

Collegiate Charleston

(United States)



Steps like the Charleston were reportedly done by African Americans since the turn of the century (once called "fouling"). The American public was introduced to the dance in the 1923 all-black Broadway musical "Runnin' Wild." Within a year, the Charleston was an immensely popular dance craze.

1920s dance manuals described simplified Charleston steps, to be repeated several times. The winners of Charleston contests, on the other hand, usually combined shorter fragments of the flashiest steps.

In the original "black" Charleston, the steps were done low to the ground, in an easy, flat manner. The "white" or flapper style was higher and bouncier, usually done as a solo. The Collegiate style was yet more exuberant, with extreme leg gestures and a preference for dancing in closed position with a partner.

The following sequence is a Collegiate Exhibition Charleston based on films of Charleston competitions in the 1920s. It may also be done in a quieter style.

Notes: Names for Charleston steps and variations were never standardized. The following titles were selected from a wide range of conflicting names.

- Cassette: "Sweet Man" on R. Powers special cassette for Stockton 1992, or any 32-bar Charleston or Collegiate tune. 2/4 meter
- Formation: Cpls in closed Ballroom pos.
- Steps and Styling: These steps are described for M; W steps opposite.

Basic Charleston: In closed Ballroom pos, M step fwd L (ct 1); tap R lightly over L w/o weight (ct 2); step bkwd R behind L (ct 3); tap L behind R w/o weight (ct 4). (W beg bkwd R.) On counts 1,2,3,4, twist the heels in toward each other (toes turned out). On the off-beats between the counts ("&"), twist the heels away from each other, pigeon-toed. For Collegiate style, push the turn-out and turn-in as far as possible, flicking the heels out to the sides between steps.

Collegiate Ballroom pos holds elbows out somewhat angularly, with heads possibly close together, but feet always farther apart than usual, for fancy footwork.

Three-Step Charleston: In Ballroom pos, M walk fwd 3 steps beg L (ct 1,2,3); M tap R fwd w/o weight (ct 4). (W walk bkwd and tap back.) Walking has a bounce, rising on the counts and flexing the knees on each "&" between the counts.

Collegiate Charleston—continued

Charleston Polka: In Ballroom pos, M step L to L (ct 1); close R to L (ct &); step L to L (ct 2); kick R back, crossing R behind L (ct &). Repeat to R with R (cts 1,&,2,&).

Swing Kicks: M cut L under R while kicking R to R side (ct 1); swing R back, crossing R behind L (ct &); cut R under L while kicking L to L side (ct 2); swing L back, crossing L behind R (ct &). Lady opposite in Ballroom pos. Body does not bounce during Swing kicks. Only feet move.

Scooter: As in clogging chugs, slip the feet fwd (ct 1) and bkwd (ct &), closed in parallel pos. Weight falls audibly on heels when slipping fwd; rise onto balls of feet when slipping bkwd.

MeasPattern

8 meas

INTRODUCTION. No action, other than finding a partner.

16 meas

Improvise solo Charleston steps, near your partner. Select steps from this sequence or others. Toward end of intro phrase, take ptr in Ballroom pos.

PART I

1-4

Basic Charleston as described above, with M facing LOD (cts 1,2,3,4). Repeat (cts 5,6,7,8).

5-6

Three-Step Charleston as described, M traveling LOD (cts 1,2,3,4).

7-8

Tapping: M tap R bkwd w/o weight (ct 1); tap R fwd (ct 2); step R bkwd (ct 3); tap L bkwd (ct 4). W opposite.

In higher Collegiate style, all taps become kicks and fwd and bckwd into air.

PART II

1-2

Charleston Polka as described, M facing LOD (cts 1,&,2,&,3,&,4,&).

3-4

Swing Kicks as described, kicking away from ctr first (ct 1,&,2,&). Repeat the pair of Swing Kicks (cts 3,&,4,&).

5-8

Repeat meas 1-4.

PART III

1-8

1-2-3 Kicks: Cpl open out to Semi-open pos, both facing ctr (side-by-side), M step fwd L (ct 1); kick R straight fwd (ct 2); step R bkwd (ct 3); tap L bkwd (ct 4); step L fwd (ct 5); kick R fwd (ct 6); bend R leg, drawing R foot back but keeping knee high fwd (ct &); kick R fwd again (ct 7); step R bkwd (ct 8); tap L bkwd (ct 9); step L fwd (ct 10); kick R fwd (ct 11); fold R knee then kick R again (cts &, 12); fold R knee then kick R again (cts &, 13); step R bkwd (ct 14); tap L bkwd (ct 15); close L to R turning to face ptr (ct 16).

PART IV

1-4

Scooter: In Ballroom pos (M facing LOD), both Scoot fwd to their L diagonal (ct 1,&); Scoot fwd to R diagonal (ct 2,&); Scoot twice to L diagonal (cts 3,&,4,&). Repeat opposite, beginning to the R diagonal (cts 5,&,6,&,7,&,8,&).

Collegiate Charleston—continued

- 5-8 Around the World: Remaining in L Side pos from the Scooter, walk fwd around each other 2 steps, both beg R (cts 1,2); kick R straight fwd (ct 3); turn to face ptr and fold R leg in (ct &); turn into R Side pos and kick R straight bkwd (ct 4); retaining R Side pos, kick R straight fwd (ct 5); bend R knee (ct &); kick R fwd again (ct 6); slap R foot down and back (ct 7); face ptr and close R to L with a stamp (ct 8).

BREAK

- 1-2 Cast away from ptr (M to L, W to R), 4 walking steps (cts 1,2,3,4).

Repeat entire sequence, or improvise, to end of music. For those who like sequences, a variation is to cast away from ptr and dance this sequence as a solo. During the next Break, advance to ptr and dance the sequence once more as a cpl.

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