

Salsa (dance)

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For the musical style, see *[Salsa \(music\)](#)*.



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(July 2008)

Salsa is a [syncretic dance](#) form with origins from Cuba as a major original American meeting point of European and African cultures.

Salsa is normally a partner dance, although there are recognized solo forms such as solo dancing "([suelta](#))" and "[Rueda de Casino](#)" where multiple couples exchange partners in a circle. Salsa can be improvised or [performed](#) with a set routine.

Salsa is popular throughout [Latin America](#) as well as in the United States, Japan, Israel, Western Europe and Eastern Europe, notwithstandingly huge growth in Asia and Southern hemisphere. It is fast becoming a global phenomenon.

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[\[edit\]](#) Salsa dancing origins

Salsa movements originate from the [Cuban Son](#) dancing of the 1920s, and more specifically through the beat of [Son Montuno](#) with strong influences from the dance of [Danzon](#), [Mambo](#), [Guaguanco](#) and other [Afro-Cuban](#) folkloric dancing. Today's Salsa dancing is a rich blend of Latin-American and Western influences. Other dance styles that have influenced today's Salsa include Western and Ballroom dancing. Salsa traces a 90-year history in which there are numerous evolutionary paths, sometimes split due to corie clay. As a result, today there are various distinct styles of Salsa dancing, namely Cuban ("Casino"), New York Style ("Mambo on 2"), Los Angeles Style ("On 1"), Colombian Salsa ("Cali-Style") and Miami-Style Salsa.

Salsa is typically a partner dance, although there are recognized solo forms, pole dancing ([suelta](#)) and [Rueda de Casino](#), where groups of couples exchange partners in a circle. Salsa can be improvised or [performed](#) with a set routine, choreography and freestyle.

[\[edit\]](#) Basic movements



 Salsa steps.

There are a few basic steps of Salsa. The most common is the three weight changes (or steps) in each four-beat measure. The beat on which one does not step might contain a tap or kick, or weight transfer may simply continue with the actual step not occurring until the next beat. The option chosen depends upon individual choice and upon the specific style being danced. One of the steps is called a "break," which involves a change in direction. Different styles of Salsa are often differentiated by the timing of the break step (On Beat "Downbreak on 1" or Off Beat "Up beat on 2"). After 6 weight changes in 8 beats, the basic step cycle is complete. While dancing, the basic step can be modified significantly as part of the improvisation and stylings of the people dancing.

In many styles of Salsa dancing, as a dancer changes weight by stepping, the upper body remains level and nearly unaffected by the weight changes. Caught in the middle are the hips which end up moving quite a bit — famously known as the "Cuban hip movement." Perhaps ironically, the Cuban Casino style of Salsa dancing actually has significant amounts of movement above the waist, with up-and-down shoulder movements and shifting of the ribcage.

The arms are used by the "lead" dancer, to communicate or signal the "follower," either in "open " or "closed" position. The open position requires the two dancers to hold one or both hands, especially for moves that involve turns, putting arms behind the back, or moving around each other, to name a few examples. In the closed position, the leader puts the right hand on the follower's back, while the follower puts the left hand on the leader's shoulder.

In some North American styles, the dancers remain in a slot or line (switching places), while in some Latin American styles the dancers circle around each other sometimes in 3 points.

Additionally, in the original Latin America form, the forward/backward motion of Salsa is done in diagonal or sideways with the 3-step weight change intact.

[\[edit\]](#) Rhythm

Music suitable for dancing ranges from about 150 bpm (beats per minute) to around 250 bpm, although most dancing is done to music somewhere between 160–220 bpm. Every Salsa composition involves complex African percussion based around the [Clave Rhythm](#) (which has four types), though there can be moments when the clave is hidden for a while, often when quoting [Charanga](#), [Changüí](#) and [Bomba](#). The key instrument that provides the core groove of a salsa song is the clave. It is often played with two wooden sticks that are hit together. Every instrument in a Salsa band is either playing with the clave (generally: congas, timbales, piano, tres guitar, bongos, [claves](#) (instrument), strings) or playing independent of the clave rhythm (generally: bass, maracas, güiro, cowbell). Melodic components of the music and dancers can choose to be in clave or out of clave at any point. However it is taboo to play or dance to the wrong type of clave rhythm (see [salsa music](#)). While dancers can mark the clave rhythm directly, it is more common to do so indirectly (with, for example, a shoulder movement). This allows the dancing itself to look very fluent as if the rest of the body is just moving untouched with the legs.

There are basically two types of [Clave Rhythm](#), the 2-3 and the 3-2 clave. The 2-3 clave is played on the counts of 2, 3, 5 and 8. Within the 8 beats that compose a basic salsa step, where the "and" count is the count that is between any two counts, e.g. the count between 5 and 6. Most salsa music is played with the 2-3 clave.

There are other aspects, outside of the Clave, that help define Salsa rhythm: The cowbell, the Montuno rhythm and the Tumbao rhythm.

The haca is played on the core beats of Salsa, 1, 3, 5 and 7. The basic Salsa rhythm is quick, quick, slow, quick, quick, slow, in other words, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, which are very similar to the beats of the cowbell. Recognizing the rhythm of the cowbell helps one stay on Salsa rhythm.

The Montuno rhythm is a rhythm that is often played with a piano. The Montuno rhythm loops over the 8 counts and is useful for finding the direction of the music. By listening to the same rhythm, that loops back to the beginning after eight counts, one can recognize which count is the first beat of the music.

Tumbao is a rhythm in salsa that is played with the conga drums. It sounds like: "cu, cum.. pa... cu, cum... pa". It is played with the counts of 8 and 2, & 4 and 6. Tumbao rhythm is helpful for learning contra-tiempo, ("On2" for North American Pundits). The beats 2 and 6 are emphasized when dancing On2 and the Tumbao rhythm heavily emphasizes those beats, as well.

[\[edit\]](#) Salsa styles

Salsa's roots are based on the [Son](#) dancing (circa 1920s) and is open to improvisation and thus it is continuously evolving. New modern salsa styles are associated and named to the original geographic areas that developed them. There are often devotees of each of these styles outside of their home territory. Characteristics that may identify a style include: timing, basic steps, foot patterns, body rolls and movements, turns and figures, attitude, dance influences and the way that partners hold each other. The point in a musical bar music where a slightly larger step is taken (the break step) and the direction the step moves can often be used to identify a style.

Incorporating other dance styling techniques into salsa dancing has become very common, for both men and women: shimmies, leg work, arm work, body movement, spins, body isolations, shoulder shimmies, rolls, even hand styling, acrobatics and lifts.

The basic Salsa styles are:

1. Latin American Styles, originating from [Cuba](#) and surrounding [Caribbean islands](#) and then expanding to [Venezuela](#), [Colombia](#), [Nicaragua](#), [Puerto Rico](#) and the rest of the [Latin states](#); also heavily influence "Miami" style which is a fusion of Cuban style and North American version. The styles include "Casino", Miami-Style, Cali-style and Venezuelino Style.

2. North American Salsa, two major types of Salsa with distinct tempo differences; Los Angeles Style which breaks on the first beat "On 1" and New York Style which breaks on the second beat "On 2". Both have different origins and evolutionary path, as the New York Salsa is heavily influenced by Mambo and Jazz instruments in its early growth stage.

[[edit](#)] Cuban Salsa "Casino"

Main article: [Casino \(salsa dance\)](#)

The most common name for Cuban Salsa dancing is *Casino* as it is known throughout [Latin America](#). Dancing *Casino* is an expression of popular social culture; Latin Americans consider *casino* as part of social and cultural activities centering around their popular music. The origins of the name *Casino* are derived from the Spanish term for the dance halls where a lot of social Salsa dancing was done in Cuba during the mid-20th century and onward.

Historically, *Casino* traces its origin as a partner dance from Cuban *Son* dancing, and its rhythmic body motions from Afro-Cuban [Rumba](#) heritage. *Son* is considered an older version and ancestor to Salsa. *Son* is danced on delay measure upbeat (*contra-tiempo*) following the 2-3 clave (*Son Clave*) whereas *Casino* is usually danced on the downbeat break of 1 or 3 (*a-tiempo*). Musically, the beats 1, 3, 5 and 7 are considered downbeats; whereas 2, 4, 6 and 8 are considered upbeats. *Casino* was popularized in the late 1950s as the Cuban *Son* received upbeat and quicker arrangements by musicians. *Casino* has a very independent development, free from external influences such as Puerto Rican and North American dances partly due to the effect of the [Cuban Embargo](#).

Culturally, *Casino* is danced as an interplay between male and female gender and feeling the music ("Sabor") as its main ingredients. Much of the interplay of *Casino* style dancing is based on the broader Latin cultural context with emphasis on sexual interplay, teasing and everyday experience.

Geographically, in Latin America, *Casino* and its variants are danced in [Cuba](#), [Dominican Republic](#), [Venezuela](#) and [Nicaragua](#). It is also highly popular in [Europe](#) and parts of [Asia](#).

This style of salsa is relatively easy to learn and thus popular among beginners. However, to master *Casino* requires mastering the underlying dance influences such as Rumba, *Son* and Mambo. This takes a long time and is further compounded by lack of teaching materials in languages other than Spanish.

Casino can be seen at the Cuban Salsa Congress,^[1] which bring dance instructors and authentic Latin musicians to many parts of the world. Today, there is a global re-emergence of Cuban Salsa due to:

1. The explosion of [Timba](#),^[2] a modern evolution of Cuban salsa music which is now considered the forefront of Latin big band music and orchestra arrangements with complex changes and innovations such as *Cruzado Clave* (Cross Clave) and rapid tempo differentials and dramatic innovations at every level of hierarchy from the tumbaos. See: [Timba](#).
2. Original YouTube videos of authentic dancing from Cuban sources such as dancing in Havana and Santiago which was not accessible before the internet age due to the effect of the [Cuban Embargo](#) by the United States.

Cuban-Style Salsa Partnership Dance (*Parejas*)

Casino is danced in three points which makes up the circular motion as couple face each other in intricate patterns of arms and body movement. This is distinctive from the North American Salsa styles which is danced in a slot (two points) and linear positions as taught by the North American and European dance studios.

Casino has an strong basic step known as "Guapea" (lit. "Chill Out" by Afro-Cuban Community), in which the male lead put his left foot behind on the break, which is a contrast to the most common basic Salsa step in which the male lead places his left foot forward.

Casino styling includes men being "machisimo" and women being femininely sexy, with major body and muscle isolations, through the influence of *Rumba* dancing. During the dance, dancers often break from each other during percussion solos and perform the "despelote," an advanced form of styling in which the male and female partner get physically close and tease each other without touching through the gyrating of hips and shoulders while performing muscle isolations.

The major distinction of Cuban Salsa Styling is that male partners have tendencies to show off (following Afro-Cuban [Guaguanco](#) influence) under the guise of cultural behavior of males having to attract attention and tease females. This is the major point of differences between "Casino" and the rest of the Northern American Salsa as the North American Salsa ascribed to the ballroom adage of "men are the picture frame while women are the picture."

Cuban Solo Dancing ("Suelta")

Cuban-Salsa Solo Dancing ("Suelta") is dancing salsa without having a partner. It originates from stage singers and dancers who set up routines during orchestra and live performance. Dance singularly or in a group (usually male facing females on the dance floor) the movements are based on "a-tiempo" or "contra-tiempo" with intricate footwork and lively body movements.

Other forms of partner dancing

Other partner dancing styles include "Trios" or "Quattros" in which a male lead will dance with two or more female partners in each arm in intricate patterns. There are also a "Trios" version in which two male leaders share a female partner.

[\[edit\]](#) Miami-style Casino

Developed by Cuban migrants to Florida and centered around Miami, this form of Cuban Salsa fused with American culture and LA Style. Major differences of Miami-style Casino is that it is exclusive dance to downbeat (On1) and has elements of shines and showstyle added to it following repertoires of North American Styles.

Miami-style has many adherents, particularly Cuban-Americans and other Latinos based in South Florida.

[\[edit\]](#) Rueda de Casino

Main article: [Rueda de Casino](#)

In the 1950s Salsa Rueda or more accurately Rueda de Casino was developed in [Havana](#), [Cuba](#). Pairs of dancers form a circle ("Rueda" in Spanish means "Wheel"), with dance moves called out by one person. Many of the moves involve rapidly swapping partners.

There two main types of Rueda de Casino:

1. Cuban-style - "Rueda de Cuba" (Original type of Rueda, not so formal consisting of about 30 calls). Codified in the 1970s.
2. Miami-style - "Rueda de Miami" (Formal style, many rules, based on a mix, hybridization of Rueda de Cuba and Salsa Los Angeles-style). 1980s and onwards to today.

The difference of Miami-style Rueda is the hybridization of Cuban and L.A. Style and dance routines that reflect American culture (e.g. Coca-cola, Dedo, Adios) which is not found in the traditional Cuban-style Rueda.

Major Rueda de Casino groups known throughout the world are:

Rueda de Casino Team	Location	Description and Information
Salsa Racing	Florida, USA	Principal Choreographer Henry Herrera, codified the Miami-Style Rueda. Dance on1 / A-Tiempo
Casino.com	Santiago de Cuba, Cuba	Principal world-renowned champion and choreographer Yanek Revilla . ^[3] Two times in a row champion of Bailar Casino National Television program by state-owned television station, Cubavision. Dance On1 / A-Tiempo
Luceros Del Son	Pinar Del Rio, Cuba	Famous Hat Rueda team, innovations in cross switching. Dance On3 / A-Tiempo
Rumbanana	Corvallis, Oregon, USA	Famous Rueda team, achieving prominence in major championships in USA and Europe. Choreographer Mike Eskeldson and Simona Boucek. Dance On1 / A-Tiempo. http://www.rumbanana.org
Salseros Indonesia	Jakarta, Indonesia	Winner of 2010 Asian Rueda Championships. Principal choreographer Albert James Loing. Dance On1 / A-Tiempo

[\[edit\]](#) Colombian Salsa / Cali Salsa style

Cali-Style Salsa, also known as Colombian Salsa, is based on geographical location of the Colombian City of Cali. Cali is also known as the "Capital de la Salsa" (World's Salsa Capital); due to salsa music being the main genre in parties, nightclubs and festivals in the 21st century.

The elements of Cali-Style Salsa were strongly influenced by dances done to Colombian rhythms such as [Cumbia](#) and [Boogaloo](#).

The basic step of Colombian Salsa is the "Atras" or "Diagonal"; breaking backwards diagonally instead of moving forwards and backwards as seen in the New York and L.A. Style. Dancers do not shift their body weight greatly as seen in other styles. Instead, dancers keep their upper body still, poised and relaxed while the feet execute endless intricacies. The dancer breaks mostly On1 (sometimes On3), with short measures of "4" instead of full "8" counts.

A major difference of Cali Style and the other styles is the footwork which has quick rapid steps and skipping motions. They do not execute Cross-body Lead or the "Dile Que No" as seen in the other salsa genres. Their footwork is intricate and precise, helping several Colombian Style dancers win major world championships. Cali hosts many annual salsa events such as the World Salsa Cali Festival and Encuentro de Melomanos y Coleccionistas.

[\[edit\]](#) New York style

There are two distinct developments of New York Salsa as a music and dance genre:

1. Primary original evolution from [Mambo](#) era when Cuban music was introduced to New York due to influx of migrating Cuban dissidents and Latin migrants during Pre/Post Cuban Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s. This era is known as the "Palladium Era". At this time, the music and dance was called "Mambo" or "Rumba" -- connoting the general term without being specific. The most famous dancer during this era was Puerto-Rican descendant [Pedro "Cuban Pete" Aguilar](#),^[4] also known "The King of Latin Beat".

2. Secondary evolution during the late 1970s, Latin migrants, particularly Puerto Ricans, contributed to the New York Salsa development during the "NuYorican" era of [Héctor Lavoe](#) which greatly popularized salsa as a term and modern Latin music throughout the world. Salsa superstars were "discovered" during the era, such as [Ray Baretto](#) ("The Godfather") and [Celia Cruz](#) ("The Queen of Salsa"). There are also salsa artists that transcend both periods, notably the legendary Puerto Rican [Tito Puente](#) ("The Mambo King").

These two developments create a fusion of a new salsa music and dance genre, different than its Latin American and L.A. Style counterparts.

Musically, the old Mambo (Mambo Tipico) is fused with New York Jazz and Swing to create a new salsa genre but retaining much of its original percussion. The addition of new musical instruments such as xylophones, jazz saxophones and steel drums added new melody to the evolving genre.

In New York Style the tempo and timing of the dance is strictly On-2 (based on delay tempo, on the first slap on the tumbao / conga).

Dancers around the world often integrate elements and repertoire from New York into their Salsa routines due to New York Style's advanced motions and routines.^[*citation needed*]

Many also refer to this style as "Mambo" since it breaks on 2nd beat of the measure. However, there are other dance forms with more legitimate claim to that name; see ([Mambo](#)) The accompanying dance to the original Mambo, popularized by [Perez Prado](#) which greatly influenced New York big band development was actually not a pure partnership dance. Due to its immense popularity, some of the original mambo steps were incorporated into the ballroom and New York Style curriculum, resulting in the 3rd Mambo Tipico steps (*Spanish : Pati-Pami*) became the first basic foundation step of New York Style. Subsequently, the L.A. Style of dancing also followed suit by incorporating the same foundation as its basic step.

The etiquette of New York Style is strict about remaining in the "slot" and avoiding traveling dancing in a sandbox area with a lot of spins, turns and styling. There is greater emphasis on performing "shines" in which dancers separate themselves and dance solo with intricate footwork and styling for a time—suspected origins from Swing and New York Tap.

New York Style dancers are typically very serious about the musicality and timing of their dancing. To satisfy their tastes, "socials" are often held that cater to almost exclusively playing Salsa Dura (lit. "Hard Salsa")^[*citation needed*] and [Descarga](#) (lit. "Jam Session"). This is mid-to-up-tempo salsa with an emphasis on percussion and band orchestration rather than the vocals.

The longest-running social in New York is the Jimmy Anton social, which is held every first, third and fifth (if there is a fifth) Sunday of the month.^[*citation needed*]

New York Style is danced by dedicated communities around the world and is also found in New York Salsa Congress and many dance congresses around the world.

One of the most famous schools of New York Style is Eddie Torres Latin Dance Company, founded by New York Salsa legend Puerto Rican immigrant Eddie Torres who is responsible for codification of the New York Style curriculum,^[5] and subsequent offspring such as the Santo Rico Dance School.^[6] and ABAKUÁ Afro-Latin Dance Company ^[7]

[[edit](#)] Los Angeles style

L.A. style is danced on 1, in a slot, with a measure of easiness and adaptability to it. It is strongly influenced by the [Mambo](#), [Swing](#), [Argentine Tango](#) and [Latin Ballroom](#) dancing styles. L.A. style places strong emphasis on sensuousness, theatricality, [aerobics](#) and musicality. The lifts, stunts and aerial works of today's salsa shows are derived mostly from L.A. Style forms with origins in Latin Ballroom and Ballet lifts.

The two essential elements of this dance are the forward–backward basic as described above and the cross-body lead. In this pattern, the leader steps forward on 1, steps to the right on 2-3 while turning 90 degrees counter-clockwise (facing to the left), leaving the slot open. The follower then steps straight forward on 5-6 and turns on 7-8, while the leader makes another 90 degrees counter-clockwise and slightly forward, coming back into the slot. After these 8 counts, the leader and follower have exchanged their positions.

The L.A. style as it is known today was pioneered by what many consider some of the most famous and influential people in dance. Albert Torres, [Laura Canellias](#) and [Joe Cassini](#) rightfully deserve much of the credit for the early development and growth of L.A. Style Salsa. Later, such dancers as [Alex Da Silva](#), [Edie Lewis](#), [Joby Martinez](#), [Josie Neglia](#), [Liz Rojas](#), [Francisco Vazquez](#) and [Janette Valenzuela](#) are often credited with developing the L.A. style of Salsa Dancing as we know it today.