

Lesson 7: Let's Cha Cha!

By Kaye West and Larry Caves

Understanding How Components Alter a Dance Rhythm

Musicians are constantly making changes to how they play music, “pushing the envelope” to create novel sounds. That is precisely what Cuban band leader Enrique Jorrin did in the 1950’s when he substituted the fourth note in a measure (one quarter note) with two quick (eighth) notes which bring three changes of weight very close together (on beats 4/&, 1). When danced, feet made a shuffling sound on the floor (dancers take a change of weight each time they hear a beat) creating a “cha/cha, cha” sound, so that was the original name for this new rhythm! Now it is commonly shortened to Cha Cha or even Cha. It is an excellent example of how various *components* are substituted for others to create new patterns (figures) or entire new rhythms!

This idea was introduced previously in this series related to the Single Swing pattern where *each* of the slow counts in the Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick pattern (four changes of weight) was substituted for a Chasse´ (also called a triple step since there are three changes of weight) creating eight changes of weight in the swing pattern called East Coast Swing or Triple Swing (See home.csulb.edu/~kwest > Walk In Dance Out > Lesson 4).

In contrast, Cha Cha substitutes just *one* slow count for a triple step, resulting in *five* changes of weight requiring four counts of music (or one measure). While different styles of Cha Cha use different counts for the Chasse´, in social dancing it does not matter when the dancers include it. Cha Cha has a rhythm of Quick, Quick, Quick/and, Quick and for purposes here, the Chasse´ is described as occurring on beats three and four. Note that the count divided in half uses the word “and” to indicate the middle of the count or a beat divided equally in two halves.

To dance this rhythm it is first necessary to master the timing pattern. Start with a *Side Chasse´* (a very useful component) which can be danced with one Chasse´ following another to fill one measure:

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Side L	Close R	Side L		Side R	Close L	Side R	

Notice that the *one* count and the *three* count are each divided in half, so two changes of weight occur during each of those counts, and there is just *one* change of weight on counts two and four. Also note that the first Chasse´ moves in one direction and the second one moves in the opposite direction. To become accustomed to this component and to remain on a foot an accurate amount of time, first count repeatedly 1/&, 2/&, 3/&, 4/&; 1/&, 2/&, 3/&, 4/& with equivalent intervals between each word. Then continue to count aloud in that manner and add a clap and/or march in place on each of the following bold words and continue to orally count but do *not* clap or change weight on the two words in plain text: **1/and, 2/and, 3/and, 4/and; 1/and, 2/and, 3/and, 4/and;** etc.

Notice that there are *two sets* of “triples” (three changes of weight) in each of the four counts. Also notice that the second Chasse´ begins with the opposite foot *because there was an odd number of changes of weight* in the first one. Both Lead and Follow can practice simultaneously, especially if they both face the same direction. When dancers *face one another*, the Lead begins with the left foot (as when starting on count 1) and the Follow begins with the right (as when starting on count 3).

Applying the Side Chasse´ (Triple Step) in Cha Cha Figures

The Cha Cha rhythm involves measures with two Quicks and one Chasse´ (five changes of weight) so one measure begins with one foot (Lead’s left and Follow’s right) and the next measure begins with the opposite foot. Because of this, frequently in social dancing one pattern is repeated immediately so that the

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third measure would again begin with the Lead's left foot and Follow's right using a different figure. This also gives dancers a second chance to harmonize their movements.

Initially dancers might dance the following figures in two-handed ("Low Butterfly") position, though if dancers are comfortable dancing with someone in close proximity, the first three figures below may also be done in Closed Position.

(1) Cha Cha Basic

Using the American style Cha Cha Basic, this pattern requires two measures. The Lead's steps are Rock Forward, Recover, Side Chasse' Left; Rock Back, Recover, Side Chasse' Right. Follow's steps are Rock Back, Recover, Side Chasse' Right; Rock Forward, Recover, Side Chasse' Left. Notice that the Lead's second measure is identical to the Follow's first measure and vice versa.

(American Style) Cha Cha Basic										
Role	1	2	3	&	4	1	2	3	&	4
Lead	Rock Forward L	Recover R	Side L	Close R	Side L	Rock Back R	Recover L	Side R	Close L	Side R
Follow	Rock Back R	Recover L	Side R	Close L	Side R	Rock Forward L	Recover R	Side L	Close R	Side L

Note that the beats in columns 1, 2, and 4 are all Quicks (quarter beats) and count 3 is divided in two, each half taking half the time of a quarter beat. As a dancer Rocks back, s/he "creates space" for the partner "to fill" by Rocking forward. When they stand offset so their right foot points between their partner's feet, they don't step on toes! Recall that in a Rock step the other foot remains approximately in place to easily regain weight on it on the next count.

(2) Shoulder to Shoulder (aka "Outside Break," "Offset Break," or "Parallel Break")

This figure, described for the **Lead**, varies only slightly from the above. It requires the dancer to step **forward** *outside* of Partner's foot instead of stepping between her feet. The Follow steps back, dancing the natural opposite.

Shoulder to Shoulder					
	1	2	3	&	4
Beginning w/ L Foot	Rock Forward L Outside Partner's L Foot (R in place)	Recover R to face partner	Side L	Close R	Side L
Beginning w/ R Foot	Rock Forward R Outside Partner's R Foot (L in place)	Recover L to face partner	Side R	Close L	Side R

As dancers realize that the upper body can rotate one way and the lower body another (with a twisting sensation at the waist), they can rotate their upper body (counterclockwise when stepping forward with the left foot and clockwise when stepping forward with the right foot) which allows them to look at their partner in the Rock step. They return their bodies to neutral on the Recover.

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(3) This pattern can be modified as a **Back Shoulder to Shoulder** in which the Lead Rocks back (so the Follow Rocks forward), essentially swapping roles from the Shoulder to Shoulder described above.

(4) New Yorker (aka "New York" or "Cross Over Break")

	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Beginning w/L Foot	(Swivel ¼ RF on R foot)	<u>Rock forward</u> on L (R foot in place)		<u>Recover</u> on R	(Turn ¼ LF to face partner)	<u>Side L</u>	<u>Close R</u>	<u>Side L</u>	
Beginning w/R Foot	(Swivel ¼ LF on L foot)	<u>Rock forward</u> on R (L foot in place)		<u>Recover</u> on L	(Turn ¼ RF to face partner)	<u>Side R</u>	<u>Close L</u>	<u>Side R</u>	

Starting facing each other, both dancers Rock forward. Note that half beats are depicted to identify movement *occurring between changes of weight* in parentheses and weight changes are underlined (which name a "shorthand description" of the figure). The swivel prior to the first step is actually done at the end of the fourth beat of the previous measure so that the dancer can step forward *on count one* as the beat is heard. In the Recover, one recovers weight back on the first part of the beat and on the second half of the beat turns to face partner. Notice that when turning to step forward the foot swivels on the floor; when turning back to face partner, the foot does not need to swivel because of the construction of human legs.

(5) Hand to Hand (aka "5th Position Break" or "Fallaway Break")

	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Beginning w/L Foot	(Swivel ¼ LF on R foot)	<u>Rock back</u> on L (R foot in place)		<u>Recover</u> on R	(Turn ¼ RF to face partner)	<u>Side L</u>	<u>Close R</u>	<u>Side L</u>	
Beginning w/R Foot	(Swivel ¼ RF on L foot)	<u>Rock Back</u> on R (L foot in place)		<u>Recover</u> on L	(Turn ¼ LF to face partner)	<u>Side R</u>	<u>Close L</u>	<u>Side R</u>	

This pattern can be thought of as the reverse of the New Yorker (notice the difference?). The timing is the same as are several of the steps. The difference is in the direction of the initial swivel and whether the Rock is forward or back (both partners do the same). In this figure, both when turning to Rock back as well as turning to face partner, the foot swivels on the floor.

Modifying Above Figures for Rumba

Many Cha Cha figures and Rumba figures are similar. To change the above figures to the Rumba timing, simply substitute the component of the Chasse' (Side/Close, Side) with a slow Side step (taking counts 3 and 4)! For example, one measure of the Basic would be Rock, Recover, Side (Hold),

Congratulations! Using the concept of substituting concepts you have learned not only five Cha Cha figures but also five Rumba figures! Practice each one individually to become comfortable with the pattern and then mix them up to add variety to your dancing pleasure! Happy dancing!