

## **Shag 101: A Lesson On Our Dance**

### **The History of Shag**

The Shag is a dance that was founded in the culture of the Carolinas. However, many people who enjoy the dance know few facts about it. The shag is the North Carolina official popular state dance as well as the state dance of South Carolina. The shag originated in the late 1930's in clubs along the crystal coast of North & South Carolina. The music found on juke boxes in "Jump Joints" was combined with dance moves that had been performed to the sounds of big band music. From this blending came the shag. Teens that frequented the coast for the summer carried the moves & the music inland when they returned home. Many names have been applied to describe the dance that has come to be known as the shag. The jitterbug, swing, & the lindy hop greatly influenced the early developers of the shag. As the dance evolved it was known as fast dancing, the bop, & the basic.

The dance as it appears today is meant to be performed to music that is written in 4/4 time. A tempo of 110 to 135 beats per minute is most often used. Many early Motown artists, "big band" groups, and blues singers lent their music to the development of the particular sound that became known as shag music. Groups with a big band sound led by Jimmy Cavalo & Earl Bostic were popular in our area. Motown sounds from groups like the Temptations, The Clovers, & The Lamp Lighters gave a life loving beat to the new shaggers. Today, groups such as Jim Quick and Coastline, The Fantastic Shakers, & The Craig Woolard Band provide the music we dance to. However, any mention of the origins of shag & shag music in this area would be incomplete without talking about The Men of Distinction. The band came to be in Dunn, NC around 1969. A Dunn native, Harry Driver, who was a local talent manager and entertainment entrepreneur, pulled the group together.

The dance itself is a smooth swing style dance. There are however notable differences. In most swing style dances the female is the center piece of the dance. The male leader stages his partner to draw most of the attention. In shag the male tends to take the spotlight. In fact, the shag has been called a "peacock dance" for this trait. Most shaggers try to portray a smooth grace on the floor. The majority of the movement is below the waist with the best dancers appearing to slide across the floor.

Many local personalities have contributed heavily to the development of this style of dance. The name Harry Driver comes up again. Harry along with life long friends like Eddie Monsour, Catherine Monsour, O.B. Knowles, Clarice Reavis, Marilyn Hodges, & Charlie Boone provided the model for dancing & carefree living that others wanted to emulate. This close knit group of friends traveled throughout North & South Carolina sharing the music & moves with a generation.

Shaggers kind of used any convenient location to perform their art. Locally, places like Grey's, Shagger's Beach Club, & William's Lake were popular hot spots. In Fayetteville Lake Wood, Country Club Lake, Steve's Silver Diner, Sh-Booms, & Wheelers kept the dance alive. However, many stories are told about how great it was to go shag at the pickle warehouse in Faison during the winter.

Carrying on the great tradition of talented shaggers in our area the Godwin couple of AC & Cathy Williams have taken the art of fast dancing to the highest levels of competition. Together they have won 5 nation level titles! With the rich tradition of shag in this area it is fair to say that people from our region have been instrumental in the development of the dance we love so much.

## **Shag Etiquette**

When asking a person to dance, do so politely. Introduce yourself & ask if they would care to dance.

It is equally permissible for a woman to ask a man as it is for a man to ask a woman to dance. Take your partner's hand & lead them onto the dance floor. At the end of the dance thank your partner.

If you want to dance with someone who is obviously with a date or partner it is polite to ask the date or partner if they mind if you dance with their date.

Typically it is good form to accept an invitation to dance, but if you don't want to dance, say "no thank you" politely. If you refuse an invitation you may consider sitting out the entire song before you accept another offer.

Please, if someone says "no thanks" do not be persistent, take them at their word.

It is not polite to correct your partner on the dance floor. Remember this is a social affair (have fun).

Unless they ask for help or are hurting you, don't teach. If your partner requests help, kindly take them off to the side away from the other social dancers.

It is not polite to offer instruction to someone in a social dance setting (or in a dance class if you are not the instructor).

Many different styles of shag have variations of certain moves. Just because someone doesn't do a step the same way you do doesn't necessarily mean they are doing it wrong, they just have a different style. Not everyone is a pro dancer nor do they want to be. Most dancers are just out to have a good time.

Dancers bump into the nicest people & dancing isn't even a contact sport. Be

aware of the dancers around you! If you bump into someone, kick someone or step on someone's foot, or if they bump into you, apologize whether it was your fault or theirs. Show concern that no serious injury has occurred. It's a fairly accepted practice that when a collision occurs apologize, EVEN if it wasn't your fault.

The shag is a slotted dance. This helps conserve room on the dance floor & avoid collisions. Usually the first couple on the dance floor will establish the slot. Once the slot is established dance in it.

Try to save room for other dancers on the floor; shag parties are not the time to try a new all over the floor move. If you require half of the floor to do your thing, you need to change your thing! Also, try not to dance diagonally on the floor; there is more room when everyone's slot is running with the length of the floor.

Shaggers & line dancers may dance to the same song. It's best to separate to opposite ends of the dance floor, if there is room. Be respectful of other dancers. Dance small. Don't dance all over the floor or in circles. Remember, you're not the only one on the floor.

Please step off the dance floor if you're not dancing. If you are drinking a beverage of any kind or smoking, keep off the dance floor because of damage to the floor & danger to others.

Leaders, if dancing with a less experienced partner, keep the steps simple at first & build to the level that your partner can handle. Leading should be defined as "the art of making your partner comfortable." Work as a team, don't showboat. Leaders, protect your partner, since you are directing her movements, you need to be sure to protect her safety.

Leaders, if you must count & give verbal leads, keep it low enough that just you & your partner can hear. It can confuse those around you & besides, just because you can count doesn't mean "you are on the beat."

Shag attire is usually casual except at themed parties (i.e. Halloween). Women shouldn't wear extremely high heels (stilettos).

For your partner's sake, avoid eating garlic, onions, or spicy foods, & always brush your teeth & shower before going out dancing. If you perspire a lot, pace your dancing, or bring extra shirts, blouses, etc. Shag rags work great too.

Dance as if no one is watching & have fun, fun, fun. Live, laugh, love, & by all means Dance.

*These suggestions have been gathered from many sources by Chris Jestes. If you see your work here please take it as a compliment. If you have suggestions for additions to this list please*

contact the webmaster of this page.

## Description & Diagram of the Shag

(Provided courtesy of goshagging.com & Mike Rink)

The shag "basic" is counted "ONE-AND-TWO, THREE-AND-FOUR, FIVE, SIX". Each of these eight words represents a step. Pretend there are six blocks on the floor, each the length of your foot. (A tile floor works great for this.) Then follow these directions. Pay close attention to exactly where your feet are supposed to be on each count. The male steps are shown on the left side. The female steps (which are exactly opposite) are on the right.

MALE INSTRUCTIONS		COUNT		FEMALE INSTRUCTIONS
<i>Men lead with their LEFT foot.</i>  On the "ONE" count, start by moving the <b>LEFT</b> foot forward, as shown in the following drawing.		"ONE"		<i>Women lead with their RIGHT foot.</i>  On the "ONE" count, start by moving the <b>RIGHT</b> foot forward, as shown in the preceding drawing.
On the "AND" count, move the <b>RIGHT</b> foot forward as shown. <i>Note that both feet are now even, as if having stepped up to a line.</i>		"AND"		On the "AND" count, move the <b>LEFT</b> foot forward as shown. <i>Note that both feet are now even, as if having stepped up to a line.</i>
On the "TWO" count, move the <b>LEFT</b> foot back as shown.		"TWO"		On the "TWO" count, move the <b>RIGHT</b> foot back as shown.
On the "THREE" count, move the <b>RIGHT</b> foot all the way back and behind the other foot.		"THREE"		On the "THREE" count, move the <b>LEFT</b> foot all the way back and behind the other foot.
The "AND" count is a weight shift to the <b>LEFT</b> foot, or just a step in place with the left foot. <i>Do not move it forward or backwards.</i>		"AND"		The "AND" count is a weight shift to the <b>RIGHT</b> foot, or just a step in place with the right foot. <i>Do not move it forward or backwards.</i>
The "FOUR" count is a weight shift to the <b>RIGHT</b> foot, or just a step in place with the right foot. <i>Again, do not move it up or back.</i>		"FOUR"		The "FOUR" count is a weight shift to the <b>LEFT</b> foot, or just a step in place with the left foot. <i>Again, do not move it up or back.</i>
The "FIVE" count is a step back with the <b>LEFT</b> foot. <i>Note that both feet are now even, as if having stepped back to a line.</i>		"FIVE"		The "FIVE" count is a step back with the <b>RIGHT</b> foot. <i>Note that both feet are now even, as if having stepped back to a line.</i>
The "SIX" count is a step up with the <b>RIGHT</b> foot. That's it! <i>Now you are ready to start over by stepping forward with the LEFT foot to the "ONE" position.</i>		"SIX"		The "SIX" count is a step up with the <b>LEFT</b> foot. That's it! <i>Now you are ready to start over by stepping forward with the RIGHT foot to the "ONE" position.</i>