

Latin Attitude (part 1)

Chris & Terri Cantrell

The following ideas have been collected in order to assist in comfortable dancing and are not meant to be absolute, your experience may vary. While there are many similarities with all Latin rhythms, below is mainly geared towards rumba, cha, bolero, mambo, merengue, and salsa type rhythms.

Let us set the mood -- You are in a darkened dance hall with a sensuous rumba playing in the background. You see someone across the room that you might like to get to know. After working up the nerve, you introduce yourself and ask for a dance. The man gently caresses the woman in a strong & secure, yet gentle, dance hold, his goal being to seduce the woman with his dancing and attitude. The woman, being prim & proper, does the 'playing hard to get' game, whether she means it or not.



Some of the information below is a repeat of information presented in the other Latin & Rumba clinic notes that have been published in the DRDC-DIXIE newsletter, BUT with a few new twists. Past articles can also be found at http://www.ctkr.com/#Clinic_Notes.



Latin Body Frame & Hold: The Latin dance hold is more compact than in the smooth rhythms (waltz, foxtrot, quickstep...). Stand 6"-12" apart with the body & head upright. A simple rule of thumb for the distance between the couple - if the woman is much shorter than you, stand further away from her. If she is much taller than you, stand closer.

Maintain a slight forward poise with your body towards one another, centered over the balls of the feet, not back on the heels. The man's arms & upper body should create a firm frame in which the woman is gently held. Both partners need to keep some tension (pressure) in the arms.

Each part of the body (toes, legs, knees, tush, tummy, hips, chest, shoulders, arms, fingers, head) has a role to play in figure execution and musicality. Some of roles may include being as still as possible or moving independently for effect (isolation type movements) - the shoulder, chest, and the head. Others work at tensing muscles - tightening the tummy and tush muscles. Body parts can also linger - feet, toes, and legs. Some parts are almost forcefully dragged into action - toes. Other parts are influenced by another body part - weight change affecting the hips.

Stillness & Isolation: As with most dance rhythms one of the goals is to limit excess body movement. Try to utilize only the body parts that are necessary for the figure you are executing. This stillness/isolation technique, moving individual parts of the body independently of others, is very useful in dancing for leading & following by reducing the ambiguity. It will also improve the overall look and feel of the figure and movement. Excess movement can send mixed signals to your partner. It also has a tendency to look chaotic.

Isolation Exercise: Practice separating the body above from the body below the waist. The following exercise works the abdominals, diaphragm, and hip muscles. Begin by planting your feet firmly on the floor a hip distance apart. Tighten your tush (buttocks) muscles slightly, place your hands lightly on the hips, and then slide your rib cage to the left and then to the right. There should be no sagging or tilting of the shoulders. You should feel a pulling sensation of the muscles around the waist while keeping your hips & legs in place, immobile. Practice 1-10+ minutes/day will also have the added benefit of improving your muscle tone, strength, and trimming your waistline.



Yoga, Pilates, Belly Dancing, and some jazz classes and videos can offer a wide variety of other isolation exercises. The following belly dance site has several isolation exercises:

<http://www.venusbellydance.com/vocabulary.htm#beginner>.

After you have mastered stillness & isolation (or at least come closer) you can add back in some deliberate movement, styling, of a single region of your body, e.g. the unused arm/hand. When adding styling, strive to not influence or induce the movement of any other part of your body.

Four Points of Contact in the Latin Closed Position:

#1 – Man's left & Woman's right hands: The man's left arm should be held up with the elbow bent fairly sharply somewhat towards the floor. His left wrist should bend slightly to the left side with his palm facing the woman and thumb up. This will cause his fingers to be parallel to the floor. The woman should approach the man with her palm facing his and her fingers up and her elbow relaxed. Her hand should contact the man's at the fleshy part below their thumbs. She should then gently fold/cup her fingers over the man's hand between his thumb and forefinger. The man should gently wrap his fingers around the woman's hand. Partners should gently fold their thumbs over each others hand, being very careful not to clamp down on their partner's hand. The man's left hand is held between the woman's cheek & eye level if she is shorter than him and the reverse if she is taller (hand is held between the man's cheek & eye level).

#2 – Man's right forearm & Woman's side: Women hold your left arm held out to the side & slightly forward. The man then places his right lower forearm under the woman's upper arm near her armpit. He should apply slight upward pressure to her upper arm and the woman in response should apply slight downward pressure. Man's right hand is not yet touching the woman's back, but his fingers and thumb should be together and his wrist should bend slightly downward. The woman should stand slightly to the man's right side.

#3 – Folding of man's right hand: The man folds his right hand around to gently touch the woman's left shoulder blade. Be very careful not to use this point to squeeze the woman, but rather it should be a gentle point of contact. Remember both of you need to be able to breath freely and be on your own feet, not leaning on or dragging your partner.

#4 – Woman's left hand: The woman places her left forearm & hand on top of the man's right arm. She gently holds his biceps with her thumb and middle finger, being careful not to clamp down. Her hand should be turned slightly outward from the wrist. If points 2, 3, & 4 have been made properly and if the partners are holding their arms up, then no light will be seen between the man's right arm & woman's left arm, excluding elbow overlap due to height differences of the partners.

Open Position: The handhold in open position is slightly modified. The man lowers the hold so he can aim for her waist & hip area (center of gravity). This allows him to communicate more effectively with the woman, i.e. 'lead'. The man also rotates his wrist inward so that his palm essentially faces him, giving the woman a very nice ledge to place her fingers on. This connection will also improve communication between the couple. In open position this is the only contact point, but there is another type of lead that is useful that is discussed in the section on Leading.



Copyright 2004©, 2005© Chris & Terri Cantrell

More Next Month