

The Carolina Shag

Reference notes from your “Basic” shag lesson

History

The dance originated sometime in the 1930’s but really took root in the 40’s as the war was closing down. People had time to go the beach and relax, and of course dance. Music of those times was being played more and more on the radio. The Lindy Hop, The Big Apple and Jitterbug were popular dances. Most say the Shag was derived from those earlier dances, but with a “Southern style”.

It was called “Shagging” because in the earlier days you danced on the beach and had to shift – shag thru the sand. The “Shag” is intensely SOUTHERN, and the capital or mecca eventually became North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. What you are learning today is the Carolina Shag and the music we dance to has been coined “Beach Music” rooted from R&B music that has a gusty backbeat.

The Shag used to be a “Peacock” dance where the men did most of the steps or patterns showing off and women held the basic and made the men look good. Over the years it has become more balanced where the emphasis is on “together” steps or “mirror” steps.

General Rules

The Shag is not a bouncy dance. There is very little to no upper body movement. Dedicate the energy and focus to the legs.

Hold your upper body straight without bending at the waist.

Keep your knees slightly bent while taking small controlled steps.

Dance on the balls of your feet, not your toes.

Keep hands still as though they were on a post and on the basic, keep your elbows pointed down.

Look at your partner not at the floor.

When dancing in the basic your feet hardly come off the ground.

On the basic, stay away from each other so as not to crowd each other’s movements; especially on the Rock step.

When we turn, it is in a slow southern manner turning your head in the direction of the turn you are making

All this action creates a gliding look – like ice skating.

Remember that the shag is a “slotted” dance

The Basic

The basic is comprised of six counts, which are actually eight distinct movements or steps. The steps are usually counted as: 1&2, 3&4, 5/6. Or sometimes called triple step, triple step, rock step. Men always start on their left foot and women on their right foot.

On the 1&2 the man moves forward toward his partner and the female moves forward as well. Then they both step back away from each other on the 3&4, and continue stepping away on the 5/6. This creates an accordion type motion – coming together, separating, coming together, separating, etc.

Everyone has his own unique basic step, but they are all on the same 6 count.

Men's movements are:

1. Left foot forward (triple step)
2. Right foot forward/beside
3. Left foot back

4. Right foot back (triple step)
5. Left foot step in place
6. Right foot step in place

7. Left foot back (rock Step)
8. Right foot up in place

Women's movements are:

- right foot forward
- left foot forward/beside
- right foot back

- left foot back
- right foot step in place
- left foot step in place

- right foot back
- left foot up in place

“up together back, back in place, rock step”

Other steps in the shag dance:

Start Step, female underarm turn, male underarm turn, side pass, saddle up, pivot and others. And there also an uncountable number of “together” or “mirror” steps that you can learn after the basic steps are mastered.

Websites you can watch and learn:

Shagtour.com, or just Google” Shag dance” and it will give you lots of info and videos.

Thanks for taking this lesson with us and we hope you enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed teaching you the “Carolina Shag”.

I can be reached at Cherwood1@aol.com if you have any questions; thanks again!

Woody Best and Carol Schulman