



Larrys Corner

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If you want to read dance stories they are under Headlines or Larrys Corner.

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Do you have any likes or dislikes, stories, or helpful hints for dancing? If so, write it down and give to Larry Ablin or Barb Johnson. We will add it to one of the future News letters.

If you would like to tell us how you became interested in dancing, write it down and give to Larry or Barb, we will add your picture with it and put it in one of the future Newsletters. If you have anything you would like to write about, just write it up and give to Barb or Larry. I enjoy writing something for you.

Come Dance With Us

Description of Salsa

Salsa is danced by stepping on 3 consecutive beats of music and then pausing for 1 beat, then repeating. The step timing can be thought of as step, step, step, pause; step, step, step, pause. **Dance** teachers count the step timing as quick, quick, slow; quick, quick, slow. Each quick consumes one beat of music, each slow consumes two beats of music. Depending on how you hear and feel the music, you may start the **dance** on any beat of the measure you wish. Most beginners start the **dance** on the first beat of the measure.

Though salsa is danced at approximately twice the tempo of the Rumba, the two dances share much in common. Salsa and Rumba music are both written in 4/4 time, with four beats to each measure. Two measures of music are required to complete one full basic step. In the music, the heavy beat is the one beat, the first beat of the measure. While the music tempo of rumba is typically 104 beats per minute, the music tempo of salsa is typically 180 to 210 beats per minute.

In both dances three **steps** are taken during each measure of music. In other words, three **steps** are taken to four beats of music. Recall that the step timing is counted quick, quick, slow; quick, quick, slow. Learning to count the music correctly is the first big hurdle for beginners. Students are seldom able to understand the **dance** fully until they are able to count the music and the step timing correctly. Notice that the cow bell sounds on the first and third beats of each measure.

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Salsa and Mambo controversy

Salsa is the music and Mambo is the dance.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's the term Salsa was used, primarily in the music industry, to identify and market the Afro-Cuban/Afro-Puerto Rican song styles that, many times, became fused with jazz. All that really changed was the name for what people were listening to.

Mambo dancing first caught on close to two decades before the term Salsa was used for the music. The dance

did not all of a sudden become something else due to a name change. The dance did experience an evolution of sorts and started to become fused with other dance forms like swing and hustle. This primarily changed the style of the dance but not its inherent nature.

References to Salsa are specifically made to the music as are the specifics of Mambo are made to the dance.

The goal of this presentation, though, is to get you to develop an "ear" for the interplay between the different rhythmic elements that can be found and that are consistently present in most salsa tunes. Once you realize and can actualize how the traditional approach to salsa music is arranged and constructed you will, as a dancer, be better able to allow yourself to synchronize your steps to the rhythms of salsa.

Salsa is usually a partner dance form that corresponds to salsa music. In some forms, it can also appear as a performance dance. The word is the same as the Spanish word salsa meaning sauce, or in this case flavor or style.

According to testimonials from musicologists and historians of music, the name salsa was gradually accepted among dancers throughout various decades. The very first time the word appeared on the radio was a composition by Ignacio Piñero, dedicated to an old African man who sold butifarras (a sausage-like product) in Central Road in Matanzas. It is a song titled Échale salsita, wherein the major refrain and chorus goes "Salsaaaa! échale salsita, échale salsita." During the early 1950s, commentator and DJ "bigote" Escalona announced danceables with the title: "the following rhythm contains Salsa." Finally, the Spanish-speaking population of the New York area baptized Celia Cruz as the "Queen of Salsa."

Salsa is danced on music with a recurring eight-beat pattern, i.e. two bars of four beats. Salsa patterns typically use three steps during each four beats, one beat being skipped. However, this skipped beat is often marked by a tap, a kick, a flick, etc. Typically the music involves complicated percussion rhythms and is fast with around 180 beats per minute (see salsa music for more).

Salsa is a slot or spot dance, i.e., unlike Foxtrot or Samba, in Salsa a couple does not travel over the dance floor much, but rather occupies a fixed area on the dance floor. In some cases people do Salsa alone.

General dance tips

The torso should remain upright while dancing. In particular, try to avoid the upper body rocking movements of swing or foxtrot dancing.

Be sure to fully transfer your weight forwards or backwards on the break steps: don't just stretch your foot out.

Lean slightly forwards. Some moves (such as a dip) may require leaning backwards, but other than these special cases, leaning slightly forwards should be the normal posture for both leader and follower.

The hip movement of salsa dancers (sometimes called "Cuban hip motion") is a consequence of proper legwork, and not a movement in its own right. Do not force movement in your hips or you will look grotesque. Proper hip movement will normally be greater in women than men, due to women having a comparatively wider pelvis.

When in closed hold, do not pump arm (leader's left arm, follower's right arm) up and down excessively.

Keep feet pointed slightly outward, especially the left foot on the forward break. Avoid the "pigeon-toed" look, with the toes pointing inward.

Keep the legs close together in passing, or even cross them slightly in front of one another. Avoid the "bow-legged" look, with the thighs and knees spread wide.

Always step first onto the ball of the foot, and then lower the heel, regardless of the direction you are moving. Never step heel-first.

Keep feet as close as possible to the floor--as if skating on ice. Lifting them high is ungainly looking--like a horse stomping around. Keeping feet close to the floor also reduces the chances of stepping onto another dancer's ankle--which can be very painful for them.

The faster the music, the smaller the steps should be. The slower the music, the larger the steps should be.

When performing the basic alone, try to move around, turning slightly to the right or left each phrase, instead of just moving back and forth like a robot on a track.

Don't grip your partner tightly. Be especially careful about thumbs: it doesn't take much force for a thumb pressing against the back of someone's hand to feel uncomfortable. This applies to both leaders and followers.

Especially in the closed and double open holds, arms should be slightly tensed (no "spaghetti arms") with pressure between the partners. This pressure feels good (at least to experienced dancers), looks good to observers, and makes it possible to perform moves that would be impossible otherwise. During complex turns, dancers should relax the arms to let them move freely.

Leaders should be careful to alternate between leading outside and inside turns, since too many turns in succession in a single direction will make the follower dizzy.

Look at your partner's face while dancing (except during a turn, or to be aware of others around you, of course), and not at the other dancers or towards the ceiling or the floor or out into space. It's okay not to smile constantly, but at least try to smile occasionally (and definitely smile when you or your partner make a mistake :).

Follower should carry most of her own weight and provide most of her own turning power.

Basic salsa dance step and variations

Salsa music has a regular tempo, and is normally counted as 4 quarter notes or beats per musical measure (4/4 rhythm). If the beats in the measure are numbered 1 through 4, then it is the even beats (2 and 4) which are heavily stressed. Measures are grouped into phrases of 2 measures or 8 beats each. At a tempo of 160 beats per minute, which is within the standard range of tempos for salsa music, a phrase lasts about 3 seconds. Phrase boundaries are easy to distinguish because the vocalists and melody instruments seem to pause and change key between phrases. Also, most of the rhythms in a typical salsa song repeat over the interval of the phrase instead of over the interval of the measure. A good collection of salsa dance music suitable for dancing is Salsa Fresca - Dance Hits of the '90s, by various artists, on the Rhino label, catalog number 72195.

The "forward basic" dance step is:

<u>Music beat / Dance step</u>	<u>Leader</u>	<u>Follower</u>
1 /	Transfer weight onto right foot	(same as leader's step 5)
2 / 1	Step forward on left foot (break)	(same as leader's step 6)
3 / 2	Rock back onto right foot (rock)	(same as leader's step 7)
4 / 3	Bring left foot back (close), without weight transfer	(same as leader's step 8)
5 /	Transfer weight onto left foot	(same as leader's step 1)
6 / 4	Step back on right foot (break)	(same as leader's step 2)
7 / 5	Rock forward onto left foot (rock)	(same as leader's step 3)
8 / 6	Bring right foot forward (close), without weight transfer	(same as leader's step 4)

Some dancers reverse the leader's and follower's steps in the above table. That is, the leader steps back on beat 2 and forward on beat 6. Since the leader's and follower's steps are mirror images of one another, this makes little difference.

Note that the first break step occurs on beat 2 of the phrase, and not beat 1. This is because of the stress on the even beats. There are times during a salsa song when the rhythm stops but the melody continues, in which case you should remember to pause a beat at the start of the phrase, since you want to hold beat 1 and then break on beat 2. If you don't do this, then when the rhythm resumes, you will be breaking on the non-stressed beats, which probably won't feel right.

Beginning dancers often have great difficulty following the salsa beat. Partly, this is because they tend to waver

between breaking on beat 1 (following the melody) and breaking on beat 2 (following the rhythm) and eventually lose the beat entirely. Some dancers think they are breaking on beat 1, when in fact they are breaking on beat 2, because they wrongly assume that the first heavily stressed beat must be beat 1. If you are certain that you are breaking on beat 1 (a non-stressed beat), and this feels right, then by all means continue to dance this way. It is more important to always break on the same beat, than to break on any particular beat. Leaders choose which beat they want to break on, whereas followers must do whatever their leader does.

The "in-place basic" is a basic in which the break steps are either very small or in-place.

The "sideways basic" is a basic in which the break steps are to the left and right instead of forward and backward:

The "backwards basic" is a basic in which the break with the left foot is backwards instead of forwards. That is, leader steps back on the left foot on step 1 and the follower steps back on the left foot on step 4. The backwards basic is normally performed in double open hold.

The "backwards basic with leg styling" is performed as follows. Leader gives a vigorous push on the break steps (1 and 4). On this same step, leader and follower make a sharp step backwards while bending the knee of the free leg (right leg is free for leader on step 1, and so forth) so that the heel lifts but the toe remains touching the floor. The rock and close steps are the same as for the standard basic.

The "whiplash" is similar to the "backwards basic with leg styling", except that on the break step, the spine is bent backwards and the head thrown back. The whiplash is normally only done by the follower.

Other variations on the basic:

Perform the close after forward break in a single beat of music (instead of spreading it over 2 beats), then kick the right foot forwards before breaking backwards. That is, leader would kick forwards on beat 5 and follower would kick forwards on beat 1.

Add an occasional additional thrust of the pelvis, somewhat offset from the normal motions caused by the leg movements.

Instead of bringing the feet into side by side position during the close step, cross the right foot in front of the left.

Instead of stepping to the left or right during a sideways basic, just point the left or right leg to the side and hold for the entire measure. The pointing leg should be straight, with the toe touching the floor and the heel lifted.

I start in time but seem to fall out of time. How do I fix it?

You may need to pay attention to the fourth beat; you should dance on three beats and WAIT on the fourth. Many people rush and end up dancing on the null beat, throwing their timing off.

I can dance faster if I keep my heels off the floor on the backward steps, but I end up with sore calf muscles?

Keeping your heels off the floor is a bit of a cheat, you should practice your back steps with your heels down. You might dance slower at first, but it will eventually help you develop power in your legs. Lowering your heels gives your calf muscle a chance to relax and eases tension on your Achilles tendon.

My feet keep slipping whenever I take a back step?

It's probably a combination of two things: you're not lowering your heel to the floor and it's causing you to transfer only part of your weight at a shallow angle into the floor. First lower your heel to the ground; full contact with the floor gives you more friction and therefore more grip. Then transfer your weight completely over the foot by ensuring that your hip is moved directly over it. This process is slow until your legs develop more power but it gives you more control, especially on slippery floors. The other thing is taking too big of a back step.

I have trouble keeping up with fast music?

You might need to relax a little. People tend to move slower if there is tension in their bodies. Another possibility is that your step size might be too big. Try dancing "on the spot" to check if you can dance in time. If so, then you should dance with smaller steps, at least until you build up enough power.