

Lesson 6: Time to Rumba!

By Kaye West and Larry Caves

Comparing Rumba to Waltz

In the last lesson the Box was introduced as a basic figure used in the Waltz and other rhythms. For example, the Box is the basic figure in the American style of Rumba! So if you know the Waltz Box, you can readily learn the Rumba Box!

Rumba has been interpreted in several different ways (by two branches of American style, the International style, and round dancing). They *all* use three changes of weight for each measure (therefore requiring one Slow count and two Quick counts, but some begin with a Slow and some with a Quick, and some begin on count 1 and another on count 2. None of that matters in social dancing since the basic rhythm is repeated again and again so, just as in stating two words repeatedly (e.g., tree, apple, tree, apple, tree, apple, tree, apple, tree, etc.), the words are said in a loop or chain, so it does not matter which word begins the sequence. Here we begin the Rumba Box with a *Slow* on count 1 to closely match the Waltz Box.

Since both Waltz and Rumba rhythms have three changes of weight per measure, timing is the major difference between the Waltz Box and the Rumba Box. Timing is the first characteristic to learn about a rhythm; others can be learned later. In both Waltz and Rumba it takes two measures to complete the Box, but Waltz uses 3/4 timing (three Quicks per measure) and the Rumba uses 4/4 timing (One Slow and two Quicks).

The following charts depict the Waltz Box and the Rumba Box (beginning with the Slow count):

Waltz Box							
Role	Starting Position	1	2	3	1	2	3
Lead	Closed	Forward L	Side R	Close L	Back R	Side L	Close R
Follow	Position	Back R	Side L	Close R	Forward L	Side R	Close L

Rumba Box									
Role	Starting Position	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Lead	Closed	Forward L	-	Side R	Close L	Back R	-	Side L	Close R
Follow	Position	Back R	-	Side L	Close R	Forward L	-	Side R	Close L

In both rhythms the Forward and Back steps make two sides of the Box; Side-Closes (which move in opposite directions) make the other two sides. The steps (or changes of weight) are essentially identical in term of which foot moves and where it goes, but the *timing* differs. The hyphen (-) indicates that the previous step takes two counts to complete. One might also describe count two as a “hold” which implies that it takes two counts (one slow) to complete the previously-named step.

Also notice that it takes *two measures* of three changes of weight *each* to complete the Box. Because there is an *odd number of weight changes* in one measure, the second measure begins with the opposite foot. After *two measures* the foot that began the Box can begin a new pattern, just like in all previous patterns which contained an even number of weight changes. One more important thing to notice: the first measure of the Lead’s footwork in both rhythms is *identical* to the Follow’s footwork in the second measure and vice versa!

Practice counting **1-2-3-4; 1-2-3-4;** repeatedly and clapping or marching in place on counts 1, 3, and 4 to get the feel for the Slow-Quick-Quick pattern of Rumba. When comfortable with the timing, move in the Box pattern to do a Rumba Box.

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After practicing the Rumba Box when counting and taking steps on appropriate counts, then do the Rumba Box with music. “Stand by Me” by Ben E. King and “Sway” by Dean Martin are helpful selections (available on *YouTube*). To synchronize with the music, steps are taken as beats of music are heard.

Vary the Box to Create New Patterns

Once comfortable dancing the Rumba Box, modest changes add a great deal of variety! Practice each pattern separately, then mix it randomly with other Rumba patterns practiced.

Left Turning Box

To modify the Box for it to turn, recognize when, and in which direction, to turn. The turn can be slight or larger. When it turns 90-degrees (one-quarter) and is done in four consecutive measures, the path on the floor is a very large box which in round dancing is called a Turning Box. When the Lead starts with the left foot and turns left-face (LF) the pattern is a **Left Turning Box** (Follow does the natural opposite):

Closed Position	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Lead	Forward L	(Turn LF)	Side R	Close L	Back R	(Turn LF)	Side L	Close R
Follow	Back R	(Turn LF)	Side L	Close R	Forward L	(Turn LF)	Side R	Close L

When the turn is one-quarter, the turn *begins* on the first step (counts 1-2). The **body** turns a bit on the side step (count 3) and completes the quarter turn on the closing step (count 4). In other words, there is some turning with each weight change. The turn is made so that all three steps of the feet in one measure make a path of **one straight line**.

These first two measures constitute a 180-degree change of direction on the floor. Repeat the two measures to complete the Left Turning Box and return to face the starting direction (ballroom would limit this pattern to two measures since they avoid moving against the Line of Dance).

Rumba Box with Underarm Turn

Without changing his facing direction, the Lead does a Rumba Box twice (taking four measures) adding the signal for the underarm turn; the Follow does a Half Box, then does a right-face underarm turn as she walks in a clockwise circle in six changes of weight returning to Closed Position (taking two measures), then ends with another Half Box to match her partner:

Role	Starting Position	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Lead	Closed Position	Forward L	-	Side R	Close L	Back R	(Signal Underarm Turn)	Side L	Close R
		Forward L	-	Side R	Close L	Back R	-	Side L	Close R

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Role	Starting Position	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Follow	Closed Position	Back R	-	Side L	Close R	Forward L	(Drop CP hold of left hand)	Forward R under joined hands	(Walking in CW Circle) Forward L
		Forward R	-	Forward L	Forward R (completing circle & returning to CP)	Forward L	-	Side R	Close L

In order to signal the Follow to do an Underarm Turn, the Lead flattens his left hand and moves their joined hands (his left and her right) out away from his body and then up so the Follow recognizes the invitation to step under their joined hands. She keeps her hand next to his and lifts their hands to step under them (the hands are above her head as she steps forward on count 3). Her fingers (first palm side and then the backs of her fingers) rotate against the Lead's flattened hand. The hands begin to lower on count 4; they regain Closed Position after the Follow completes the circle at the end of the third measure so they can dance the last Half Box together facing the same direction as when they started.

This pattern can be varied by the Lead's turning left-face in measure 3 (same as measure one in the Left Turning Box described above). That invites the Follow to do a right-face turn in measure 3 (Forward R, [Turn RF], Side, Close) to end in Closed Position to complete the final Half Box. In this pattern the dancers end one-quarter of a turn from their original facing position.

More information about the character of the Rumba is available at **Round Dance Rhythms > Rumba > The Character of Rumba.**

Enjoy dancing the very popular Rumba, the dance of love!