



## Here's the MOOCHI ... How to DANCE it ...

A jazzy foxtrot in 3/2 time from 1930

Created by Robert Sielle and Annette Mills  
Reconstructed by Richard Powers and Nick Enge

This dance was introduced in London, then quickly spread to the USA, France, Australia and New Zealand. Many fad dances of this era never caught on, but the Moochi enjoyed a brief flurry of popularity, described in many newspaper articles, dance magazines and dance manuals at the time, due to an especially good song, enjoyable steps, and ease of lead-and-follow improvisation.



First, here is a good **practice sequence**, to get started.

bars

- 4    **Moochi Walk:** Back the Follow three slow but bouncy steps, in one bar of music (1, 2, 3).  
Continue, beginning on alternate feet, for 4 bars (12 steps).
- 4    **Moochi Chassé:** Back the Follow three steps (1, 2, 3), then close the trailing foot halfway up to the leading foot (and). Slow-slow-quick-quick, 4 times.
- 4    **Moochi Zig Zag:** Side, cross, side, cross, side (1-and-2-and-3) with the Lead traveling diagonally forward LOD toward the center of room, and the Follow diagonally back. The Lead crosses behind each time, and Follow in front. Then repeat this on the other foot, traveling diagonally along LOD to the outside wall. Repeat both. Beginners can simply close the feet together instead of crossing.
- 3    **The Moochi:** For the Lead, step side L along LOD (1), close R to L (and), then side L along LOD (2), and bring the R foot up between outside feet, tapping R toe to the floor without weight, with the R knee turned in (and). Step R in place, dropping onto the heels, with the R knee turned out (3), then the L knee turned in (and). The Follow dances with the opposite footwork. Quick-quick-slow-slow. Repeat this step, dancing it three times.
- 1    **Moochi Spin:** Pivot steps (1 and 2) which feels somewhat like a polka,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a turn, then a walking step with the Follow backing against LOD on count 3, lined up to repeat the sequence.

Dance this pattern four times through, then end with the Moochi Walk as the music fades.

Music: "The Moochi," recorded by Jack Payne and His Orchestra, 1930.

Richard's sequence reconstruction note: The original description of the Moochi contained six steps—these five plus a sixth, the Moochi Twist. But the recording mostly plays a four-part sequence, so to fit the music, this practice pattern skips the Moochi Twist (described on the next page), and I modified the final pivots, the Moochi Spin, to accompany the Moochi step in the last part of the sequence. The essential steps in the Moochi are the first four, which are unmodified.

## The Moochi's Swiveling Steps

One characteristic of the Moochi was swiveling steps, which were optionally done throughout the dance, in most of the variations. Unlike the Charleston's opposing swivels, the Moochi's steps swiveled in parallel, both to the left or both to the right. Robert Sielle, the co-creator, provided the most concise description of the swivels:

swivelling of the feet is optional, and is done by placing the advancing foot down turned slightly out, and swivelling it into the normal straight position in relation to the line of dance, while it is carrying the body one step to each crotchet.

This is the same as the "twist step" or "sugar foot" in the African American Lindy hop, which dates to this same time period. The African influence was intentional in the Moochi, which was claimed to have been inspired by a Zulu tribal dance. The "jungle" influence was also featured in many articles about the dance.

To dance the **Moochi Twist**, which was the one step left out of the practice sequence, dance the swiveling steps in slow-quick-quick-slow timing, both beginning on the left foot, holding your partner slightly off to your right side. Revolve slowly CW around your partner, making a complete turn in four Moochi Twist steps. The original published description was not very clear, so Robert Sielle elaborated in a 1930 Dancing Times article.

Carol Bird reassured that, "Those who do not master the swivel can do the fox-trot to Moochi music."

## Moochi de Côté

Prof. D. Charles described all of the original Moochi steps and then added one of his own: a grapevine. The Lead steps side L to LOD, crosses R behind L, closes L beside R, then crosses R over L. S-QQ-S timing. He didn't specify whether the Follow dances mirror image, or crosses behind when the Lead crosses in front.

## Improvised Moochi

The original description of the Moochi was of a collection of steps, not an arranged sequence dance. I have already noted that the number of steps didn't fit into a four-part sequence. The steps were intended to be danced in any order.

We also see evidence of improvisation in Carol Bird's 1931 newspaper article, which said that it was danced "in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, and all points west, east, north and south indulging in the Moochi." She continued with,

Soon Moochi teas were being held daily in the swanky West End hotels. Every afternoon at 4 o'clock men and women of leisure were found at their favorite cafes, sipping their cocktails. At intervals they arose to dance the Moochi.

That sounds like improvised dancing, and an article on the Moochi in the March 28, 1931 Queensland Times confirms this. "When a dancer is proficient, it is not necessary for him to follow a sequence... He may introduce his steps as he wishes."

Side steps are the easiest steps to follow, and most of the Moochi steps described on page 1 can be led with a sideways motion. For the Moochi Chassé, slightly lift in toward the center of the hall to lead the quick-quick steps. All of the Moochi variations are quite easy to lead and follow.

## Foxtrot Steps for 3/2 Music

The Moochi was essentially a foxtrot, but in 3/2 slow waltz time. Following Carol Bird's advice to dance "the fox-trot to Moochi music," any foxtrot steps can be mixed into one's dancing. To be historically accurate, we shouldn't perform just any new foxtrot step, but only steps that we know existed in 1930 or before.

Several fox-trot steps from this time period fit quite well to 3/2 music, meaning they fit into a three-count phrase. Here are a few that you might mix into your improvised Moochi.

### The Two-And-One

In closed position, Side, close, side (1-and-2) with the Lead traveling diagonally LOD toward the center of room, L-R-L. Then the Follow backs against LOD one step as the Lead walks forward R. QQ-S-S timing.

- Arthur Murray, THE MODERN DANCES, 1922

### Le Pas à point d'appui

Back the Follow one step, stopping. Rock (replace) the Lead back. Back the Follow 2 slow steps QQ-S-S.

- Congrès International de Bruxelles, GUIDE DU DANSEUR 1924-1925

### The Chasse in the Tango Fox Trot

Side, close, side (1-and-2) with the Lead traveling sideways toward LOD, L-R-L. Then cross the R over the L foot in closed promenade position, as the Follows crosses L over R, both facing forward LOD. QQ-S-S.

- Arthur Murray, THE MODERN DANCES Part 3, 1925

### The Promenade of the Tango Fox Trot

In closed position backing the Follow, the Lead steps forward L, then steps R to the right side, diagonal toward LOD, then close L to R. Then the Lead steps forward R. The Follow steps opposite. S-QQ-S timing.

- Arthur Murray, THE MODERN DANCES, Introductory Course, 1923

### Pas d'arrêt

The same as above except rocking the Follow back then rocking the Lead back on QQ. S-QQ-S timing.

- Prof. D. Charles, TOUTES LES DANSES MODERNES, 1927

### The Chasse-Pivot to Right

Side, close (1-and) with the Lead traveling sideways toward LOD, L-R. Then the couple does a slow CW pivot step, with the Lead coming around in front of the Follow, and finish a full CW turn with a second slow pivot step. QQ-S-S timing. When turned smoothly, this feels like an unusual rotary waltz.

- Arthur Murray, SOCIAL DANCING Part 2, 1930

### The Chasse-Pivot to Left

In closed position backing the Follow, the Lead steps forward L, starting to rotate as a couple CCW and stops, then rocks back (replace) on the R, continuing to rotate CCW. Then side L and close R to L, while rotating CCW. S-S-QQ timing.

- Arthur Murray, SOCIAL DANCING Part 2, 1930

### Jazz alterné avec un pas de marche

In closed position backing the Follow, the Lead steps forward R, backing the Follow diagonally toward the outside. Rotating a bit CW so the Lead is facing out, quick side-close toward LOD. Rotating a bit CW so the Lead is backing diagonally against LOD toward the center, back the Lead 2 slow steps L,R. Rotating a bit CCW so the Lead is facing out, quick side-close toward LOD. Rotating a bit CCW to back the Follow diagonally toward the outside, slow step L backing the Follow. Repeat, S-QQ-S S-QQ-S.

If beginning on the Lead's L foot, just add a slow L before beginning, which becomes S-S-QQ S-S-QQ.

- Prof. D. Charles, TOUTES LES DANSES MODERNES, 1927

## **Did the Moochi Chassé predate Arthur Murray's Magic Step?**

Yes and no. You may have already noticed that the Moochi Chassé is essentially the same as the most popular foxtrot step in the world, which Arthur Murray named the "Magic Step" in 1944. (In 1937 he had called the same step the Collegiate Swing.) But Murray admitted that he did not invent the Magic Step. He discovered that it had been danced for decades as a basic concept, easily modified into variations:

After 25 years of teaching I made an astounding discovery. Believe it or not, 75% of all popular steps are merely variations of this one easy step. - *Arthur Murray, 1944*

Indeed, the Moochi Chassé, and the Magic Step, were similar to five different foxtrot steps described by Arthur Murray in 1922, 1923 and 1925. Prof. D. Charles' described it in 1926 (Marche, Pas de côté) as did others. The later Texas Two-Step was another version of this same step.

## **Sources**

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Thanks to Nick Enge for discovering this dance.