

Mastering the European Waltz

By Cheryl Elton

A dear friend of mine calls the European Waltz “the barrier dance.” Skaters often sail through pattern dance tests up to this point, and then get stuck on the European, sometimes for a while. Many feel if you can get past this dance, you’re on your way to becoming a high-level ice dancer.

Why is this? The signature move of the European Waltz, the ‘waltz’ or ‘dropped’ 3-turn, requires all the basic elements of ice dance to execute smoothly. In addition to erect posture, a strong core, good edges going in and out of the turns, even leg extensions, and consistently powerful stroking, the dance requires a continuous rise and fall of the knee to give it the smooth flow that depicts the waltz movement. These skills, coupled with the transition steps between the turns, require much practice before the dance is mastered.

Today I’d like to provide you with a brief overview of the dance steps for the man and the lady, and then some of the key points I’ve gleaned over the years on how to ace those challenging 3’s.

Basic Overview of European Waltz Steps

The dance is skated in waltz hold. Partners must keep equal distance between them throughout the dance, and avoid lurching or separating. Their shoulders should be parallel and they must stay square to the tracing on the ice.

The basic steps for the man are a cross roll 3-turn, a back outside edge and a forward outside edge. Between the side lobes of the dance, as he skates his cross rolls, impetus is gained from the outside edge of the skating foot as it becomes the free foot.

The lady skates a back outside edge, a 3-turn, and another back outside edge. She changes circles with a transitional back stroke, with her feet closely placed together, rather than crossed. She must try to bring her feet in neatly and keep her hips underneath her.

The side pattern of the dance has semi-circular lobes of the above referenced steps. The first lobe starts toward the midline of the rink; the second toward the side barrier. Care must be taken to ensure these lobes are full semi-circles, and that each starts towards or away from the long axis of the rink. These lobes are connected along the ends of the rink with a larger, flatter lobe consisting of a series of 3-turns and back outside edges. Normally the end pattern has four turns for each partner.

The European Waltz has a $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz tempo, with 135 beats per minute. All 3's are turned on the count of 3 – one, two, *turn*, one, two, *turn*. All edges are 3 beats in length.

As dancers practice these turns in partner position, it's a common error to try to aim your turn *around* your partner, stepping and staying inside their curve, instead of stepping *between* the partner's feet, which is correct.

European Waltz 3-Turns

Now, onto those precise and pesky turns. For a left forward outside (LFO) turn, you start in a basic outside edge position on the left foot, making sure your left hip, shoulder, and arm in the lead are facing to the outside of the circle. Bend both knees before pushing onto your LFO edge. The free leg is extended back, with the toe and hip well turned out and held over the tracing.

As you rise on your skating knee, your free leg is drawn in to the skating leg. It's important to keep the free foot close to the skating foot during the turn. This is vital to controlling the turn. Some coaches teach bringing the feet together with the ball of the free foot touching the instep of the skating foot. Others prefer placing the boot of the free foot instep against the inside heel of the skating boot so that the feet are open at almost a 'T' position during the turn.

The latter method ensures that the hip stays open—also necessary in controlling the turn. Practicing with the foot in the 'T' before the turn, then closing to parallel as you re-bend for the right back outside (RBO) stroke works well. Your feet remain together for the back outside push to avoid wide-stepping, another common error.

Hip control and balance are key to clean and smooth turns. Practicing slowly and isolating and freezing while balancing going into and just after the turn, and keeping your feet close together are good ways to develop control. As you improve and gain experience you will acquire a sense of how far you can rotate into the turn while still keeping your hip open.

Mastering the European Waltz 3-turns requires much practice alone and with a partner. For a good video demonstration of the European Waltz, see:

<http://www.icedancers.com/apps/videos/videos/show/17091389-european-waltz>