

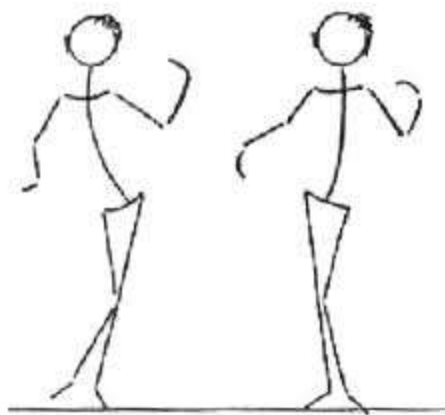


Rumba and the Latin Hip

by Harold & Meredith Sears

Both two step and rumba are danced quick, quick, slow. Does that mean we should dance these rhythms the same? As we dance a rumba, should we look the same as when we do a two step? Should we feel the same?

Oh, we hope not. Two step is an up-beat, playful, skipping kind of dance, and rumba is a down, into-the-floor, smoldering, and passionate dance. Rumba is the quintessential *Latin* rhythm. Think "Latin Attitude" or even "Latin Lover." "Latin" means that the dance doesn't travel around the floor much. We stay more in one spot, maybe better to focus on our partner rather than on some distant destination. It also means that we give our lower bodies more freedom; we almost disconnect the lower body from the upper. In the Smooth rhythms, our body moves as one unit. Our body parts, from head to toe, are connected. We speak of our "frame," and it is well toned, and it moves as one, with uniform, still smoothness. A Latin body is quiet above but active below. We loosen the hips from the spine and let them move.



Let's look at some features that can give Latin character to our rumba steps, and for a context, we can picture Rumba Walks: fwd, fwd, fwd; or Side Walks: sd, cl, sd; or the rumba Basic: fwd, rec, sd; bk, rec, sd (QQS; QQS). First, let's take our steps ball/flat, rolling from the inside edge of the big toe to the ball of the foot to the flat of the foot. Second, we step to a straight leg; the supporting leg is straight, the free leg is

flexed. The third feature is the Latin Hip, the rotation of the hips over the supporting foot, back, and through a figure-8 over each pair of steps. Of course, these are not separate efforts to be added individually to our dancing. They very much happen together to create a Latin look.

Step ball-flat -- A normal walking step (and many steps in the Smooth Rhythms) are taken heel-to-toe. We can really reach with a heel lead, and the effect is to carry the body over the foot, from back to front, and on to the next step. The effect is to carry us toward our destination. But initial pressure on the ball of the foot, with the knee flexed, and then lowering to the heel, and only then straightening the knee does not particularly encourage progress. These are small steps, almost in place. This is not locomotion; this is forward poise and moving your body in time with the music and in sympathy with your partner.



Let the hips move -- Now, allow the hips naturally to follow these Latin stepping actions. As the weighted left foot is released for a step, the right hip rotates up and back, and the left hip rotates forward and down. We step forward to the inside edge of the big toe/ball/flat and then straighten the left knee. The left hip shifts left, it rises, and it rotates back, describing a small counter-clockwise arc. As the left knee straightens, the right knee flexes, releasing the right heel from the floor. The right leg comes forward, and the right knee crosses in front of the left. Again, we step forward R, edge/ball/flat/straighten. The right hip shifts right in a clock-wise arc, up and back.



With each step, the hip shifts onto the straight leg. We step ball/flat/straighten/hip; bring the free leg forward and in front of the supporting leg; and we step ball/flat/straighten/hip, for a rhythmic,

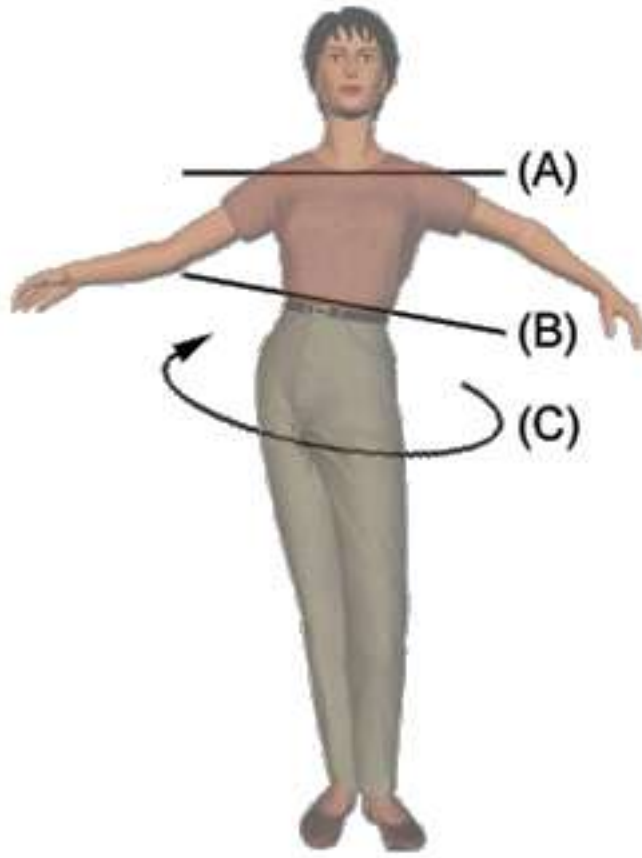
rolling, figure-8 Cuban or Latin hip action. Notice that you are *not* "wiggling your hips." The hip movement is not independent but *comes from* the feet and knees. As you boil all this down to what you actually need to do, it pretty much comes to straightening the supporting knee, relaxing the free knee, and allowing your hips to move naturally.

Stepping to the inside edge of the big toe is not required, but it does help to emphasize our Latin hip rotation. The flexed left knee will bend inward a little and allow the left hip to move farther forward and the supporting right hip farther back. Then we take weight, and the left hip can rotate back a little more dramatically.

Again, the Latin Hip is active under a relatively still upper body -- like a pendulum under quiet support; like a bell ringing under its quiet handle. Especially the up-and-down hip movement should not disturb your upper frame. Don't raise one or the other shoulder or otherwise tilt your shoulder line. Instead, slightly stretch one side of the body and compress the other. Don't rotate your torso in time to your rotating hips. Your upper frame should remain toned and steady, allowing your hips to shift under that frame.



Try it. Stand up straight, feet together. Bend your left knee forward and inward, keeping your right knee straight. Your hips should shift right with no additional action on your part. Now step side left, inside edge/ball/flat/straighten. Recover with the same inside edge/ball/flat/straighten. Rock left; your right knee is flexed inward, toward your body's center line. Now rock right; your left knee is flexed inward. Allow the hips to rotate left with the left foot and right with the right foot. Let that figure-8 happen. Can you put this Latin Hip into your rumba?



Latin Hip -- No steps are being taken here, but notice that the supporting leg (right) is straight and the free leg is flexed. The right hip is up (line B) and back (line C). The shoulders are level (line A); therefore the right side is compressed and the left side stretched.

