

MUSIC

Here are some recommendations for music. As well as tips on feeling the beat in Salsa music it also includes the Salsa music we generally recommend people to buy, and music for Latino dances Merengue and Bachata as well.

We also sell some good compilation CD's ourselves.

They are compiled by a very experienced Salsa teacher called Robert Charlemagne so are all real classic tracks that are good for dancing to. In general, they are medium paced, though they all have at least one slower track as well.

- plus we sell the first CD recently produced by Salsa Band 'Palenke'.

I have also included information on two other popular Latin dances, Bachata and Merengue.

All the CDs we sell cost £12 each.

MUSIC - WHAT TO BUY & DANCING IN TIME

i) BUYING MUSIC

Here are some recommendations for Salsa and other Latin music, which you may find useful. Try getting them from Amazon.

1) Salsa

When you buy a Salsa CD, you will often find that you have a few really good tracks and the majority not so good - therefore, compilation CD's are a good idea.

The following are good compilations to dance to:

I love Salsa

Salsa dance Class

The Beginners' Guide to Salsa (3 CD's)

The Rough Guide to Salsa Dance

We Love Salsa (50 tracks / 3CD's best of Fania Records

– Classic Salsa! Only £10!! – 'Just Buy It You Can't go Wrong' (Ed))

A very popular track often used in our classes is:

La Vida Es Asi / Alex Bueno

Mellow Salsa music

A good mellow Salsa compilation of (predominantly African-style) Salsa music is:
'Afro-Latino' (1998) on the PUTOMAYO label (PUTUI39-2).

The first track is one that we often use in the Absolute Beginners class on Tuesdays.

The slow and jazzy track (Use Me) is from Alex Wilson

"R'n B Latino" (2002) which is a nice R'n B crossover - this is the first track we play in the classes on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Two tracks (Smooth & Corazon...) are from Santana "Supernatural" 1999 - also mellow.

We love African Salsa and so would recommend anything by Africano (listen to their version of Aicha on eg iTunes).

2) Merengue

We use compilations Ed has made (which we cannot sell because of copyright)

We suggest you get 'Caribe Mix 2002' (Blanco Y Negro Music)

'The Rough Guide to Merengue' is also a good compilation.

Alternatively anything by the groups "Illegales" or "Proyecto Uno"

3) Bachata

'Bachata Hits (Envidia) 2005' or

'Bachata Hits (Envidia) Vol 2'

The very popular Bachata hit

'Obsession' is on the album 'We broke the Rules' by 'Aventura' - the rest of the album is good too.

ii) Salsa Music - Dancing in Time

There is a quote from Dizzy Gillespie (jazz saxophonist) when he was jamming with some Latin musicians apparently shouted out 'Can't anybody tell me where the one is!' - so don't worry, if you find it hard, you are in good company!

Unlike most of the pop music people generally dance to in this country, Salsa does not have the beat

being played by the drums. Instead, each of the many instruments in a Salsa band plays its own rhythm.

People new to Salsa usually find it hard to find the rhythm.

Partly this is because they are expecting to be able to hear every beat in the music. Also they tend to listen to the percussion for the beat.

Consequently they dance too fast to the music as in Salsa this is being played more quickly, while the rhythm of the music flows more slowly underneath.

Salsa is like a wave

Think of Salsa music not in terms of hearing every beat giving a staccato effect, but instead as a wave. Much more smooth and flowing.

Rather than 4 regular beats, instead with a wave we have a build up, then a peak with a rush of energy as the wave crashes, and then a resolution as it laps up the shore.

ie instead of trying to step regularly on each of the 8 beats, see the dance also as a wave.

We are stepping forward or back on beats 1 and 5 ie this is where the accent in the music is, so put that accent into your dancing.

Accentuate the steps on 1 & 5. by stepping 'sharply', with vigour. This means the first step will be faster, and the rest of the steps come as a natural extension of it - like the ricochet from a gun firing.

The peak of the wave in the music is on beats 1 & 5, which are accented. Beat 1 has a stronger accent than beat 5.

However, Salsa music is VERY complex, so there may also be accents on other beats especially on beat 2.

This means that you can correctly identify beat 1 and be dancing in time with the music, but even so, for instance, you notice that the singers or an instrument keeps coming in on the following beat - nevertheless, you are in time! - so don't be put off if this happens.

If you feel that you are being carried along by the music (like surfing a wave), rather than struggling to catch up with it, you are probably in time.

The Accent

The accent in the music will come in a variety of ways, some of which may be quite obvious (eg an instrument or singer may come in, or may start singing/playing with more emphasis, or there may

be a change of some sort in the sound of the music) – but often the changes are so subtle that we may not consciously be able to identify WHY we feel the wave crashes there - but somehow we still feel that it does, even though we can't consciously explain why.

The Build up

Similarly with the build up before the crash, it may be very subtle - often the change in the chords played pre-empts the coming crash - but we don't need to know why it happens with the mind to be able to feel what is happening. We do, however, need to trust that we can indeed feel it.

You may well not be able to identify and explain these things consciously (unless you study the music) but the good news is that your body will be able to FEEL them anyway.

Learning to Trust the Body's Ability

We need to learn to trust this innate sense in the body, which is generally very much undervalued in the west. The body WANTS to get in sync with the music - rhythms are how the body works (eg heart beat).

It is not a question of 'having a sense of rhythm' EVERY BODY has this - or their bodies just would not work. Full stop.

It is a basic law of physics that things want to get in sync with each other - even inanimate objects like clocks.

Pendulum clocks placed side by side change their swing to get in sync with each other. Try patting your head and stroking your tummy at the same time. The body does not like this, and soon changes it so that both hands are in sync, unless you really concentrate to stop this happening.

Of course, really concentrating is what people are often doing in a Salsa class, or at the start of a dance when they are listening for the beat. Bear in mind that this may be actually inhibiting your body's natural ability to feel the music.

Gaining Confidence in Trusting the Body

Below are some suggestions of how to gain more confidence with this natural process.

To really get to feel the Salsa music and rhythms, listen to it a lot.

Don't just dance Salsa to it, as it may be hard not to concentrate then on 'getting it right'. Experiment with just moving to it eg Turn it up loud, and close your eyes and see what bits of your body want to move to the music - try not to judge it as not being 'proper' dancing or not being in time to the music. Allow your body to make any movement it wants and just see what happens.

Instead of moving the whole body, try moving just your arms or hands to the music, as this may help

you get away from trying to dance 'properly. or dance 'Salsa'.

You can try asking your hands to show you what the rhythm in the music is, and see if they can 'tell' you by the way they want to move.

You can do the same with your voice - Try singing along with it (it doesn't have to be fluent Spanish - it can even be gobbledygook!)

Work out which is your favourite song and listen to it a lot, and sing along (it doesn't have to be in tune!).

Do this whenever you have time to spare eg if you get stuck in a traffic jam. (Don't worry, the person in the car behind will just think you are talking on your mobile phone!)

Start trying to anticipate the music eg when the singers come in. Even if you have problems consciously knowing in advance when something is going to happen, see if your body (eg move your hands).

This is a very brief introduction to the very complex, rich music of Salsa. As it is such a rich and varied genre, there are many different ways of feeling, listening to and interpreting the music.

I have focused here on one of the simplest and most intuitive ways to feel it.

If you have any questions, do feel free to contact me any time.