

Implementing the Character of Cha Cha

This document provides information gleaned over many years of dancing and teaching dance which comports with natural body movement and principles of physics and body mechanics.

Walking

Cha Cha uses the style of walking where the left hip moves forward when taking a step forward with the left foot (so the hips are slanted creating “left side lead”) and vice versa. That causes the paths (“tracks”) of the feet to be closer together than in normal walking. Additionally, the previously-standing foot is left on the floor as long as possible so that just the toe remains on the floor, and that foot rotates in space with the toe being the pivot point. Using this action, the hip can slant even further momentarily (some are able to make the hip bone actually be parallel with the direction of walking).

Walking forward in this way is done while some claim both elbows remain “in front of the body” so that it *appears* that the shoulders remain parallel though they do slant toward the direction of movement, but not as much as the hips. Additionally, because the other foot is left on the floor momentarily and that hip remains *back*, it *appears* that the body is slanted forward, creating what is described as “forward poise.”

Walking as described above on tracks close together creates an “automatic” placement of the ball of the foot on the floor, first with the outside of the ball of the foot touching the floor (in International style) or the inside of the ball of the foot first (in American style), then the full ball, and then the heel) while the other foot rotates in space which creates the position of the toes pointing out. Attempting to step with toes out without changing the foot’s track takes the knee (a hinged joint designed to move only one way) out of alignment with the foot which over time can cause knee injury.

More information about Latin walking, including how the walk occurs in relationship to **timing** and how it is similar to and different from walking in other rhythms, is found in the document “**Body Awareness – Walking.**”

Hip Action

In addition to the basic hip action described above as one walks forward or back, hip action can be exaggerated by moving the hips as if drawing a figure 8 in space with the “top edge” of the hip bone. Such action occurs in walking forward or back, in taking side steps, doing “hip rocks,” and is also apparent in the rock-back or rock-forward action beginning many Cha Cha figures.

Hip action is also involved in other ways in Cha Cha, such as in *settling into the hip*, in a *hip twist action*, in a *checking action* (such as in a *New Yorker* or *Cuban Breaks*), and in the forward and back *pendulum action* (as in a *forward chasse’* (aka *forward/lock, forward*)).

Details for producing these various hip motions are included in [“Body Awareness – Cuban Motion / Latin Hip Action.”](#)

Snappy, Crisp Actions

Timing differences can increase the speed in performing parts of figures. Most of the following techniques should be delayed until dancers have a firm grasp of the figures involved:

- In normal walking, used in Modern Ballroom / Smooth dances, the moving foot is next to the standing foot half-way through the given count. Since Cha Cha technique involves leaving the opposite foot behind as long as possible, it must travel twice as far (from where it was, to next to the standing foot, and then forward for the subsequent step) in the same amount of time as when the leg starts next to the standing foot, so the leg must move faster to get there on time. That leg moves *after the transfer of weight* not *with the transfer of weight*.
- Breaking down the counts for a normal *Chasse'* action, one's three weight changes are on counts 1/&, 2 (or equivalent) which means that there is an equal amount of time between 1 to & as between & to 2. One can create a snappier appearance by holding the 1-count a bit longer (taking 3/4 of the beat instead of half) and then taking weight on the "a" count, followed by taking weight on 2. Doing this creates only 1/4 of a beat (instead of 1/2 a beat) prior to the 2 count, so the hips must change directions very quickly. This is an example of "guapacha timing," meaning very good looking Cha Cha timing, which can be implemented in many places. For more information about timing conventions, see [Understanding Timing](#).
- In a figure like the *New Yorker*, often dancers begin to turn to face their partner at the same time as they are recovering (at the beginning of count 2 in round dancing). A much more snappy appearance is created when from the beginning dancers are trained to recover their weight fully on the count of 2, *then* turn on the & count to face partner. One could also experiment with delaying turning to face partner until the "a" count.
- In the component *Curving Chasse'* dancers generally turn 1/4 between steps 1 and 2 (timing from 1 to &) and another 1/4 between steps 2 and 3 (timing from & to 2). When dancers make the turn all at once, it is made more quickly. In other words, normally dancers might step forward – turning 1/4 / Xif - turning 1/4, back. Instead they would substitute forward / turning 1/2 while Xif, back.
- An advanced technique involves turning the *body* while leaving the *head in place* momentarily then turning the head quickly. This gives the *appearance* that the entire turn was done very quickly.

Flirty, Playful, Sassy Attitude

In addition to the hip action and using speed for turns (which whips a girl's skirt around), there are some additional techniques dancers can use to be flirty, playful, and even sassy:

- Look at partner's eyes whenever possible and accompany that with a smile, wink, etc. One might even look coyly at partner and then look away.
- Allow the body to respond to the music between taking steps such as "bouncing" a shoulder (isolating the shoulder momentarily and moving it forward and returning it to its normal position).
- The Follow can place her hand on the Lead's chest or simulate a facial caress when the opportunity presents itself.
- During the *Rock Back* dancers can lift the heel of the unweighted foot and bend that knee.
- Since a Cha Cha *Basic* typically has two measures, and on measure two the Follow essentially does what the Lead did on the first measure, the Follow could perform her second measure as a *Switch Turn & Turning Chasse'* or with a *Switch Turn & a Three-Step Turn* (one-upmanship is quite sassy!).

Harmonious Movement

In all dancing it is important for dancers to synchronize their body movement so that they dance together as a single unit rather than two people simply doing their part. The more experienced dancers are, and the more they are implementing the character of Cha Cha, the more important this is. Like many of the above techniques, this

principle is best implemented after dancers have an understanding of the figures themselves (i.e., the “beat and the feet”). See the document *Harmonious Movement*.