

Chaines Turns

Chaines turns are a method to do a quick series of turns (hence the name chaines, French for “chains”). In WCS, chaines turns are preferred for any extended series of turns. They can be linked together much easier than pivots. In addition, chaines turns are faster than pivots since the feet are closed during the turn; as a result, many dancers prefer to use chaines for all traveling turns.

The following drill is designed to develop the basic mechanic of chaines turns for west coast dancers.

The Drill—Feet:

Stand in an open third or fourth foot position, with your left foot in front. Your forward foot should be pointing down line with a slight turnout; your back foot should be at about a 45 degree angle. Your upper body should be prepped for a turn, with the back (right) side held back slightly. As you transfer weight to the three-toe base of the left foot, gather your free foot to your supporting leg. You can think of moving your feet into first position (with the right foot only skimming the ground, with no weight), or you can think of dragging the right foot to your left ankle (again with no weight on the right). At the same time, let your core unwind to rotate your body to the left.

You are aiming to rotate approximately three quarters of the way around; if down the line is 12 o'clock, your rotation should take you to 3 o'clock. With your feet together, you transfer weight to your right toe base anywhere between 9 o'clock (a quarter rotation) and 3 o'clock (the full 3/4 mark). By the time you hit 3 o'clock, you should have your weight on your right toe base with your left foot unweighted, next to your right.

The last quarter of rotation comes from stepping down line (12 o'clock) with your left foot. As you do so, again pull back your right upper body to prep yourself for the next spin. You should now be in position to do another chaines turn.

Be sure to practice spinning in the other direction! When you are turning to your right, your right foot is forward while your left side is prepped back. As you close your left foot to your right, you begin to rotate to the 9 o'clock mark, changing weight somewhere between 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock. From the three-quarters position, step forward with your right down the line in order to get the final quarter of rotation and to set yourself up for the next spin.

Adding Arms:

Many people finding that adding specific arm movements improves their balance during chaines turns. If you don't feel stable, try this exercise.

You will alternate between open and closed arm positions. Closed arm position is straightforward; put your arms in front of you in an oval, fingers almost touching, with your hands at approximately navel level. Open position keeps your hands at the same level but

moves the hands away from each other. If you feel a pull on your pectoral muscle (the upper chest), that arm is opening too far; generally an angle of 90 degrees is sufficient.

Start with your feet together and your arms in closed position. As you step forward for the turn, open your arms. The arms should match the feet, with the forward arm pointing down line and the rear arm following the back foot.

As you bring the feet together, close the arms by bringing the rear arm to the front arm in closed position. Do not swing the arm; this will throw you off balance. The closing action is a relaxed movement that happens naturally as your torso unwinds in the spin. Keep the arms in closed position through the remainder of the spin. When you step forward for the next spin, you will open the arms again.