

Ballroom Dancing - The Rumba

Unlike all the other ballroom dances, the Rumba emphasizes ones body movements more than their footwork. The rhythm of the dance, which is emphasized by any type of percussion, drums, pots, maracas, etc., is more essential to the dance than the tune itself. The fascinating rhythms and mesmerizing body movements of this dance make it one of the more popular ballroom dances.

The Rumba was influenced by the Spanish and Africans with most of the development of the dance taking place in Cuba. The Rumba evolved in 19th century Havana, originating with the African Negro slaves who had been imported. The rural Rumba was originally for exhibition rather than participation. In some reference works the Rumba is said to be a pantomime of the movements of barnyard animals with the steady level shoulders depicting the movements of slaves as they carried heavy burdens. However, most look at the Rumba as a dance of love and sensuality with the woman tempting the man with her charms, teasing then withdrawing. Some go a step farther saying the dance is a pantomime of sex with the man dancing very fast in a very sensual yet aggressive manner with greatly exaggerated hip movements, and the woman responding with a defensive attitude. Whichever is correct, the Rumba is the most sensual of all the Latin ballroom dances.

Son, Danzon, Guagira, Guaracha and Naningo are all names for the Rumba. The Son, which is a slower more refined Rumba was a favorite among the middle class Cubans. The wealthy section of Cuban society preferred the Danzon, which is an even slower Rumba using very small steps and more subtle hip movements.

The modified version of the Rumba known as the Son was introduced to Americans in 1913. In the late 1920's Xavier Cugat formed an orchestra specializing in Latin American Music which really didn't develop a following until around 1929. By the end of the decade Xavier had the best Latin American orchestra of his day.

Monsieur Pierre Lavelle, a London dance teacher, and his partner Doris Lavelle were responsible for bringing and popularizing the Rumba and other Latin American dances to Europe. In 1955 with the help of Pierre and Lavelle the Cuban Rumba was finally named as the officially recognized version of the Rumba.

During ballroom dance competitions the judges will be watching for the following:

- * Interplay between the partners - this is a dance of love, a portrayal of romance. This is not the time for solemn, passive expressions
- * A strong direct walk

- * Lots of slow body shapes - the body NEVER stops changing its shape
- * Figure eight hip rolls - hips alternating in a forward motion
- * NEVER leading with the heel, stay on the balls of the feet
- * The Cucaracha step - you should rock to the right or left then replace and close
- * The fan position - the woman positioned to the man's left side, at arms length and at a 90° angle to the man