



DAN and SANDPS  
A FEW NOTES ON SAMBA

Samba originated in Brazil and is known world-wide as the dance of “Carnaval,” a Mardi Gras like event held annually 50 days before the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox (or, more simply, four days before Ash Wednesday). The next Carnaval in Brazil will be February 5-8, 2005.

Samba is a lively dance, flirtatious, exuberant and bouncy. It grew out of the music African slaves brought to South America and mixed with the rhythms of the Portuguese who had settled in Rio de Janeiro in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Early forms evolved into a couples dance called the mesemba in the 1880s, which was adopted into Rio’s high society. By the time it went to Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “samba” had combined with another Brazilian dance called the “Maxixe.” There is still a step in samba called the maxixe. The first recorded samba music was “Pelo Telefone (By telephone)” in 1917.

Samba appeared in the United States in the late 1920s in a Broadway play called “Street Carnival,” was featured at the 1939 New York World’s Fair and was popularized by bandleader Xavier Cugat and actress Carmen Miranda with her fruit-basket headdresses. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers performed a samba in their first film together, “Flying Down to Rio” in 1933. Ballroom samba was standardized for competition in 1956.

Although the movies did much to make the samba popular, it is believed that economics had much more to do with its popularity. Radio stations are charged royalties for playing copyrighted music, but learned they could avoid those fees on the new unlicensed music coming from out of the country. The more air time given to the “free” music, the less in royalties to be paid. All the better that the audiences loved the samba beat.

The name “samba” derives from a word in Brazil meaning to pray or to invoke your personal orixa (patron saint). Seems fitting somehow.

### MUSICAL TIMING

Samba is danced with several rhythmic timings but the most popular is *SaS* (or *Ia2*). It is faster than most dances, with a tempo of 46 to 54 measures per minute, compared to rumba, danced at 26 to 32 measures per minute.

Steps in the most common samba timings split the two beats in each measure of music as follows:

$S \ a \ S [1,a,2]$	$S \ Q \ Q [1,2,\&]$	$S \ S [1,2]$
$\frac{1}{4} \ \frac{1}{4} \ 1$	$1 \ \frac{1}{2} \ \frac{1}{2}$	$1 \ 1$

### FOOTWORK

Steps are small, with rise and fall through the body and contractions in the pelvis. The signature “bounce” occurs on the “a” count as a result of flexing and straightening the knee and stepping

quickly on only the ball of the foot with partial weight. Eddie and Audrey Palmquist likened it to limping with a sore toe. Samba has its own hip action, different from rumba, occurring as a result of lifting the hip on one side of the body and compressing the same side of the torso.

### DANCE POSITION

As a Latin dance, samba is danced in the same positions (open, half open, Latin closed) as rumba and cha cha. When in Latin closed position, partners are further apart than in smooth closed position and lead hands and arms are held perpendicular to the floor with Man's left hand level with the top of his ear.

### BASIC STEPS

Samba first appears in the Roundalab phase manuals at Phase 4, as a high intermediate dance. It has a vocabulary of its own, with terms like copacabanas, corta jaca, cruzado and marchessi. The basic figures are:

#### Samba basic: *1a2 3a4*

Usually done in closed position.

Forward left/close right, in place left; back right/close left, in place right (opposite for Ladies).

#### Samba walk: *1a2 3a4*

May be done in half open, open or semi-closed position.

Forward left/ back with inside edge of toe of right, pull left back on a flat foot; forward right/back with inside edge of toe of left, pull right back.

#### Bota Fogo: *1a2 3a4*

A versatile that can be danced from closed into semi-closed, traveling, or in opposite directions of partner.

Forward left/side right on inside edge of toe, recover left; forward right/side left on inside edge of toe, recover left.

#### Volta: *1a 2a 3a 4a*

Can travel down line of dance (traveling voltas), curve in a circle (circular voltas), turn on the spot (spot voltas) and curve  $\frac{1}{4}$  to left or right changing sides under lead hands (criss cross voltas). Voltas can start with either foot.

Cross in front/side and back, cross in front/side and back, cross in front/side and back, cross in front.

#### Whisk: *1a2 3a4*

Side/cross behind, recover in place; side/cross behind, recover in place. Usually cued as whisk left and whisk right.

#### Corta Jaca: *1&2&3&4*

Forward right heel flat forward and side left on heel slid right sideward to left with flat foot

Back and side left on toe slide right sideward to left with flat foot. No bounce on "&" counts—only on "a" counts.