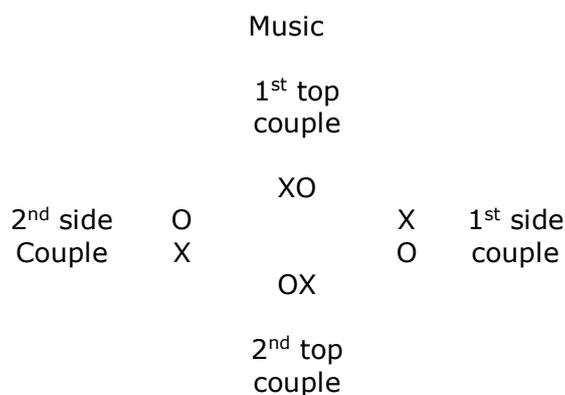


Introduction to Irish Set Dancing

Welcome to Irish Set Dancing. This short introduction will outline the basic formation of a set, common dance moves and how to hold your partner.

Forming a set

Irish Set dancing is danced in square sets of 4 couples and occasionally in a half set (2 couples). In a full set, the couple with their back to the band or music is 'first tops' and the couple facing them is 'second tops'. In almost all sets the couple on the left of first tops is 'first sides' and the couple facing them is 'second sides'. Sometimes the first sides will be on the right of the first tops – for set from the Connemara region, for example - and the dance teacher or caller will remind you when this occurs. When as a couple, the man is always on the left of the lady.



O = male X = female

The music

Irish set dancing is danced to reels, jigs, polkas, slides and hornpipes. Jigs are played in 6/8 time with a distinctive 123, 123 pattern, and the others are played in 4/4 time and have a more regular 1, 2, 3, 4 beat. In all of these styles, the main step used is a type of waltz step where each bar has three steps – the first moving forward and the second and third 'catching up' but not moving any further. In 4/4 time these happen on the first three beats and in 6/8 they happen on 1, 3 and 4. The easiest way to learn these steps is to watch an experienced dancer, and full instructions can be found at www.setdanceteacher.co.uk. In each phrase of music, the men lead off with the left foot and women with the right in most dance movements.

Dance vocabulary and formations

Half the secret of becoming proficient Set Dancer is recognising the dance vocabulary. This is the set of instructions that the teacher or caller will use to indicate what comes next in the dance. At first it can be rather overwhelming but the vocabulary *will* become second nature. Some of the more common formations are outlined below to help you.

Advance and retire	The couple dances into the centre of the set with five steps (1, 2, 123) and then retreats to their place with the same step. It is often danced twice. A variety of holds will be used for this – waltz, lower promenade or right hand in right are the most common – and occasionally this is done singly or with other people from other couples.
Body / Quarterhouse	A movement danced in polka and hornpipe figures. Partners dance in place (2 bars) then turn one full turn (2 bars) on to the next place in the set on their right. They repeat this 4 bar movement into each place and back home thus <u>splitting the set into four quarters. Everyone moves anticlockwise round the set.</u>
Chain	A movement in which dancers in a group 'chain' past each other taking alternate hands in a handshake grip – right hand with partner, left hand with next dancer and so forth. Dancers commonly chain half way or all the way around the set.

Christmas	Also known as a basket. Dancers form a circle with hands joined behind their backs and travel either clockwise or anticlockwise. The standard hold is achieved by putting your left arm over your neighbour's arm and holding onto the wrist of the next-but-one dancer and your right arm under your neighbour's arm and placing it <u>flat</u> on their back (ready to be gripped by another dancer). This is usually done with two couples but occasionally involves all the people in the set.
Dance at home	Dancing one or two full clockwise turns normally in waltz hold while remaining in the 'home' place. The couple moves in a small circle on the floor.
House around	Also shortened to 'house'. All four couples dance around the set by turning clockwise three quarters of a turn as they move into the place of the couple on their right (progressing anticlockwise). At the end of each two bars they are one place on and are facing into the set again, thus making four full turns to get back home (8 bars).
House inside	This is danced in the same manner as a 'House around' but with one or two couples dancing within the space determined by the position of the other three couples. It should be an unhurried movement taking the whole 8 bars to get back home. Again, each two bars should see the couple(s) progressed one quarter of the way around the circle.
House half way	Also known as house across. This is often a way of opposite couples changing places by dancing the 'House around' movement, but for 4 bars only, thus ending in the opposite couple's place.
Lead around	A movement normally danced by all four couples with partners side by side and facing anti-clockwise around the set (8 bars). A range of 'holds' may be used for this movement.
Slide and house half way	Also known simply as slides. A jig or slide movement in which couples, with waltz hold, slide towards the centre of the set and back to place then house half way. The slide step is a three-beat step (slide, and, slide) and is therefore different from the advance and retire.
Star	Four dancers take right or left hands in the centre and dance around in 8 bars, or around in 4 bars and then change hands to dance back in 4 bars.
Swing	Partners spin around each other, rotating about a point midway between them. To accomplish the movement safely, partners' right feet should be placed together with little toe to little toe. The right foot carries the weight while the left propels the dancer round like pushing off on a scooter or skateboard. The aim should be to keep the right foot turning in as small a space as possible and as flat to the floor as possible to produce a smooth, flat swing. The speed of the swing is always governed by the person who prefers to swing more slowly.

How to hold your partner (the four most common holds)

Waltz hold	Also known as a ballroom hold. The woman's right hand is held in the man's left hand at, or below shoulder level, while the man's right arm goes around the lady to <i>support</i> her back on the left shoulder blade – just above bra level. The woman's left hand rests upon, or behind, her partner's right shoulder although some women hold the man's upper arm especially when there is a marked difference in height. Note – men need to hold their partners firmly and up high – not on the waist which gives no support – and women please don't pull down on or clutch the man's shoulder.
Waist and shoulder hold	Stand side by side with the man's right arm around the woman's waist while her hand rests on his shoulder. This is simply a waltz hold with the 'front' hand not held and the hold straightened out.
Lower promenade hold	Also known as skaters hold. Stand side by side with right hand in right and left in left. Right hands are in front.
Ceili hold	Partners face each other, take left handshake hold and pass their right hands inside their partner's left elbow to lie flat against the small of the back.