

Samba

Notes by Chris & Terri Cantrell



History: Samba (aka Mesemba) means ‘to pray’ and is an Afro-Brazilian dance from the Bahia, Brazil region. At its inception, in the 1880s, the dance was described as “a graceful Brazilian dance” and was a combination of the Lundu group folk dance done by the West African slaves, Portuguese music, various Indian rituals, and steps & body motions from ‘Carnival’. During the 1900s it was mixed with the Maxixe (Brazilian folk dance combining the rhythms of the Habañera and the movements of the polka). There were and still are many different variations of the samba, including the Bossa Nova. It was at the 1939 New York World’s Fair that it also developed into a couple dance instead of always being done solo. Samba went on to popularity mainly due to the choreography of Fred Astaire for the movie “Flying Down to Rio” and the movies of Carmen Miranda.



Musicality: The time signature of Samba is 2/4 (2 beats to a bar of music), but in Round Dancing it is typically written as 4/4 (4 beats to a bar of music) in cue sheets. Tempo ranges from 48-56 bars per minute, competitive ballroom samba is generally 50 bars per minute; Samba in its current form has figures with very different rhythms due to the diverse origins of the dance. There are eight basic rhythms commonly used in Samba. [S = slow ; Q = quick]

Count	2/4 and 4/4 Timing	Beat Value	Sample Figures
SS	1 2	1. 1.	Basic (as typically defined in round dancing)
S a S	1 a 2	3/4. 1/4. 1.	Basic, Whisk, Samba Walks, Bota Fogo, Reverse Turn
S a S a S a S	1 a 2 a 1 a 2 (4/4: 1 a 2 a 3 a 4)	3/4. 1/4. 3/4. 1/4. 3/4. 1/4. 1.	Stationary Samba Walks, Volta
----	1 2 3	3/4. 1/2. 3/4.	Rolling Off the Arm
S Q Q	1 2 and	1. 1/2. 1/2.	Barrel & Natural Rolls
S Q Q Q Q Q Q	1 2 and 1 and 2 and (4/4: 1 2 and 3 and 4 and)	1. 1/2. 1/2. 1/2. 1/2. 1/2. 1/2.	Corta Jaca
Q Q S		1/2. 1/2. 1.	Cruzados
S S Q Q S	1 2 1 and 2 (4/4: 1 2 3 and 4)	1. 1. 1/2. 1/2. 1.	Plait

Latin Body Frame & Hold: The Latin dance hold is more compact than in the smooth rhythms (waltz, foxtrot, quickstep...). Stand 6”-9” 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. The general rule is comfort.



Body weight should be slightly forward, centered over the balls of the feet, not



back on the heels. Maintain a slight forward poise with your body towards one another. Now breathe, oxygen is your friend. It will help relax those stubborn muscles and prevent little mishaps like turning blue, passing out, and gasping for air during & after dancing if you breathe regularly throughout each routine and practice session.

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. A common complaint heard from the ladies is that the gentlemen are not leading. Well, guys for once it may not be your fault. What essentially happens is that the woman does not allow the man to lead. She interferes with the hold by flapping her arms, bouncing around, faking the hip movement, and not sustaining hand/arm pressure when dancing. The man cannot lead arms of jelly. Man, even if you are a beginner, you can dance & lead effectively, if you stand erect and keep a firm forward pressure on your partner. Men, now that you have her under your control (Ladies, stop laughing) try adding breathing to the partnership, ladies, you too.



Characteristic & Movement: Samba has a light, bouncy feel and look. The bouncy feel and look come from the linear and circular movements of the body down and around the line of dance, not from rising (hopping) up & down in the body or feet. Sway can be used in some rotating figures if it is used to assist in the linear & circular movement.



The body does most of the action in Samba through the use of contractions (suck in the gut / tilt the pelvis back) and compressions (tilt pelvis forward) of the pelvis. Use the contractions to move the foot back or forward and the compressions to recover the foot, almost to the starting position. This combined with bending and straightening the knees while transferring weight from the ball to the flat of the foot will give your Samba bounce.

Weight changes in Samba are delayed until the very last moment and then the foot should quickly move into position, tracking underneath the body from its initial to its new position. Keep both of the legs energized/toned at all times. To do this there should be some degree of pressure on the floor from both feet at all times except when one of the feet is being moved quickly into position. Also by pushing off the standing foot and by not taking full weight onto a foot during an 'a' (1/4 beat) step. Toeing out slightly will not only give you a more attractive look, but also helps with your balance. The action described above is called the Samba Bounce. Samba Bounce occurs on almost all figures with the timing SS or SaS. It is not typically used in figures counted SQQ or QQS. Below is a chart of your basic body actions for figures that employ bounce. As you practice, please remember to breathe.

Count / Timing	Gut / Stomach	Pelvis	Knees	Foot	Visualization Clue
a	Compress the gut	Tilts backwards			Prop
1	Relax	Tilt forward	Flex (bend)	Quickly move the foot into position & take weight	Drop

After you get used to the Samba movement and a few figures, allow the hips to move softly from side to side in a figure eight motion as a result of the flexing and the straightening of the knees. The hips should not move on their own accord. To achieve this hip movement, take every step with pressure on the ball of the foot, with the knee flexed. As you take weight, onto the foot, lower the heel, straighten the knee, and allow the heel of the opposite foot to release slightly from the floor. The hips should then move in the direction of the stepping foot. Finally, please remember to **BREATHE!**

