

INTRODUCTION TO RUMBA

Rumba is a “Latin” dance. It has its rhythmic roots in Africa and found its way to Cuba. It migrated to the U.S. in the early 1930s, and is sometimes still referred to as the “Cuban rumba.”

Rumba is considered the “dance of love” because of the sensual interplay of the partners’ movements and the emotion of the music used. Dancing rumba is supposed to tell a story. You can fill the room with feeling, your interpretation of the story—love in bloom, unrequited love, jilted love—expressed through your steps, when and how you look at your partner, your arms.

RHYTHMIC INTERPRETATION

Rumba is fundamentally a “body” dance. Each step is punctuated by “settling” through the hip (also called Cuban motion). Although you can “throw” your hips from side to side, Cuban motion occurs correctly through proper use of ankles and knees in the transfer of weight from one foot to the other.

MUSICAL TIMING

The time signature for rumba is 4/4. In the basic footwork, the dancer takes three steps in the four beats of each measure. Basic timing is *Quick Quick Slow* but is sometimes syncopated as *Quick Quick & Slow* to allow four steps in a measure.

DANCE POSITION

Always stand up straight, with your four blocks of body weight positioned over each other. Under no circumstances should you “reach” for your partner by bending at the waist.

Closed position: This is a LOOSE CLOSED POSITION. Partners stand about six inches apart facing each other. The arms are not raised as in smooth closed position but fall comfortably from the shoulders and are rounded toward the partner. The man’s right hand is on the lady’s left shoulder blade. The lady’s left arm is to be on top of the man’s right arm. The lady’s right and the man’s left hands are joined at eye level. There is no offset of bodies (as in smooth dances) nor will there be an exaggerated top line. Dancers should stand eye to eye.

Open Facing Position: Partners are further apart, holding hands left to right, in shake hands position or both hands, as a figure dictates. The arms should curve down from the shoulders, with forearms extending straight forward from the elbow, roughly parallel to the floor. Man’s palm is up and lady’s palm faces down, with her fingers in the man’s hand and his thumb on top of her hand.

Fan Position: The lady will be at right angle to man on his left side, at arm’s length, her right hand in his left hand.

Side by Side Position: Man and lady face the same direction with lady on man’s left or right side, usually on opposite feet.

Shadow Position: The lady is on the man’s left or right side, slightly ahead, both facing the same way, often both on the same foot.

FOOTWORK

Forward steps are described as being taken “ball” or “ball flat.” Rumba rarely has any heel leads or “rise and fall,” as all forward steps begin on the ball of the foot and backward steps begin on the toe. The feet move in two tracks, meaning you don’t place one in front of the other like walking a tightrope.

The body, not the leg, initiates forward movement. Going forward, the body moves first, legs catch up. Going back, the toe goes first and body moves to it. You should have contact with the floor at all times. Think of dancing while trying to keep a piece of paper under your foot as you move. Rumba has no marching soldiers.

HIP ACTION

As one heel hits the floor, that leg straightens. With the next step, the knee of the opposite leg relaxes and bends and the foot begins moving forward. This causes the hips to rotate. This is not a forced action. It should occur naturally with the bending and straightening of each leg.

HAND AND ARM POSITIONS

Hand and arm action is a dancer’s personal interpretation of the music. The actions should look and feel natural and not detract from the figure. A basic rule is to hold the arms and hands in a natural, unaffected way. If the partner has hold of one hand, the free arm is never static and can take a whole measure of music to create its expression. Some basic rules:

As dancers move apart, the free arm moves out to the side at waist level.

As dancers move together, the free arm moves slightly across the body.

Arms are never “thrown” back behind the shoulder.

Arms should fall softly from the shoulder, never limp but never stiff.

Lady’s hands form the characteristic “C” shape, like making shadow puppets.

Try not to thrash the arms. Dangerous on a crowded floor.

Hands are joined equidistant between the partners.

CONNECTION

Each partner should have a slight pressure towards the other’s hand. This creates a physical feel of being “connected”. This connection allows each partner to feel movement originating in the other’s body and transmitted through the arms and the hands. Eye contact helps maintain this connection. What you’re looking for in this connection is to allow your “team” to move as a unit even when apart and doing different foot work.

Connection is essential so that the man knows where the lady to allow him to turn her at the right time. He cannot rush her.

BASIC STEPS

Rumba Basic: This is a two-measure figure (six steps) in open facing or loose closed position. Man places his left foot forward with toe slightly turned out (Q), replaces weight to his right foot (Q) and steps side on the left foot, settling (S); then back on his right foot (Q), recovers to his left foot (Q) and steps side right (S). The woman does the opposite.

It is important to remember that Step 1 is a placement of the foot, not a forward or backward step with full weight on the step.

Hockey Stick: This is so named because the six steps taken by the Lady make an “L-shape” on the floor like the handle and blade of a hockey stick. Because this is usually done from a “fan” position, the Lady will close her right foot to the left and transfer weight on Step 1. Lady then walks forward on Step 2 and 3 to be in front of the man but still at right angles facing RLOD. With the man’s direction, she makes a slight body angle change so that the 4th step goes forward diagonally reverse wall. She continues to step forward on Step 5, allowing the man to turn her on the ball of her right foot AFTER she has committed her weight on the step so that her sixth step will be back. The Man must lead the Step 5 turn ONLY after the Lady is “on” the foot.

Cucarachas: Think of these as “pressure” steps, in standard timing without turn. Step 1 is a side step with pressure into the floor, with some weight retained in the supporting (in place) foot; on Step 2, full weight is transferred back to the supporting foot; on Step 3, the moving foot is closed to the supporting foot. The steps can be taken forward or back, diagonally or to the side. The heel of the supporting foot will not release from the floor except in a forward cucaracha.

Alemana Turn: This is a right face turn under for the Lady, stepping left, right, left, but it is not a twirl. Lady walks forward with a swivel, then forward with a swivel and either side or forward. The trailing foot will track under the body, as though brushing on the swiveling action. Man’s steps are basic—forward, replace, close, back, replace and close (or side). His forward and back steps use a cucaracha action.

Man’s job is to lead and balance as he shifts (cucaracha). It looks like he isn’t doing anything but what he does requires concentration, coordinating with Lady’s movement.