Salsa Dancing & Rueda de Casino Guidebook



Steps, Styling, Technique, Timing & Latin Rhythms— Beginner Through Advanced

Barbara Bernstein, Ph.D

PRAISE FOR

SALSA DANCING AND RUEDA DE CASINO GUIDEBOOK

If I had to save one medium to teach humanity how to dance again following an apocalypse, I would choose this book. Barbara effortlessly and comprehensively captures all crucial elements that make dancing Rueda and Salsa technically sound, beautiful, and fun.

Jessica Churgin, Dancer & Software Developer

Barbara Bernstein has written a gem, second to none. A multi-sensory guide for beginners and experts alike laced with humor and inspirational vignettes. You'll be laughing and dancing in no time. It's a must-read for all Salsa enthusiasts.

Sherrita Wilkins, Dancer & Journey Bound LLC Founder

Bernstein's enthusiasm for her subject is infectious and inspiring. Her comprehensive knowledge of dance combines with her background in teaching to provide a clear, entertaining, and highly accessible compendium into the world of Salsa. Reading this book feels almost like a personal tutoring session on the topic.

Susan Miller, NYC Learning Specialist

A book written from the heart. A comprehensive guide created by a passionate and very respected educator in the dance community, with information on traditional moves and the most modern, updated trends. A practical and useful guide for both beginners and advanced dancers, including the magical benefits that dance provides to everyone.

Carolina Graells, Dance Instructor & Business Owner

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Cover Photo:

Danceintime dancers practicing "Puente Complicado"



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For questions: danceguidebook@gmail.com

Dedications

This book is dedicated to the countless dancers who have taught me, learned from me, watched out for me, and partnered and collaborated with me. They have made it clear that the dance community is a diverse group of people who are deeply bonded by their common love of music and dance.

The book is also dedicated to my biological family, none of whom are serious dancers, but who nevertheless cheered me on selflessly as I pursued what I loved—making all this possible!

To each of you, my deepest gratitude.

Barbara Bernstein Director, Danceintime

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The job of feet is walking, but their hobby is dancing.

- Amit Kalantri, Wealth of Words

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Preface

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched—they must be felt with the heart.

— Helen Keller

To dance is human, and humanity almost universally expresses itself in dance.

— Judith Lynne Hanna

In an "earlier life," before teaching dance, I taught math at a small college in Maryland. But I was very fond of dancing, and always made time to take classes in ballroom and foreign folk dance. It was when I went out to a Salsa club that I'd say I really fell in love with the music and the dance moves. I began taking Salsa and Rueda de Casino classes regularly. At some point, I started a practice group with a bunch of friends and eventually began running formal classes.

As a math teacher, I had grown accustomed to helping students by writing up summaries of my lessons. It felt natural to do the same when I began to teach dance steps. So I launched the Danceintime website and posted videos and notes on many of the moves. Later, during the pandemic, I started consolidating that information into what ultimately became this book.

My initial purpose was simply to document all the steps and techniques I had learned and then taught, as dance moves are the heart and soul of a dance. So the book starts with verbal descriptions and video illustrations of hundreds of dance moves. But dancing well requires much more than just knowing moves. Once I began writing, additional considerations seemed to flow from my pen; I couldn't stop them.

This book summarizes things I have learned in more than 20 years of teaching both L.A. style Salsa and Rueda de Casino full-time. Rueda de Casino is a group form of dancing with couples arranged around a circle, doing moves in synchrony with frequent partner exchanges. It is exhilarating to dance in a smoothly flowing "Rueda" and it's no surprise that this dance style has become popular worldwide. L.A. style Salsa is also popular across the globe. It's arguably the most well-known style of Salsa dancing.

Rueda de Casino was developed in Havana, Cuba in the 1950s by young men and women who are referred to as the "Founders" of the dance. They created dance moves that quickly became popular throughout Cuba and then in the rest of the world. Those of us who love this dance and whose lives have been enhanced by it owe a big debt of gratitude to these Founders!

Salsa dancing began later, in the late 1960s and 1970s. It was largely developed by Puerto Ricans and Cubans who were living in NYC. This dance evolved to be danced to Salsa music, which was relatively new in the late 1960s. Of course, as we all know, Salsa dancing became wildly popular across the globe.

In this book, I have shared insights that come from years of teaching experience. Like all insights, they are colored by my way of thinking and seeing the world. I hope they are useful to readers. They cover things like lead and follow technique (what you should and shouldn't expect from your partner!), ways to add style to your dancing, information on Latin rhythms and percussion, the astonishing health benefits of dance exercise, tips on how to deal with timing issues as well as how to study dance and avoid injury on the floor, etc. And of course, hundreds of moves—the heart and soul of a dance—are explained and illustrated.

I think most people who have done a job for eight or ten years feel like they know it well. But when they look back 20 or 25 years later, they can see how much more there was to learn, and how much insight was gained in the intervening years. Experience is a great teacher; it keeps on teaching us—relentlessly! We continue seeing things from a larger perspective, no matter how long we have worked at something.

So as you go through this book, bear in mind that there are many ways to do a dance move. And even if two teachers do a move the same way, they may conceptualize and describe the movement differently. I'm sharing moves as I do them and explain them, but there are other perfectly fine ways to do so. In some cases, I have described various options.

Steps may be done differently for physical, philosophical, or artistic reasons. Sometimes a move requires getting into a position that is physically difficult for some people, so they adjust the move. Or sometimes a dancer likes to add flourishes to a step for styling.

Rhythm can be handled differently too. Most groups start dancing on beat 1 but some begin on beat 5. Or consider the basic step of Rueda de Casino. There are videos in Chapter 1 of four different ways to do that step. I believe there is no right or wrong in these matters; there is value in respecting multiple approaches to an art form.

I need to make some comments about my step descriptions. In the past, teachers often referred to leaders as he, guy(s), man/men, etc, and to followers as she, girl(s), or lady/ladies. But today, it's very common for women to lead and men to follow, as old gender roles in dance have become less rigid, mirroring changes in society. Gender has come to have little meaning in partnership dance because dancers increasingly learn both parts.

There was a time, not that long ago, when only people who were preparing to teach learned both parts. As recently as the early 2000s, some studios didn't allow women to do the leader's part in classes, even if there were more women and that would help balance the lead/follow ratio. But now it is generally recognized that advanced dancers do better if they understand how the lead and follow affect each other.

So there is now not only acceptance of dancers learning both parts but even encouragement to do so. (Some folks call this being "ambidancetrous.") In my dance company, many experienced dancers have learned to both lead and follow as you can see in the videos.

I have tried to minimize the use of gendered pronouns in writing this book. The terms leader and follower have primarily been used—sometimes abbreviated as "L" and "F" respectively. But even with abbreviations and occasional bending of grammar rules, the effort to balance political correctness and respect for gender neutrality with brevity and clarity has been challenging.

As a result, there are still occasional gendered pronouns in the book and definitely there are many in the videos. In particular, when I dance with my mentor, Glen, we switch lead and follow constantly. So while watching the videos, you should check to see who is leading and make no assumptions!

The point is that any male-oriented pronouns in the videos refer to the leader, even though the video may show a leader who is a woman (frequently myself!). Likewise, female pronouns simply refer to the follower, regardless of the apparent gender of the follower. Please know that in no way is any use of pronouns meant to imply that leaders should be exclusively men, or followers exclusively women!

Some steps in this book have verbal descriptions or phrases that I use in class to help students remember the sequence of action in a dance move. I describe many actions in a few short words which I "chant" while students are learning. This is like a helpful "recipe" for the move.

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I began doing this when I was learning to lead Puente Complicado (the move pictured on the cover) myself. It's a long move with portions that repeat. I kept having trouble remembering what came next. But at some point in my own learning, I started to chant the action while walking through the step. That helped me a lot, so I subsequently used this approach to help students.

However, in writing the book, I encountered a dilemma with my chants. There is some dance action in every four beats of music. I try to capture the essence of that action in just three or four syllables so that the "chant" is rhythmically related to the music. This works best when each syllable can be said in one beat. The need to sometimes say "leader" instead of "he" or "follower" instead of "she" makes many phrases too long to be said in four syllables.

In addition, students in class can see what I'm referring to if I say something like "overhead." But it's unclear in a written description whose head is referred to—leader or follower, and what is going over the head—a right arm? Left arm? The fact is that it's hard to describe movement clearly in words, especially in just a few words. Therefore, in this book, though I have outlined the action verbally, readers should ultimately rely on the videos provided as the "final word" on how moves are done.

Also, when only one partner's action is described without designating if it's done by the leader or follower, it is usually the leader. This is because leaders are responsible for remembering the sequence of action. Followers don't have this responsibility since they are led. Similarly, in describing moves, I sometimes use the word "you," with the assumption that "you" are a leader.

In keeping with this line of thought on gender in dance, there has been a movement to dance with leaders and followers switching roles repeatedly. There are now some Rueda groups that require advanced students to know both parts since "switch moves" are so frequently called. This is proof positive of a major shift in thinking about the relationship between gender and lead/follow!

Note that there are some moves in this book that are easy to describe in words, and really don't require a video. For example, the move "Medio Sombrero" can be explained by saying that you "Do a Sombrero step holding only one of the follower's hands instead of holding both hands." Moves that can be described adequately in words do not always have a video.

Translations of the Spanish step names are included. It's important to note that words can mean different things in different contexts as well as in different countries or regions. Translations are by their nature subjective. In addition, words can be translated literally or by considering their meaning in the context of the dance. I used online information and consulted Spanish speakers from several different countries in putting together the list of translations. When it was sufficiently unclear how to translate something, no translation is provided. Nonetheless, those that are provided should be "taken with a grain of salt."

Some words, like Enchúfala or Vacila, are used in many step names. It would make the text very "wordy" to repeat those translations every time, so I haven't. I only mention the translation of words commonly used a few times. There is a complete listing of translations in the glossary at the back so that words can also be looked up easily.

I included some personal anecdotes throughout, as well as "small world" coincidences related to dance steps or material under discussion. Most of these are presented as "Side Notes." I like to think these human-interest vignettes provide some history and perspective —and sometimes humor—that lighten the technical content of the book. I would compare this to a cookbook that includes personal stories about family events surrounding certain recipes. But if you don't enjoy these detours, you'll lose nothing by skipping them.

When you watch the videos I reference, you should know that I had to remove some of the soundtracks we danced to for legal reasons. At some point, I began recording videos with music I had purchased the right to use. But when necessary, I either silenced a particular song that I couldn't use, replaced the original music with another song that I purchased the right to use, or replaced the music with a voice-over saying the beats. Note that the beat count can be slightly uneven in some places because the original music slowed down or sped up. (Links for the original videos with music that aren't in this book can still be found by searching Danceintime's playlist.)

Among the many videos here, some were recorded years ago at old Danceintime performances. Camera technology has improved during this time, so some pictures are not sharp by today's standards. In addition, some performances were recorded in dark nightclubs. Despite these inconveniences, I think the action of the moves can be seen clearly.

Here is a helpful tip for watching YouTube videos. You can see the movement better if you slow the video down. Just click on "settings" (the little gear), and slow the playback to 75 or 50 percent....I remember well the day someone explained that little gear to me! It rocked my world and opened up a whole new way to watch moves which was enormously helpful.

I like to think this book has a wealth of steps covering all levels. Chapter 1 deals with moves for new beginners ("newbies"), starting with the most basic concepts of how dancers count beats and when they take steps. No previous knowledge is assumed. Moves become increasingly sophisticated throughout the initial chapters. By Chapter 4, there is information on very advanced steps. Anyone who wants to look up a specific move may find the alphabetical index of moves at the back helpful.

There is material in this book that is relevant to more than one chapter. Some people may read through the chapters in order. Others may use this text as a reference book, looking up only topics of interest. In the latter case, each chapter should be constructed to stand alone and be clear. But for those who read through the book, this would involve needless repetition.

I handled this with the following compromise. Topics that are mentioned in more than one place are covered fully in the most relevant chapter. The coverage is briefer in other chapters, hopefully without sacrificing clarity. Throughout, I mention other sections where readers can find more detail about a topic under discussion.

In closing, I encourage you to check out DancelnTime classes (danceintime.com) in Washington DC & Maryland. They're friendly and, like this book, address all levels of dancers. The motto "the more the merrier" certainly applies. Visitors from out of town are always welcome and encouraged to share any moves they learn in our class with friends back home.

Documenting all these dance moves and sharing dance information has been a laborious but satisfying endeavor. My years of dancing Salsa and Rueda de Casino have been great fun and I hope you'll be able to say the same. It's been my experience that dance classes invariably create warmly bonded communities. The students' shared love of music and dance elevates this activity from simply a dance class to something well beyond that—an experience that fosters joy and connection. It is this perspective that I hope leaps off the pages of this book.

Barbara Bernstein
Danceintime

Salsa Dancing & Rueda de Casino Guidebook



Introduction: How To Use This Book

Do you like to dance? Sure you do! It's great fun.

It's even more fun when you know cool steps you can do smoothly with a partner, with a good lead-and-follow connection and tight timing—which make the moves feel great.

This book covers all the dimensions of dance that enable you to walk onto the floor with grace and confidence—from how to do moves and add styling, to staying in synch with the music and your partner.

Whether you're a beginner or already a sophisticated dancer, you will find here a new spin on concepts that can enrich and improve your dancing. Several music and Salsa styles are described, and Rueda de Casino dancers will find information on calling, blending moves, and mind-blowing new structures.

Oh....and in case you need a good excuse to make time for this fun, check out Chapter 16 on The Astonishing Health Benefits of Dance Exercise.

Why not go ahead and give it a "whirl?"...

The chart below, along with the Table of Contents, provides guidance to help readers find what they are interested in. Bear in mind that since dance skills keep improving with practice, if you want to learn something that looks like a reach, it's just a matter of time and drill to get there.

Also note that the information is cumulative. So Part One on dance moves sets the stage for understanding the material in Parts Two through Six. In general, you'll understand the later sections best if you have a number of dance steps from earlier sections under your belt.

Finally, when you look at the dance steps in the first four chapters, it is recommended that you watch a video of the move first. The videos give everything else a lot more clarity. Videos should be regarded as the ultimate guidance on how moves are done.

Most of the videos have numbers after the link to indicate where to start watching. Those numbers are clickable and take you to the exact start of the move in question. The only time you will need to click on the video link itself is when there are no numbers after it. In that case, you start watching the video at the beginning (0:01).

1. TOPICS OF GENERAL "HUMAN INTEREST"

There are many parts of this book that a wide range of readers may enjoy. In addition to what's listed below, other sections of the book may catch your attention depending on your interests.

- Chapter 8 Lead and Follow Technique (Some tips apply to life beyond dance!)
- Chapter 9 Helpful Insights for Learning (Some tips apply to learning in general)
- Chapter 11 Dance Teams and Performances (Funny anecdotes about experiences on stage)
- Chapter 16 The Astonishing Health Benefits of Dance Exercise
- Appendix A Dance Humor

Interesting photos sprinkled throughout the book

2. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN DANCE BUT HAVE LITTLE OR NO EXPERIENCE

The material below provides a general overview. After reading this, you will have the perspective to plan your next steps.

- Chapter 1 Steps and Information for Novice Dancers
- Chapter 9 Helpful Insights for Learning
- Chapter 20 Dance Styles In Perspective; Sections A & B (Summary of all major styles of Salsa and some other Latin dances)
- The chapters listed in number 1 above

3. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN L.A. STYLE SALSA

- Chapter 1- Steps and Information for Novice Dancers; Sections A, B, C, and D
- Chapter 20 Dance Styles In Perspective; Section A on L.A. Salsa (Covers basic and intermediate L.A. Salsa moves)
- Chapter 4 Steps for Advanced to Master's-Level Dancers (Look at steps which are either L.A. style or a blend of L.A. style with Casino. This would include moves such as "The Promenade, El Kiwi, L.A. de Glen, Triple Toss, Advanced L.A, Rotanya, La Bonita, Serpiente Complicado, and Guanabacoa.")
- Chapter 6 Styling and Embellishments; Sections A, C, and D
- Chapter 7 The Tremendous Importance of Timing; Sections A and B
- Chapter 8 Lead and Follow Technique
- Chapter 9 Helpful Insights for Learning
- Chapter 10 The Seven Sins of Salsa (Article)
- Chapter 11 Dance Teams and Performances
- Chapter 16 The Astonishing Health Benefits of Dance Exercise
- Chapter 17 Understanding the Music: Clave Rhythm and Percussion
- Chapter 18 Etiquette and Safety on the Floor (most portions)
- Chapter 19 Differing Points Of View Among Dancers; Section C

4. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN RUEDA DE CASINO

Aside from the material on L.A. Salsa moves, all the rest of the book is relevant to Rueda de Casino dancers! Check out Chapters 1 through 4 on moves, and look at all the subsequent chapters for a wide variety of additional information.

5. IF YOU ARE A DANCE TEACHER

There is material in the book that may be helpful for teachers. Some suggestions are below.

- Chapters 1 through 4 (Find steps to teach your students—either entirely new moves or just a new "twist" on moves they know)
- Chapter 6 Styling and Embellishments (Find styling ideas your students may like)
- Chapter 7 The Tremendous Importance of Timing (Strategies for dealing with timing issues)
- Chapter 8 Lead and Follow Technique
- Chapter 9 Helpful Insights for Learning (They are relevant to teaching, too!)
- Chapter 12 Blending Moves (Doing several moves that are blended into a series is a great way to drill steps)

- Chapter 14 New Dance Structures (For those who teach Rueda de Casino, these are novel approaches to that dance. You can choose a structure that suits the size and level of your class.)
- Other Chapters, depending on what would suit your students
- Appendix A on Dance Humor (Find humor to share with students)

6. IF YOU HAVE A SPECIAL INTEREST IN SOMETHING SPECIFIC

A few common topics of interest are listed below with references to where you'll find relevant information.

- Dance Steps
 - Chapters 1 through 4 (Steps for beginners through very advanced)
- Styling and Embellishments
 - Chapter 6 Styling and Embellishments
- Music, Percussion, and Latin Dance Rhythms
 - Chapter 17- Understanding the Music: Clave Rhythm and Percussion
 - Chapter 19 Differing Points Of View Among Dancers; Section D
 - Chapter 20 Dance Styles In Perspective; Section B
- Dancing with Someone Trained in a Different Style
 - Chapter 13 Blending and Adapting Dance Styles
- Safety & Health
 - Chapter 16 The Astonishing Health Benefits of Dance Exercise
 - Chapter 18 Etiquette and Safety on the Floor; Sections B, C, & D
- Overview of Salsa Styles and Latin Club Dances
 - Chapter 20 Dance Styles In Perspective; Sections A & B

Chapter 1

Steps and Information for Novice Dancers

There are shortcuts to happiness and dance is one of them.

— Vicki Baum

That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

- William Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet)

Chapter one "begins at the beginning"—explaining the underlying dance rhythm and how your steps relate to the beat of the music. From there, we proceed to video illustrations and verbal descriptions of basic steps to start you on your dance journey.

Bear in mind that dancing becomes more and more fun as your proficiency and technique improve, and your repertoire of steps increases. Hundreds of moves of all types are covered in this book—from beginner to very advanced. Buckle up; it's a lively ride.

A. What's in a Name?

This book covers two dance styles: L.A. Salsa and Rueda de Casino. Salsa dancing is very popular all over the globe. And L.A. Salsa is probably the most common style of Salsa worldwide.

There is another beautiful dance style called Casino that can be done to Salsa music and is also danced to a music style called "Timba." Individual couples can dance Casino, or a group of couples can dance this style together in a circle. The latter approach is called Rueda de Casino. (Rueda means "wheel" in Spanish.)

Casino dancing is often informally called "Cuban Salsa," "Salsa Cubana," "Salsa Rueda," or "Salsa Casino" or "Rueda" for short. If you look up "Styles of Salsa" on the internet, Cuban Salsa (or Salsa Cubana or Salsa Casino) will be listed. Many people use these terms loosely and interchangeably, even though the correct technical name is Casino. The fact that Casino can be danced to Salsa music is no doubt a factor.

Regardless of how these dances are named, the steps in this book are all beautiful dance moves that can be done to Salsa music or to Timba. Information on these styles of music as well as the development of these dances is fleshed out later in this book. But as promised, we start in Chapter One at the beginning— with an explanation of the dance rhythm and instruction on how to do the most basic steps...

Enjoy!

B. General Information for New Dancers

In any partnership dance, the rhythmic relationship between the music and the dancers' steps is very important. All styles of Salsa and Rueda de Casino dancing are done to music written in phrases of eight beats with dancers stepping on 6 of those beats. Eight beats comprise what musicians call two "measures of music" since each measure has four beats.

The "basic" dance step is completed within those eight beats. Longer dance steps in this book are generally done in multiples of eight beats. So some moves are eight beats, some are 16 beats, some are 24 beats, etc. This means that after a move that starts on beat 1, the next move will start on another "beat 1." This is significant because there is a musical emphasis or accent on beat 1, which is called the "downbeat."

It may sound obvious that moves would routinely start on beat 1. But in fact, there are partnership dances such as Swing and Foxtrot where this doesn't happen. Those dances have steps that are not done in multiples of the number of beats in a musical phrase. For example, some forms of swing have many moves that run six beats yet the music is eight beats per phrase. So some swing steps begin on beat 1 but others may begin on beat 3, 5, or 7. In such a dance, the movement doesn't relate to the music the same way it does in Salsa and Casino.

The footwork for Salsa and Rueda de Casino dancers is to step on beats 1, 2, and 3 and not on beat 4. Likewise, there is a step on beats 5, 6, and 7 but not on beat 8. A step lasting one beat is called a "quick" step and a step lasting two beats is a "slow" step. Thus, dancers are said to be stepping in a "quick quick slow" rhythm.

Dancers make a full weight change each time they step from the right foot to the left foot or vice versa. Moving in the quick quick slow rhythm with full weight shifts should become automatic over time, with dancers stepping precisely on the beat. The skill of stepping in rhythm to the beat of the music is a number one priority. If one too many or too few steps are taken, then dancers will be on the wrong foot, making it hard to do the move! There is more on this in Chapter 7, titled "The Tremendous Importance of Timing."

A dancer's connection to the floor is gentle. Steps are soft; they are not marched or pounded with heavy impact unless the step specifically calls for a "stomp." The body leans very slightly forward. Knees stay slightly bent throughout the dance, which is referred to as having a "soft knee." Latin dancers almost never lean back on their heels.

C. Counting Beats

In this book, to identify precisely when some action occurs, I may say, for example, it's on the "third beat 7." If you are practicing a move and want to see where that falls, you can dance through the step, counting this way: ONE, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7; TWO, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7; THREE, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, etc. So you can see what is happening when you arrive at the third beat 7. Note that the number written in capital letters tells you which 8-beat phrase you are in (first, second, third, etc). The other numbers tell you which beat you are on in that phrase. In this manner, you are counting only the beats on which dancers take a step.

To help keep a steady beat if there is no music, dancers will often count "1 2 3, 5 6 7" throughout a move they are practicing. It becomes second nature to think about rhythm this way. In charts throughout this book, the notation "1" at the left is used to designate the action in beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. A "5" designates the action in beats 5, 6, 7, and 8. (The numbers 4 and 8 are included here because even though no step is taken, sometimes an arm moves or there is a pivot, etc.)

Side Note 5

Once, I was teaching basic Salsa at a fair, loudly shouting out the beats to step on: "1 2 3, 5 6 7!"

A small child came up, tugged on my skirt, and told me, "You forgot 4."

In L.A. Salsa, each couple is led by the dancer designated as the "leader" who decides what moves to do. The partner who is following gets physical signals from the leader that tell them what to do. But in Rueda de Casino, there is a "caller" who chooses the moves and shouts out the step name and/or makes a hand signal that tells the group what move to do next.

The calls are usually made on beat 1 or soon thereafter and dancers start that move on the next beat 1. Some groups do calls on a later beat, particularly if the dancers in the circle are very experienced. I've even heard calls as late as beats 6 or 7. But calling on beat 1 is probably the most common approach, and that's the way calls are handled in this book. This gives dancers time to mentally prepare for the start of the move.

Charts that summarize the action of a step usually start on beat one when the move begins. But occasionally a chart begins with the beat 1 when it's called. This is because in some cases, a little movement is needed to get in position for a step before it actually begins.

For instance, Dame is called on beat 1, and four beats later, on beats 5 6 and 7, leaders turn to face their next partner. But the Dame is considered to "start" on the beat 1 that is after the call. This means dance movement can deviate from the basic step slightly before the move that was called officially starts. When that is the case, a chart will usually begin with beat 1 when the step is called.

D. Basic Steps for L.A. Salsa and Rueda de Casino

Most moves in each section have videos at the end of the description. **It's best to watch a video first,** as the written material makes more sense after seeing the move.

L.A. Salsa Basic

The basic step in L.A. style Salsa is done as follows:

When leaders step forward on their left on beat 1, followers step back on their right. Followers are always four beats behind the leader (or ahead—depending on how you think of it).

Step outline:

- Beat 1: leader steps forward on left foot; follower steps back on right
- Beat 2: leader's right foot steps in place; follower's left foot steps in place
- Beat 3: leader brings left foot next to right foot; follower brings right foot next to left foot
- Beat 4: continue moving slowly through the step taken on beat 3, so the movement stays fluid and doesn't completely stop
- Beat 5: leader steps back on right foot; follower steps forward on left foot
- Beat 6: leader's left foot steps in place; follower's right foot steps in place
- Beat 7: leader brings right foot next to left foot; follower brings left foot next to right foot
- Beat 8: Keep moving slowly through the step taken on beat 7, so the movement remains fluid

Repeat

The leader's action on beats 1 2 3 is called a "forward rock" and the leader's action on beats 5 6 7 is called a "back rock." Followers do the opposite— a back rock on beats 1 2 3 and a forward rock on beats 5 6 7. It's important to keep in mind that back rocks in Salsa are generally small steps. Taking big steps is a common mistake made by beginners.

Watch youtu.be/0uDm8Tu8kCg for video instruction on this basic step and other beginner moves for L.A. Salsa.



Danceintime L.A. Style Salsa class at Bossa Bistro in Washington DC.

Rueda de Casino Basic

The Rueda de Casino basic step is called Guapea. There are a number of ways to do Guapea but they all have significant similarities. The version I teach has leaders and followers standing on the circumference of the circle facing each other, with the leader's right shoulder toward the circle center and the follower's left shoulder toward the center. Both partners do a "back rock" on beats 1 2 3 and a "forward rock" on beats 5 6 7.

Leaders step back on their left on 1, replace the right foot where it was on 2, and bring the left to the right on 3. On beat 5, leads step forward on their right foot, step in place with the left foot on 6, and bring the right to the left foot on 7.

The followers' footwork in Guapea is also a back rock on 1 2 3 and forward rock on 5 6 7. Followers start on their right and are always on the opposite foot from the leaders. Note that the follower's footwork in this version of Guapea is identical to the footwork in L.A. Salsa (described in the section above).

Since both followers and leaders are back rocking on 1 2 3, they are moving away from each other on those beats. Then they both rock forward on 5 6 7, so they're moving toward each other on those beats. If the partners both step directly forward, their feet may hit. So **leaders step forward at a slight diagonal to the right** while followers step directly forward, to avoid a collision!

Generally in partnership dancing, when leads move forward, followers move back and vice versa. So the pattern of movement in Guapea is a little unusual but it still works well.

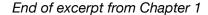
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During Guapea, the leader's left hand holds the follower's right hand, and their other hands are not held. This enables them to comfortably step back away from each other. However, on beat 5, the forward rock, their free hands gently push against each other at about midchest level when the dancers rock forward. Although this contact on beat 5 is released right after the push, it helps partners feel connected throughout the basic step.

Step Outline:

- ① step back and together ("together" refers to bringing feet next to each other)
- 5 step forward and together

Watch youtu.be/z6jqT83-IL0 for an introduction to Guapea and other beginner Casino moves.





Danceintime performed at a Veterans Plaza "Salsa Night" in Silver Spring, MD. It included a short lesson and lots of social dancing. (Program sponsored by the Silver Spring Town Center, Inc. and run by AM Salsa and Danceintime.)

Chapter 2

Steps for Beginners to Intermediate Dancers

If you aren't dancing, you are wasting your feet.

- Author Unknown



Sassy Salseras, posing before a performance at the San Francisco Salsa Rueda Festival

Beginner Moves

This video: youtu.be/TTibS0sXZ0E explains a number of additional "beginner steps" including Pelota con Dos, Pelota Con Cuatro, Enchúfala con Mambo, Festival de Enchúfala, Adiós, Uno, Enchúfala Doble, Foto, and Dame Dos.

Intermediate Moves

As you watch videos in this book, remember that if there are numbers after a video link, clicking on the numbers will take you exactly to the move being shown.

SETENTA CON GANCHO

Translation: Setenta means "seventy." Con Gancho means "with hook."

Setenta can be reviewed here: <u>youtu.be/SWHzOilJzT8</u> <u>8:57–10:57</u> (explanation); and 29:31–29:39 (group demonstration).

Setenta con Gancho is an extension of the move Setenta. Note that the hook in Setenta is done with the feet but the hook in Setenta con Gancho is done with the arms. Specifically, one elbow goes over a partner's elbow.

This move starts with the first 12 beats of Setenta. Then the leader does an arm hook on the second beat 7 (instead of the drape in "Setenta"). The leader rocks forward on the third beats 1 2 3. Then the leader turns the follower left and brings the follower all the way around the leader's body moving counter-clockwise. That is followed by a free spin on the fourth 5 6 7. The move ends with DQN.

Summary

- 1) start Setenta
- (5) continue Setenta
- (1) continue Setenta
- ⑤ continue Setenta, hook (hook on 7)
- (1) lead rocks in
- ⑤ follow moves left (F comes in front of L, moving to the L's left while turning left)
- (1) follow moves right (F comes behind L, moving toward L's right)
- 5 follow's free spin (F turns left)

Ends with DQN

Tip



The turn on the second beat 7 is more elegant when led from the hook, without unhooking first. The opportunity to lead a turn from an elbow hook occurs in a few other moves as well, such as Kentucky Complicado.

Watch: youtu.be/6heaSihZQ3M

SOMBRERO DOBLE

Translation: Sombrero means "hat." Doble means "double."

Sombrero can be reviewed here: youtu.be/SWHzOilJzT8 6:25–7:46 (explanation); and 28:17–28:24 (group demonstration)

Sombrero Doble starts with the first 8 beats of Sombrero which uses a two-handed cross handhold. Then on the second beats 1 2 3, arms stay connected and the leader rocks forward while removing arms from behind the head of each partner. On the second beats 5 6 7, the follower turns left while doing a Cross Body Lead, moving to the leader's left side.

Partners tap on the second beat 7. Fast, sharp alardes can be added for styling in the second set of 8 beats.

Partners do a back-to-back turn on the third beats 1 2 3 with the follower turning right and the leader turning left. The leader can either stay connected with both hands during the turn or release the leader's left hand and lead only with the right. The follower continues turning right on the third beats 5 6 7 and leader drapes right arm behind the follower's head on 7. The move then ends with Dile Que No.

Summary

- ① Sombrero (F turns right while moving a little to the right)
- ⑤ continue Sombrero (F turns right again and moves the rest of the way to L's right side)
- 1 lead rocks forward (arms come in front of head)
- ⑤ Cross Body Lead (L brings F to L's left side; tap on 8)
- 1 back-to-back turn (F turns right; L turns left)
- ⑤ drape over follow's head (L's right hand goes over and behind F's head)
 Ends with DON

Watch youtu.be/ecnm9gt2Yhc 0:21-0:39

End of selected moves from Chapter 2



Danceintime performers onstage at "Artscape," an annual Baltimore event.

Chapter 4

Steps for Advanced to Master's-Level Dancers

The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.

- Vidal Sassoon

Never give a sword to a man who can't dance.

- Confucius



Danceintime performance

BESO COMPLICADO WITH STRAIGHT JACKET

Translation: Beso means "kiss." Complicado means "Complicated."

Beso can be reviewed here: youtu.be/SWHzOilJzT8 10:59-12:33 (explanation); 27:46-27:56 (group demonstration)

Beso Complicado with Straight Jacket is a 56-beat move that starts with the first 20 beats of Beso. On the third beats 5 6 7, leaders turn right, going under their own right arm and hammerlocking their left arm. Then on the fourth set of 8 beats, leaders rock forward and lead the followers in a Cross Body Lead. Followers are constrained by the way their hands are held, but they walk in front of the leader to the leader's left side as far as possible. Leaders then turn slightly left to face their partner at the end of the Cross Body Lead.

Leaders should not move their location on the floor much during this CBL. Sometimes it can feel to leaders as though moving to the right will help the followers get to their left side. But because of the way they are connected, that isn't helpful and actually makes the follower's steps more difficult.

On the fifth set of 8 beats, partners do a back-to-back turn, with the follower turning right and the leader turning left. Leaders move to the follower's right side and put an alarde behind the follower's head on the fifth beat 7. They leave the alarde there. Followers keep their right elbow up so their right arm is horizontal or a little higher, leaving space for the leader to go under.

Leads then go under the follower's arm on the sixth beats 1 2 3, walking behind and encircling the follower. Sometimes leaders walk around the side of the alarde rather than going under it. In either case, leaders start to turn the follower right on the sixth beat 3 or 4. Leads touch their own right shoulder (or come close) on the sixth beat 5 and their own left shoulder (or come close) on the sixth beat 7. These shoulder touches on 5 and 7 can be difficult to do quickly. Leaders can skip one of them if they prefer. After that, the move ends with DQN.

Side Note 5

Straight Jacket is an alternative way to end certain moves, such as Beso Complicado, Uno Complicado, or Sombrero de Regnier. I consider the movement in Straight Jacket to be an acquired taste. Some followers don't like the constrained position they're in very briefly. It may feel a little like a choke hold even though that lasts only a small fraction of a second. Despite some mixed opinions on how this move feels, it's eye-catching to watch!

Watch youtu.be/1Wa3449GRrk (Beso Complicado with Straight Jacket)

TRIPLE LOCK







This is a very flashy L.A. style move though it's not long (48 beats). The word "lock" here refers to turning the followers as far as they can go (given hand connections that constrain further movement). After each lock, the followers "unwind."

If one couple does this step dancing one on one, they don't need to be concerned about their orientation. But in order to do this in a Rueda, the move was adapted so it can be described in relation to the circle.

The move starts with a two-handed cross handhold—right over left. In the first 8 beats, partners do a CBL with a left turn on the outside of the circle. The leader turns 180 degrees left and follower turns 360 degrees left so they end facing the same way. To lead the turn into the first the lock, the leader's right hand goes over the follower's head and the leader's left hand stays down. The follower basically turns as far as possible constrained by the handhold. The second beat 1 is the first lock. For styling, followers can dip down a little on beat 1 when each lock is complete.

Then followers turn right two times during the next 8 beats. These turns are led first with the leader's right hand over the follower's head, then by the leader's left hand, while the leader's right hand stays at waist level. The follower turns as far as possible into the second lock, again facing away from the leader. The second lock is on the third beat 1 (eight beats after the first lock).

Then followers do 1.5 turns left. Leaders keep their right hand down the entire time and go over the follower's head only with the left hand for these turns. They end on the third beat 7 with partners facing each other.

Next, the follower rocks back while leads rock forward and then the follower walks out turning right 180 degrees. They end back in Guapea position with partners again facing each other on the fourth beat 7.

Followers then step back on the fifth beat 1, forward on 2 and 3 with a slight left turn. On the fifth beat 5 leads start leading with two hands (right to right and left to left). Two quick right turns are led on the fifth beats 5 6 7. Initially, both of the leader's arms go over the follower's head for the turns. But for the last portion of second turn, only the leader's left arm goes overhead; the leader's right arm stays at waist level. The follower is facing away from the leader when the follower cannot turn further. That is the final "lock;" it happens on the sixth beat 1.

The 7 remaining beats in this move are like an embellished Cross Body Lead. Followers begin walking toward the leader's left side while turning left. The leader's left hand moves quickly to the follower's hip on beat 2 (preferably) or 3 (at the latest). Leaders check the follower by beat 3 and change the direction of their turn so they begin turning right. Leads have to move very fast or this check action will happen too late to be an effective lead. Followers turn right 1.5 times while moving to the circumference to get back into Guapea position and end the move.

Note that the choreography below adds a Copa after Triple Lock, but that's not part of the move. A Copa is an L.A. style dance move in which followers make a quarter turn to the left while moving forward and leaders then break the follower's movement and send them back with further left turns.

Watch youtu.be/QoJ48wuydyo 1:15–1:33 (group performance with Copa added at end)

LA PRESA

Translation: La Presa means "female prisoner."

La Presa is an 80 beat moving that starts with Enchúfala. On the second beats 1 2 3, the leader flares the follower. On the second beats 5 6 7, the leader takes both of the follower's hands in the leader's right hand and leads a Cross Body Lead, so the follower winds up on the leader's left side.

Partners then do a back-to-back turn with leaders turning left and followers turning right. The follower's hands are brought over the leader's head and encircle the leader, coming down to a little above shoulder level. Then the follower's two hands are separated and the leader's right hand holds just the follower's right hand. The follower is led in a right turn.

Next, the leader does an Enchúfala over the leader's own head, coming to the follower's right side. The follower then comes across the leader moving in front of the leader and to the leader's right side. The leader then takes the follower's left hand in the leader's left hand.

That is followed by an Exhíbela. Then the leader and follower both turn right and the leader hooks the follower (leader's right elbow over the follower's right elbow). They take three steps to walk around each other moving clockwise. Next, the leader unhooks and turns left to unroll and face the follower. It ends with an Enchúfala over the follower and DQN.

Summary

- 1 start Enchúfala
- (5) face each other
- (1) flare step step (F flares on 1)
- ⑤ Cross Body Lead, tap (L takes both of F's hands in L's right hand on 6 or 7)
- back-to-back turn (L turns left; F turns right)
- ⑤ arms overhead (F's arms are brought over L's head and encircle the leader; by 8, L is in front of F and separates F's hands, holding both, so they are right to right and left to left)
- turn the follower (L drops left hand connection and turns F right with L's right hand)
- ⑤ Enchúfala over lead (L turns left; partners switch places and face each other by 7)
- (1) leader moves left (while moving behind F; F's right arm is hammerlocked)
- (5) leader comes forward
- 1 start Exhíbela
- ⑤ continue Exhíbela (on 7, L's right arm is up as in the move Abanico)
- 1 both turn right (as in the move Abanico: L walks around the F while both turn right)
- ⑤ ronde and hook (L does ronde and right arm hooks F's right arm on 7)
- ① walk walk walk (partners walk around each other moving clockwise)
- ⑤ unhook, unroll (unhook fully on beat 5, L turns left and unrolls on 7, so partners switch places and face each other by 7)
- Enchúfala over follower
- (5) continue Enchúfala

Ends with DQN

Watch youtu.be/xbD04mSTO80

End of excerpt from Chapter 4



Danceintime entertained at a Fiesta honoring the Monarch Butterfly. These orange and black butterflies fly to Mexico and happen to arrive every year on the Mexican holiday Dia de los Muertos. On that holiday, people honor deceased relatives. As a result, the butterflies came to be thought of as symbols of ancestors' souls returning to Earth! (Note we dressed in the butterflies' colors to honor the holiday.)

Chapter 8

Lead and Follow Technique

It takes two to tango.

– Al Hoffman and Dick Manning

He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a good leader.

– Aristotle

D. The Complex Eco-System of Dance Partnerships

On a number of occasions, followers have told me that if they are led well, they can do a particular move. Then if that move fails, they conclude the leader must be at fault. I don't agree with this line of thinking. A partnership is all about teamwork and nuanced interactions, where everything one partner does has an impact on what the other partner can do.

Here is an example that deals with the concept of frame or tension, which dancers need for effective lead and follow. Imagine that a leader is leading a little too strongly for the follower's comfort. The follower may respond to this in different ways. One possibility would be for the follower to loosen their frame somewhat to avoid feeling pushed. The leader may then find the follower less responsive to the lead and compensate by leading even more strongly. So it can become a vicious cycle.

Or consider the matter of how partners stay connected. In parts of some one-on-one moves, each dancer holds their fingers together in a curved shape while maintaining some tension in the hand and fingers. Leader's and follower's hands are linked in this position, and their fingers gently pull against each other, helping to maintain contact.

There is a range of tension that is satisfactory for maintaining this contact. But if both the leader and follower are in the proper range but at the very low end, they may still disconnect. So even though they were both dancing "correctly," they may disconnect causing the move to break down.

In this situation, it's understandable that each individual would feel blameless, having done "nothing wrong." The feeling that it must have been the other person's fault may be natural but it misses the point. It's really the union of how those two individuals dance together that caused the problem. Partners should look at what happened and figure out how they can both contribute to avoiding this problem in the future.

Here is a different kind of example. Years ago, I was dancing with a wonderful, considerate friend, and while turning, I lost my balance slightly. As a result, I swung out a bit farther from my partner than he had reason to expect. He moved closer to me in an effort to help stabilize me but before he could, I lightly bumped into another couple on the floor. The truth is that they were dancing too broadly for how crowded the floor was.

My partner immediately gestured apologetically that it was his fault since it's the leader's responsibility to watch out for the other couples on the floor. The other couple apologized; I think they then realized they were taking up too much space. And I felt it was my fault for swinging out too far. My partner couldn't have anticipated that I would lose balance and do

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that. Truthfully any one of the parties involved could have avoided that collision and we all shared some responsibility for the breakdown.

It's helpful to grasp the complex nature of these interactions and focus on what each of us can do to help avoid a problem. We've all heard the expression that you can't change other people; you can only change yourself. That thinking is useful here.

The point is that partnership dancing is a joint effort requiring cooperation and a common understanding of what is needed for a dance step to work. I think of it like a mini-ecosystem where everything affects everything else. Appreciating how interactive this system is and trying to strengthen your own contribution goes a long way ... and makes you a beloved partner.



End of excerpt from Chapter 8

Danceintime set the mood for Hispanic Heritage Month at a Washington Nationals Baseball game in DC. We did Salsa and Casino dance demonstrations near the entrance. Barb danced with George Washington, the team mascot!

Don't laugh; he was a pretty good lead.

Chapter 9

Helpful Insights for Learning

Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes but they don't quit.

- Conrad Hilton

Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.

- Albert Einstein

D. The Fundamental Law of Learning: It's on a Continuum

People generally understand that when someone learns to play a musical instrument, they don't just have the ability to play it or not. We recognize that this kind of learning is incremental, improving over time. The same goes for learning a language; it's a gradual process.

But some kinds of learning aren't always thought of that way. In fact, our language itself tends to be binary in this regard. For example, students often say they "know" or "don't know" a dance move. Yet clearly, there is no on/off switch for learning dance steps. Dancers continually become faster and more polished over time. You might have studied a move and feel you know how to do it, but still not be able to do it smoothly or automatically. In that case, if something distracts you, or if the music is faster than usual, you may not be able to get through it. And yet in some sense, you do know the move.

According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of Outliers and many other books, to become a top-level expert in a skill, 10,000 hours of practice are necessary (though not sufficient). The average dance student may not be looking to become an expert, but Gladwell's "rule" underscores the concept of incremental learning. It essentially means that continual improvement comes with continued practice.

When students learn a new dance move, they do it hesitantly at first. They may feel that they know the move after 25 repetitions—and sometimes want to go on to other moves. But after 500 repetitions, they'll certainly know it much better. Students should keep this in mind, as it helps them be patient with their progress as they keep practicing to improve.

To do advanced dance moves, the foundation of underlying moves needs to be very solid. It's not enough to "know" the basic moves; students have to be able to do them automatically and smoothly in order to use the basic movements in more complex steps. It's all about the continuum, which is why dance classes drill skills. Understanding this should also prevent students from being discouraged as they work to progress.

Side Note 5

Here is an analogous situation that helps clarify this issue. In a math class, if a student "knows" the multiplication tables but has to think for thirty seconds to figure out each answer, that student isn't ready for long division. To do long division, the tables must be very automatic because there are so many calculations that have to be made in each problem. Likewise, it wouldn't be feasible to do the calculations needed to add, subtract, multiply, and divide with fractions, decimals, and percents

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—until the student can multiply faster!

A student may be right in thinking he/she knows the multiplication tables. But that's not what is important. What's important is how well (i.e. fast) students know them. When students are first learning multiplication facts, they don't have this perspective. But teachers do, which is why they drill this—to prepare students for what is coming.

An obvious implication of this is that students advance their skills when they review or drill moves they already "know." And this is especially true when they are guided to work on certain things as they dance. For example, a teacher may be guiding them to work on keeping stricter time with the music or to be in the correct location with respect to their partner while stepping through a move, or to have less tension in the arms, etc.

Learning new moves isn't the only way to become a better dancer. I stress this because it is not unusual for students to equate being a good or advanced dancer with knowing a lot of moves. But many times, the way someone can really become a better dancer is to focus more on how they are moving and less on accumulating more steps.

Admittedly, it's seductive to watch advanced dancers on the floor and it's natural to want to learn the things they do! But in a class, the teacher may see that it's more important for a student to work on improving underlying skills such as timing and making steps steady and even, for example. Learning new moves can feel thrilling, but dancing well is even more important.

Side Note 5

I saw a cartoon that captures this sentiment perfectly. It's framed and hanging in my home studio. It shows a wise older person speaking on a platform to hundreds of people listening with rapt attention. The caption is, "Five polished moves are better than fifty unpolished moves."

The Fundamental Law that learning is on a continuum has other implications as well. Just as children learn to walk before they run, students of dance learn to do things slowly before they can do them quickly. This means it is best to learn challenging material first to slow music and get the timing and technique solid. Once that is in place, the tempo can be kicked up gradually. The fact is that people develop muscle memory on anything they do repeatedly. So it's helpful to avoid practicing moves at a pace where you are making a number of mistakes.

Here is an interesting point, in keeping with this outlook. There is often some speed at which you can do a particular move. Suppose you just took one step every few seconds, which is extremely slow. You can probably do many moves you are learning at that pace. So in a sense, one could say that the question isn't so much whether you are able to do a move, but at what tempo you are able to do it!

In addition, while dancing to fast music is a lot of fun, there might be an element of discouragement involved. Failing to get through a move correctly can be discouraging. If the step wasn't tried slowly first, students may not realize that they could do it well enough at a slower speed. Then the music can gradually be speeded up as proficiency increases—which is a more encouraging way to learn.

How people feel about their own progress affects how willing they are to continue studying something. Learning moves gradually at an appropriate speed generates confidence and a "can-do" attitude!



This is a philosophy we can live with! This quote is attributed to Robert Brault.

E. "It's Hard Till It's Easy"

I wish I had a penny for each time a student said to me, "Is that all?" at the end of my teaching an advanced move. Here's why ...

Before I start teaching a long, sophisticated move, I typically show the step from start to finish so students can visualize it. Usually, people are excited to start learning the move. Then I break it down, teaching a piece at a time. Near the end, I say, "And then it ends with a Dile Que No"—or Dame. This is often followed by someone in the group looking puzzled and asking, "Is that all?"

When I first showed the move, it looked complicated and long. Once students learn the move, it seems a lot shorter and easier. This has happened so many times, I developed the saying that heads this section.

Learning is like that in general. Something seems hard initially, but once you understand it, suddenly it's no longer so challenging. It's very rewarding to work at something and master it. Students are well-advised to hold on to the thought that things always become easier with practice. (Repeat after me: "It's hard till it's easy!") This can help people get through the harder parts of learning—whether they're studying a dance move or anything else.

The long-range impact of mastering something that was initially perceived as difficult is hard to overstate. In life, as in dance, mastery builds confidence for tackling challenges that will come along in the future.

Chapter 16

The Synchrony and the Ecstasy: The Astonishing Health Benefits of Dance Exercise

Wherever we look, gods and goddesses of dance are linked to healing and health ... prehistoric humans understood the important link between dance and health.

- Dr. Julia Christensen and Dr. Dong-Seon Chang

Humans can go about most of our lives sensing and feeling ourselves as separate, but through one small action—coming together in movement—we dissolve the boundaries that divide us.

- Kelly McGonigal

A. A Brush With Magic

My first career was as a mathematics teacher at a small liberal arts college. I mention this to establish my credentials as a staunch believer in science, facts, and logic. So it rocked my world when I seemed to have a "mystical healing experience" while dancing ...

It happened when I was in college at the University of Chicago. There were lots of extracurricular "foreign folk dance" classes on campus and I took them all! One day a dance teacher announced in class that auditions would be held for an excellent Balkan dance troupe. I was very excited and signed up to audition.

The night before the audition I got sick with a sore throat and runny nose; I was coughing and sneezing and felt miserable. But these auditions were held only once every other year. I was never going to have another chance to do this. So I went anyway. (This was many years before the Covid pandemic.)

It was a grueling experience. They lined us up and we danced for several hours straight, learning complicated moves that we all did in synchrony. I was so laser-focused on the dance steps that I barely noticed the time passing.

Hours later, I left the audition sweaty and exhausted. As I walked outside into the frigid Chicago winter air, I realized my sore throat was completely gone. My nose wasn't running, and I wasn't sneezing. I was magically back to normal. And the illness did not return. For many years I thought of this as my life's one mystical experience.

Side Note 5

I should mention that a few days after auditioning I got word that I was not selected to join the dance troupe. I was disappointed but continued taking and loving folk dance classes throughout my college years and beyond.

Now, years later, as a full-time dance teacher, I understand that what happened that day wasn't magic. The fact is that I have sometimes come to my dance classes with a strained knee or shoulder, or just feeling worn out. But during and right after class I feel fine; nothing hurts and I have loads of energy.

Because I primarily teach a group dance, where the whole class dances together in synchrony while exchanging partners, people become connected through a phenomenon called "muscular bonding." There is a surge of positive feelings that comes from dancing this way as science amply explains. Rueda groups in particular, routinely become tight-knit; I've never once seen this fail!

B. What the Research Says

A distinguished historian who taught at the University of Chicago, William H. McNeill, published a book in 1995 about muscular bonding, titled, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*. McNeill's point of departure is his military basic training. He said that the prolonged movement drills created a "strange sense of personal enlargement … becoming bigger than life …" He goes on to talk about the boundary loss and the feeling of being "one" with others.

People who do these types of synchronous drills together routinely experience a profound sense of group cohesion. This is also true of dance classes generally, and Rueda classes in particular, where everyone dances together in a big circle.

The same theme is echoed by dance teacher and scholar Juliet McMains, in her terrific book, *Spinning Mambo Into Salsa*. McMains describes an experience she had in Cuba at a party when she was pulled into a Rueda. She says the dance was exhilarating, with people smiling and laughing more and more as the dance went on. In her own words, none of the other dances that night "built such a strong sense of community or ... intimate sense of connection" as the rueda did.

We have long known that exercise, listening to favorite music, and socializing all lift people's mood and improve feelings of well-being. Add to that the research on additional benefits of being part of a group moving in synchrony, and you have a recipe for astonishingly good feelings.

Side Note 5

True story: I have a physical therapist friend who used to tell me that one of the best things a doctor can do is write on a prescription pad, "Take a dance class." It's just good for so many things that ail us. Then, years later, the book *Dancing Is The Best Medicine* by Christensen and Chang was published, and it has a chapter titled: "Prescribe Dance, Not Drugs."

End of excerpt from Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Understanding the Music: The Clave Rhythm and Percussion

Music is the language of the soul.

- Angela Alvarez

This chapter covers points that are useful for dance students to understand about the music they dance to. Latin bands generally have a large percussion section because "rhythm is king" in this style of music. Of particular importance is the clave rhythm which is played by an instrument with the same name. The first section explains this rhythm in detail.



Latin music is strong on percussion!

A. The Clave Rhythm

The clave is essentially just two pieces of wood that are hit together. Claves can be made of different types of wood and have different shapes. Some claves have a depression in the center as shown in the photo above; some are long and thin; and some are small enough to fit into a purse. These variations in materials, shapes, and sizes can create different tones

and levels of volume. But all claves mark a rhythm that plays a special role in Salsa and Timba music. Other instruments in the band all take their lead from and coordinate with the clave. It is no accident that the Spanish word "clave" means "key" in English.

There are two fundamental clave patterns, both shown below. The clave is struck on the beats that are in bold. Note that the second half of a beat is referred to by putting the word "and" after the beat number.

3-2 Clave Rhythm1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 and2-3 Clave Rhythm (also called "Reverse Clave")

1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 and

These clave patterns are closely related. In the 3-2 clave rhythm, there are 3 clave hits in the first measure (comprised of 4 beats) and 2 in the second measure. The 2-3 clave rhythm just reverses the first and second measures. Note that the 3-2 clave is the beat that is clapped in the dance move "Pelota con Clave" which was explained earlier in this book.

There is a distinctive feel to each of the clave measures. The one in which three beats are struck creates a syncopation or tension. The clave measure with two beats resolves the tension. The two beats that provide the resolution tend to be louder and more accented.

The nature of the music determines whether the 3-2 or 2-3 clave rhythm is more suitable. However, there are also some pieces of music in which both clave rhythms are played. In any case, all of the other instruments have to be consistent/coordinated with the clave since the clave is (literally) the "key" to the song's rhythm.

The rhythm of the first three notes in the 3–2 clave is also called "tresillo" which is Spanish for "triplet." Interestingly, this portion of the clave rhythm is very similar to playing three notes of even length during one measure (four beats) of music. This is a common way to create rhythmic tension in a number of other music styles. And the three even hits which are the same length are called by the English word "triplet!" Triplets feel a bit less sharp or accented than the 3 clave hits but they still have a "jazzy" feeling.

The tresillo rhythm is sometimes referred to as 3-3-2 timing because that is the ratio between the amount of time each of the notes last. In the clave measure with 3 hits, the length of those hits is 1.5 beats, 1.5 beats, and 1 beat respectively. You can express these numbers in fraction form: 3/2, 3/2, and 2/2. If you multiply those fractions by 2, you'll see that the ratio of how long those beats last is 3-3-2.

There is a lot of information online about 3-3-2 rhythms for anyone who cares to read more about the relevant music theory. The point here is that "triplets" and the clave rhythm are extremely similar. And both have a feeling of rhythmic tension that many musicians and dancers love!

Side Note 🎜

These facts about the clave rhythm are dear to my heart because when I was a child taking piano lessons, I would convert simpler rhythms to triplets when I played many songs. As a youngster, I had not heard of the clave, but I knew songs that had triplets. And I loved adding that rhythm to a lot of music whether it was written that way or not! :)

Years later, when I began dancing Salsa and Rueda, I realized that I had essentially infused something like a Latin rhythm into every song I could—before I even knew what a Latin rhythm was! It is certainly fitting that I became a Latin dance teacher. The side note below shows a calculation of just how rhythmically similar triplets and the syncopated clave notes are.

Salsa Dancing & Rueda de Casino Guidebook

Side Note 5

It's interesting to consider precisely how similar triplet timing and the syncopated clave hits are. When triplets are played as three even beats in a 4 beat measure, each hit last for 1.333 beats. So 3 triplets together last for 3.999 beats which is essentially 4 beats, or one "musical measure."

In the clave rhythm, the measure with 3 syncopated hits breaks down this way: The first and second hits each last for 1.5 beats. The third hit lasts only one beat. There is a very small difference mathematically between how long the triplet notes last and how long the initial clave hits last.

To calculate this, we can assume the music is 200 beats per minute. By definition, that means there are 200 beats in 60 seconds. This means that one beat lasts 0.3 seconds. So a triplet note would last for (1.333) times (0.3) seconds, which is 0.3999 seconds, or about 0.4 seconds.

The syncopated clave hits last for 1.5 beats and each beat is 0.3 seconds. So each syncopated clave hit lasts (1.5) times (0.3) seconds which is 0.45 seconds.

Therefore, the initial (3-2) clave hits are only five-hundredths of a second longer than each of the triplet notes. Five-hundredths equals one-twentieth. A time difference of one-twentieth of a second is so small it's hard to perceive.

End of excerpt from Chapter 17

About The Author

I began my career as a mathematics instructor at Bowie State University. I hold a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland's School of Education and a Master's Degree in Mathematics Education. Subsequently, I worked in a family business that published annual editions of a *Tax Guide for College Teachers*. But I've been a full-time Latin dance teacher in the DC area for over 20 years, specializing in Rueda de Casino and L.A. style Salsa.

It may seem like a big jump to start a career teaching math and end it teaching dance. But they are surprisingly similar—both require helping students feel comfortable with the subject, as well as a lot of drill to become proficient. I've always had a deep love for music and dance, and as a young adult, I studied Foreign Folk Dance, Ballroom, and Latin dancing.

As director of Danceintime, I've produced shows for a wide array of venues including the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage and DC's 20,000-seat Capital One Arena. In addition, I have taught private and group classes, wedding dance preparation, coached college dance teams, and run Salsa Boot Camps.

I've also taught workshops at Salsa events in DC, Baltimore, Miami, NY, San Juan, and Dublin as well as credit classes at local colleges in both Ballroom and Latin dance. These include American University, University of Maryland, George Mason University, Prince Georges Community College, and George Washington University.

Danceintime has been featured on ABC News, the WTTG Morning News in DC and Baltimore, Telemundo, and the Voice of America.



Goofing off before a DC Salsa Congress performance.

When I'm not dancing, I can often be found hanging out with friends over skim, decaf lattes, or singing in a Sweet Adelines chorus. And I'm a member of two long-standing book clubs.

For questions, comments, workshops, speaking engagements, and in-person or online projects, contact danceguidebook@gmail.com.

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YouTube: youtube.com/@danceintime5678 (for Danceintime playlists)

DIT Documentary Film: youtu.be/ywFWErpb_do

Closing Poem

Learning To Move: That Sweet Education

by Barbara Bernstein

There once was a friendly young woman,
Who loved dancing deep in her soul.
With demonic possession,
She made a confession:
To dance well would be her life's goal.

She practiced the steps day and night Until she got every one right. She worked on her dips And Cuban-like hips And found every drill a delight.

The truth is it felt like a treat.

Dance made every day feel complete.

There's no way to measure

The fabulous pleasure

Of ending your turns on the beat.

And when your arms hit a nice line, And body roll styling looks fine, When your movement is good, And steps flow like they should, The way that you feel is divine.

But the main thing she learned in the end
Is that dancing and life almost blend.
The best thing of all
Is it makes you walk tall
Which can sometimes help other wounds mend.

Back Cover

Embark on a rhythmic journey through the vibrant world of Latin dance, where every step becomes a passionate expression of energy and movement.

In the Salsa Dancing & Rueda de Casino Guidebook, Barbara Bernstein shares over 20 years of expertise as the director of the DanceinTime studio. This guide covers everything from the fundamental techniques of lead and follow, to the intricate art of adding personal style to your moves.

Designed to cater to dancers of every proficiency, this book offers a wealth of information, starting with the most basic concepts for beginners and gradually progressing to sophisticated maneuvers for master-level dancers. Working in-hand with her written step-by-step instructions, Barbara also provides links to over 500 YouTube videos from the DanceinTime studio so that you can take advantage of this visual guidance.

Alongside the technical instructions, the guidebook is filled with personal anecdotes and humorous side notes, creating a delightful reading experience that transcends the boundaries of a mere instructional manual.

Whether you're a novice eager to learn the basics or an advanced dancer seeking new challenges, this guidebook is your passport to unlocking the joy, rhythm and spirit of community that come with dancing Salsa and Rueda de Casino. So, join Barbara Bernstein on this enlightening journey, and let the transformative power of dance shape your life both on and off the dance floor.