



# Larrys Corner

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This is called Larrys Corner because when I teach I stand in the corner so I can see everyone.

If you want to read dance stories they are under Headlines or Larrys Corner.

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Do you have any likes or dislikes, stories, or helpful hints for dancing? If so, write it down and give to Larry Ablin or Barb Johnson. We will add it to one of the future News letters.

If you would like to tell us how you became interested in dancing, write it down and give to Larry or Barb, we will add your picture with it and put it in one of the future Newsletters. If you have anything you would like to write about, just write it up and give to Barb or Larry. I enjoy writing something for you.

Come Dance With Us

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## ChaCha

The **cha-cha-cha** (in Spanish *cha-cha-chá* and also known simply as **the cha-cha**) is a style of dance music.

In 1951, Cuban composer and violinist Enrique Jorrín introduced the *cha-cha-chá* to Cuban dance floors while playing with Orquesta América.

According to Jorrín, the sound made by the shoes of the dancers on the floor sounded like "cha-cha-cha", while they tried to follow the new rhythm that, at the beginning, was simply called "mambo-rumba". In 1953, his *La Engañadora* and *Silver Star* became recorded hits. In early days, this dance and its music were both known as "triple mambo" or "mambo with guiro rhythm".

## ChaCha Dance Steps

Cha cha cha is danced over two measures of 4/4. Dancers usually use a pattern of 8 counts across two bars to describe the basic step. Count 1 is a step in place, leader's left foot, follower's right. Count 2 the leader makes a break step backward on the right foot, follower steps forward on the left. Count 3 the leader steps in-place on the left, follower on the right. On "4-and-5" the leader makes two quick steps and steps in place: right-left-right. On 6 the leader breaks forward on the left, on 7 steps in place on the right, and on 8-and-1 the small "cha cha" steps return to the start of the cycle. As a matter of etiquette, many leaders start on 6 to avoid the first step stepping away from the partner, symbolizing rejection.

1 The Cha-Cha-Cha falls on 4-and-5 and on 8-and-1. Because this does not gel with the conventional ways of subdividing rhythms, i.e. it spans the end of one bar and the beginning of the next, some schools call it "Cha cha" enabling the teacher to call out "1 2 3 cha-cha 5 6 7 cha-cha"

The Cha-Cha part of the rhythm is a compact chasse.

The forward step of the cha-cha is: instead of the leader stepping forward on his right foot he puts his left foot to his right while the follower does the same but she puts her right foot to her left, then they both step back in and do the three steps on the spot. This can be repeated as many times

as you want rotating sides. The backward step of the cha-cha is pretty much the same as the forward step but instead of using you're inside foot and stepping forward you use your outside foot and step backwards. The cha-cha turn is: the leader does a basic cha-cha step but when he/she does the three cha-cha's on the spot he does them while moving to the side then he/she does it again moving back to his original position. While he/she does this the follower does a normal step but instead of the three cha-cha-cha's he/she does two quick turns whichever way the leader is going then he/she does it again to end up back in his/her original position.

The tempo of the cha-cha is 128 beats per minute

It is danced to medium tempo Latin music

The dance was popular in the 1950's

The cha-cha was created in Cuba by a Cuban violinist called Enrique Jorrin in 1954. When dancing the cha-cha very small steps are needed because of its rhythm. The cha-cha part of the rhythm is a series of small gliding steps that barely touch the floor. A huge variety of fancy footwork can be added to the dance. Weight has to be moved carefully to make motions look gliding. The cha-cha includes a lot of hip motion. The pelvis is held in one position and left free for this motion. Even though the cha-cha uses smaller steps, dancers in competitions usually make their movement slightly longer to travel across the floor. The Cha-cha became hugely popular in the United States as did the mambo in the 1950s. Dancers began inventing new steps and turns to win competitions.

## **ChaCha International Dance Steps**

Cha cha cha is one of the five dances of the "Latin American" program of international ballroom competitions (where it is officially but erroneously known as "Cha cha"). The basis of the modern dance was laid down in the 1960s by Walter Laird and other top competitors of the time. The basic pattern involves a checked forward step with the left foot retaining part weight on the right foot, the knee of the right leg being allowed to flex and close to the back of the left knee, the left leg having straightened just prior to receiving part weight. This step is taken on the second beat of the bar. Weight is returned to the right leg on the second step (beat three.) The fourth beat is split in two so the count of the next three steps is 4-and-1. These three steps constitute the Cha-cha chasse. A step to the side is taken with the left foot, the right foot is half closed to the left foot (typically leaving both feet under the hips or perhaps closed together), and finally there is a last step to the left with the left foot. Both knees are allowed to be flexed on the count of 'and' as otherwise an increase in height would take place as the feet are brought towards each other. Cha cha is danced without any rise and fall. The length of the steps in the chasse depend very much on the effect the dancer is attempting to make. In general Cha cha steps should be kept compact. While one partner dances the bar just described the other partner dances as follows. A step is taken back on the right foot, the knee being straightened as full weight is taken. The other leg is allowed to remain straight. It is possible it will flex slightly but no deliberate flexing of the free leg is attempted. This is quite different from technique associated with salsa, for instance. On the next beat (beat three) weight is returned to the left leg. Then a Cha cha chasse is danced RLR. Each partner is now in a po-

sition to dance the bar their partner just danced. Hence the fundamental construction of Cha cha extends over two bars, as does the underlying clave. Because of the action used during the forward step (the one taking only part weight) this basic construction inevitably turns left somewhat. The dancers do not dance in a slot; instead their alignment in the room gradually changes throughout the dance. Hip actions are allowed to occur at the end of every step. For steps taking a single beat the first half of the beat constitutes the foot movement and the second half is taken up by the hip movement.

***Six Golden Rules: (most of these apply to everyone, not just beginners).***

1) **Be aware of the people around you** and actively avoid hitting them! Sounds simple right? Well, if this sounds simple to you then you haven't been dancing in some of the more crowded nightclubs. This can prove very difficult at times, and you have to keep your wits about you in order to "steer clear". Avoid throwing your partner (i.e. the follower) into people as a means of clearing space for yourself that's a joke. If you're dancing in a crowded place, **don't take large steps**, keep your steps smaller this will help with the faster music anyway.

2) If you knock into somebody, or step on somebody, acknowledge your mistake. **Say you're sorry!** You don't have to get on your hands and knees and beg for forgiveness although it might help, but you do have to actually look at the person and acknowledge the fact that you hit them, stepped on them, whatever. Even a friendly nod is better than nothing! If they are busy dancing, and they ignore you, it's ok to go up afterwards and just say your sorry. Ladies with spiked heels that step on somebody DO have to get on hands and knees and beg for forgiveness.

3) **Let the show-off's, show off!** You can't stop them. Partner dancing is beautiful, and it's gorgeous to watch two people really groove. As a beginner, it might be in your better interest to actually give these guys some room as some can be mighty forceful in taking it from you. Just move your partner to a safer place on the floor. Generally, "shows" are held on the outside of the floor, the edges. If you're going to show off, you want people to see it, so you're not going to go to the center of the floor right? Beginner's may find more space, and easier dancing in the center, or even in front of the band (if there is one).

4) It's nice to have people admire your dance style and super fast, razor sharp moves. However, as an alternative view, show off's have to pay special attention to rule number 1! Be aware of your surroundings! The worst part is, most show off's are good dancers, thus they already are aware of their surroundings. They just don't care. They are going to clear space for themselves to do their stuff, at whatever cost to those dancing around them! Well, that's just life. Some people are cool, some aren't! As a beginner, my advice is to avoid these people like the plague. Believe me, you won't be able to miss them out on the dance floor. When you're watching them, you'll be awed and entertained, when you're dancing next to them, you won't be!

5) **Lay off the fancy dips!** I know . . . believe me. They'll be plenty of time for that later. For example, let's say you just learned this great dip in class and you want to twirl the lady around five times, absurdly fast, catch her with one hand behind your back, and gracefully take her body to the floor, as the woman is astonished by your grace, and the crowd is awed by your speed. Unfortunately, this often turns out quite poorly when starting out! The five quick turns don't go as well as planned as the lady spins out of control crashing into the couple next to you. In a flailing attempt to grab her, you leap forward catching her and throwing her into a dip far too fast. As you are lowering her body, you notice the spiked heel of the lady dancing next to you flick up in the air towards your partner's head. As her head and the lady's heel nearly collide you attempt to jerk her out of the way, throwing her into someone's ass, and then throwing both of you off balance, as you land not so gracefully on the floor, on top of the

woman who is never going to dance with you again nor will any of her beautiful friends. Not the most beautiful of pictures eh? Well, I see it all the time! It never ceases to amaze me.

6a) Leaders (**protecting your partner**): Adding on to all of our previous tips, the underlying theme is, your partner is **gold**. Her safety is in your hands, and only your hands. Whether she is a rote beginner, or a truly advanced dancer, you are the leader at least in most cases. You've learned that through the use of well placed turns, and cross body leads, you can deftly navigate the most crowded of dance floors. Your partner is not a weapon, to be flung out like a dangerous projectile, in order to clear more space for yourself. Likewise, if she is swinging out of control, you might try to reign her in a bit. Remember the simple truth, followers are following your lead. If an accident happens it's always the leader's fault (whether it IS or not). Leader's need to be vigilant in preventing dance accidents before they happen! Stay sharp . . .

6b) Followers (**protecting your partner**): Does that mean you can close your eyes, and go blindly wherever led? Well, yes and no. In many cases, you are at the leader's mercy, however, in some cases (cross body leads for example), you have many choices. For example, let's take the biggest problem. Huge steps! Most of the time, unless your in a ballroom, your not going to get away with taking enormous leaps away from your partner! Keep it small, keep it tight. Watch some of those advanced female dancers we have in our midst. I hate naming names, because inevitably I'll leave out someone who will read this, but I can't think of a female teacher who takes big steps (when not performing). One dancer in particular, you'll know her when you see her (and if she's at the club, you WILL see her), is just lightning fast in the smallest space I've ever seen. In fact most of the really advanced dancers, dance incredibly tightly, and very controlled. Oh, and one more thing, if you see your leader about to crash into someone else behind him (he can't see back there, trust me), it's polite to give him a little pat (with either your left or right hand), alerting hit to the impending *crash*.

Sub Rules of Dipping: Know which direction you are going to dip the lady, and make sure your not dipping her into somebody!

### *The two not-so-golden Rules*

1) While it is ok to ask someone phenomenally better than yourself to dance, it's not ok to do it more than once, or over and over throughout the night (unless invited). Be respectful of their right to dance at their level. They're out to have a good time just like you. If you are going to ask someone phenomenally better than yourself to dance, be understanding of the fact that they may wish to wait for a song or two. If they say no, don't take it personally. You may just have asked at an inopportune time (i.e. their favorite super fast dance tune just came on)! It's ok to ask again, once, but usually not in the same night.

### **The Opposite View**

Advanced Dancers: Wow, a beginner just came up to you and asked you to dance during your favorite fast song, so you said "not right now, maybe later, thanks for asking", and went to dance with someone else. Be aware, and sensitive, to the fact that it is NOT easy to ask people to dance. He/She may have walked all the way across the floor, with her friends watching, to ask you that question that you so easily brushed aside. If you really just didn't want to dance with a beginner for that particular song, FIND him/her later and say something to the effect of "how about that dance". If you don't want to dance with a beginner, be POLITE about it, and go out of your way to be both charming and respectful.