

Bachata First Level

8 Count Basic and Lady's Turns

Historical Perspective

Music

Bachata originates from the Dominican Republic as a guitar based music. During much of its history, bachata music was denigrated (shunned/talked down) by Dominican society and associated with rural backwardness and delinquency. It remained popular. In the 1990s, bachata's instrumentation changed from acoustic Spanish guitar to electric steel string and soon became an international phenomenon.

José Manuel Calderón is credited as having recorded the first bachata singles: ("Borracho de amor" and "Que será de mi (Condena)") released on 45 rpm in 1961. After the dictator Trujillo's death, other recorders followed such as Rafael Encarnacion, Ramoncito Cabrera El Chivo Sin Ley, Corey Perro, Antonio Gomez Salcerro, Luis Segura, Ramon Cordero and many more. In the early 1990's popular stars such as Luis Vargas and Antony Santos included many bachata songs in their recordings.

Juan Luis Guerra's Grammy winning 1992 release, "Bachata Rosa", is routinely credited with making the genre more acceptable and helping bachata achieve legitimacy. Aventura, based in New York City, is today the best known bachata group. Their 2002 single "Obsesión" dominated airwaves in Latin America countries, the US Hispanic market, and Caribbean Spanish speaking Islands. Other popular modern artists include Raulin Rodriguez, Zacarias Ferreira, Frank Reyes, El Chaval, Monchy y Alexandra, Andy Andy, Elvis Martinez, Joe Veras and Luis Vargas. ¹

(References 1 and 2 are paraphrased from Wikipedia.)

Dance

Today bachata is as popular as salsa and meringue in many Latin American dance halls. The dance is a four-step beat achieved with a walking Cuban hip motion, and a unique "pop". The dance is performed both in open position and in closed position depending on the setting and mood of the partners.

The style developed in Europe and US is a basic dance sequence of a full 8 count in a side-to-side motion. The Dominican style basic dance sequence is a full 8 count moving within a square. Counts 1 through 3 and 5 through 7, when taken, generate a natural hip motion. Counts 4 and 8, consists of a "pop" movement. The "pop" depending on a person's style is executed lifting or tapping a foot or using stylish footwork while popping the hip to the side opposite of the natural Cuban hip motion. ²

Scope of This Segment

This segment graphically illustrates the dancers' positions for each step of the bachata 8-count basic plus execution and timing of the hip "pop". It also illustrates the leads and body positions of the lady's inside turn from both directions.

This chapter does not show videos of the dance nor provide music. The best practice music may be selected from the historical section of this segment and acquired through searches on the internet. To get the full flavor of the dance, learners should watch others dance the bachata and perform the steps shown here accordingly.

Pre-requisites

This is a beginning segment and there are no pre-requisites.

Standard Conventions

Every drawing shows a large bold number (usually in the upper right quadrant of the picture). The numbers are confined to the digits 1-8 for the eight beats of standard bachata plus one quick beat of "and" shown as "3&" or "7&". In this case the "3" and the "7" are used only for identifying which side of the basic the "&" is on, and the numbers are accordingly grayed to show they are not significant. The reason for the "&" is to illustrate the hip pop that occurs on a 1/2 beat.

Many drawings show the line of dance between the dancers. This line disappears at the terminal ends when the dancers changed directions.

Finally, each picture displays a small dashed circle around the foot of dancers where the body weight is placed on that step.

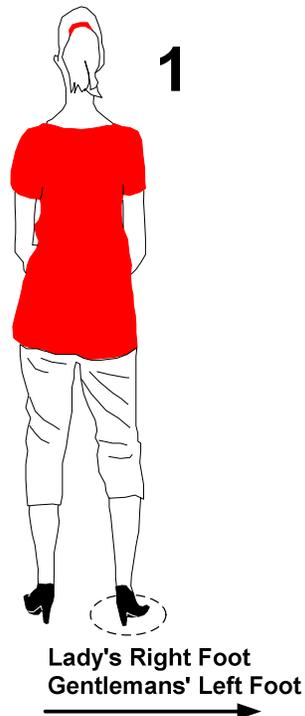
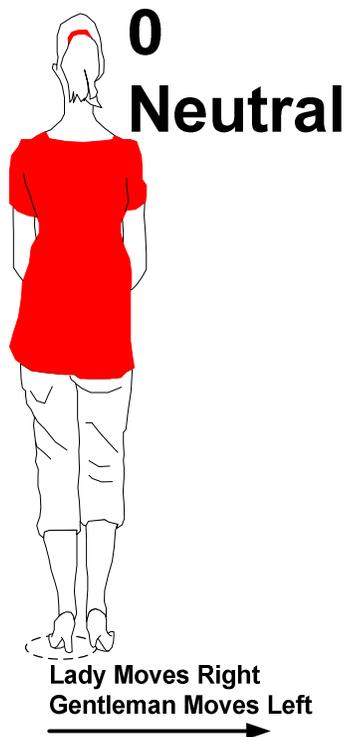
Timing and Beats

As mentioned in the historical portion, the standard timing for bachata is 8 beats. These beats take up quarter notes or half notes depending on the speed of the music. The rhythm is a steady cadence from beginning to end: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8. There are three steps in one direction followed by a tap of the trailing foot in the opposite direction. That same tap foot is used again to start the three steps in the opposite direction.

No other timing is necessary to dance bachata. However, in order to execute the traditional bachata hip pop, an additional action is taken between the counts of 3 and 4 as well as 7 and 8. On the half beats of 3& as well as 7&, the dancer drops the trailing hip and pops it up at the same time as the touch step to create the hip pop action.

Bachata Basic Footwork

In this set of illustrations, we use the lady only to demonstrate the steps. (This is for clarity.) The neutral position for the start is with the lady's weight on her left foot ready to step to her right and with the facing gentleman's weight on his right foot ready to step to his left...



On the first heavy down beat of the music, the gentleman takes a side step to his left and the lady takes a side step to her right so the dancers continue to face each other.

Together - Side

On heavy beat #2, the dancers bring the trailing foot (left for the lady and right for the gentleman) beside the other and place the weight on that foot.



**Lady's Left Foot
Gentleman's Right Foot**
→

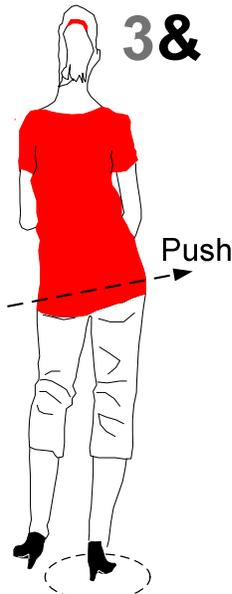


**Lady's Right Foot
Gentleman's Left Foot**
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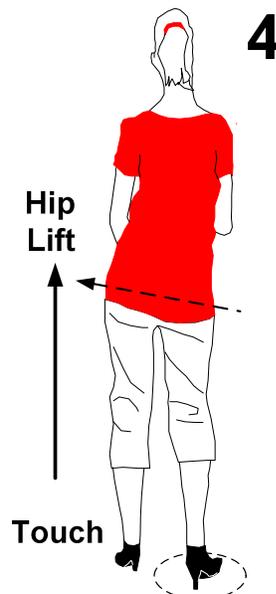
On heavy beat #3, the dancers take another side step with the leading foot (right for the lady and left for the gentleman) and place the weight on that foot.

Pop and Point

In preparation for the pop, on the beat of 3& the lady pushes her right hip to the right and the gentleman pushes his left hip to the left.



**Lady's Right Foot
Gentleman's Left Foot**
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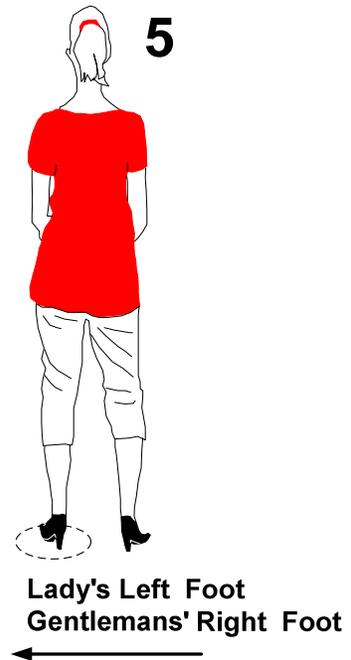
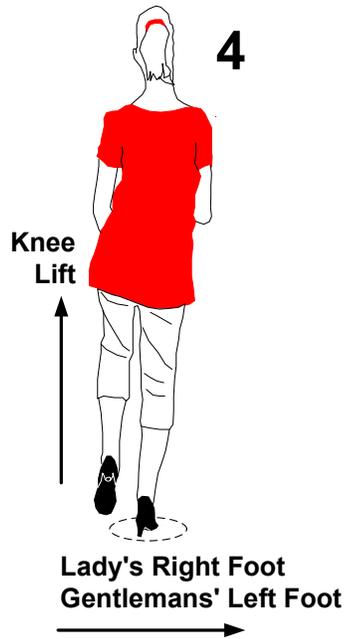


**Lady's Left Foot
Gentleman's Right Foot**
→

On the count of 4, the lady sharply lifts her left hip (gentleman lifts his right hip) and touches the trailing foot (lady's left – gentleman's right) to the floor.

Side Step

The first step in the second half of the basic (5) is taken with the same foot used for the "point" step – lady's left and gentleman's right. The couple is now moving in the return direction. This is a side step.

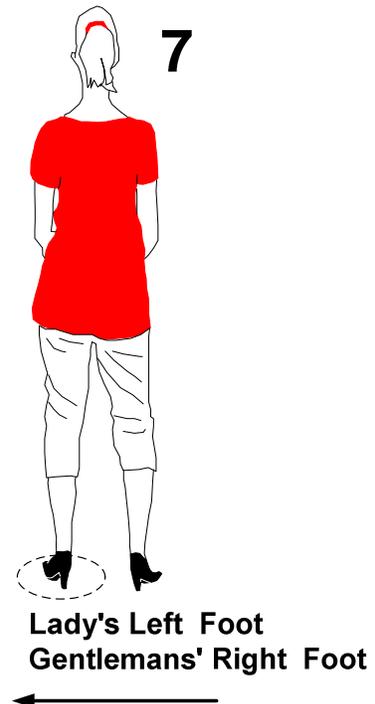


An alternate 4 step is to do a knee lift. Avoid striking the partner.

Together - Side

On heavy beat #6, the dancers bring the trailing foot (right for the lady and left for the gentleman) beside the other and place the weight on that foot.

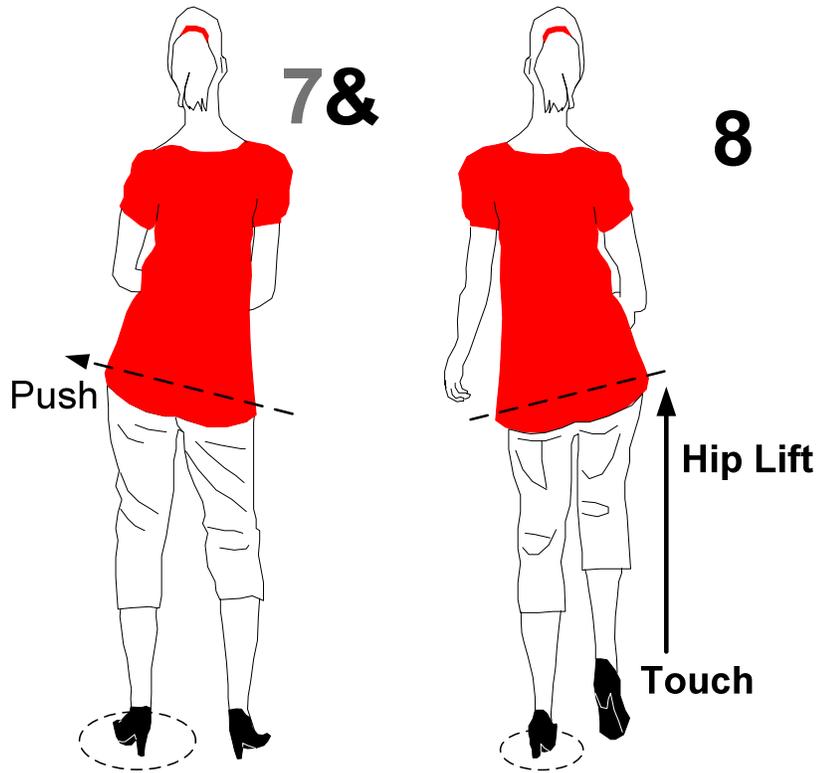
On heavy beat #7, the dancers take another side step with the leading foot (left for the lady and right for the gentleman) and place the weight on that foot.



Pop and Point

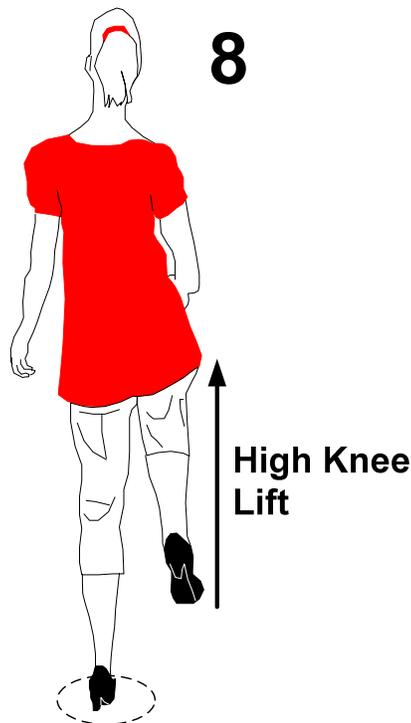
In preparation for the pop, on the beat of 7& the lady pushes her left hip to the left and the gentleman pushes his right hip to the right.

On the count of 8, the lady sharply lifts her right hip (gentleman lifts his left hip) and touches the trailing foot (lady's right – gentleman's left) to the floor.



Alternate To Touch Step

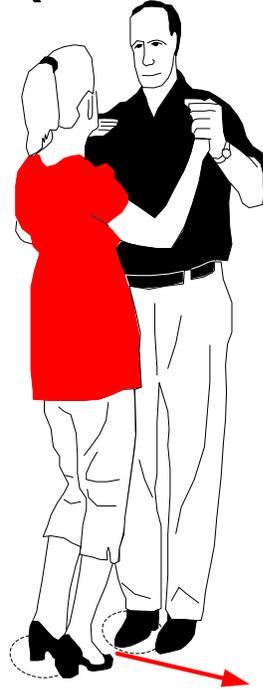
An alternate 8 step is to do a knee lift. Avoid striking the partner.



Basic with Partner

The neutral position (0) is as described earlier. The gentleman's right forearm is under the lady's left arm, and his hand rests between her shoulder blade and the small of her back. The lady rests her left arm on the gentleman's right arm. She places her left hand on the ball of his right shoulder. The gentleman gently clasps the lady's right hand in his left hand.

0 (Neutral)



The gentleman holds the lady's left hand about mouth level. (Above that tells her to turn.)

The partners should face each other nose-to-nose. Other patterns require them to be offset to prevent stepping on and bumping each other. However, sideways movement does not require that positioning.

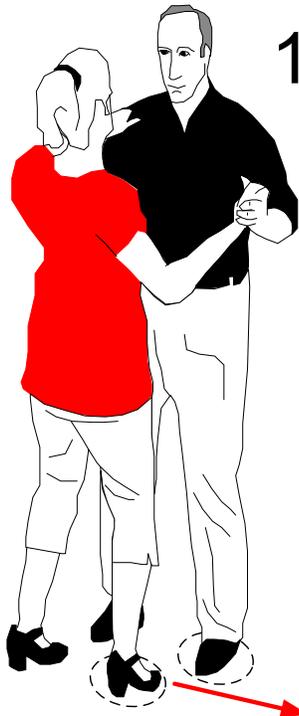
Postures should be straight with shoulders back and knees slightly bent.

This segment does not cover Cuban motion that is created by bending the knees before each step. Cuban motion will be covered in a later segment.

Side – Together

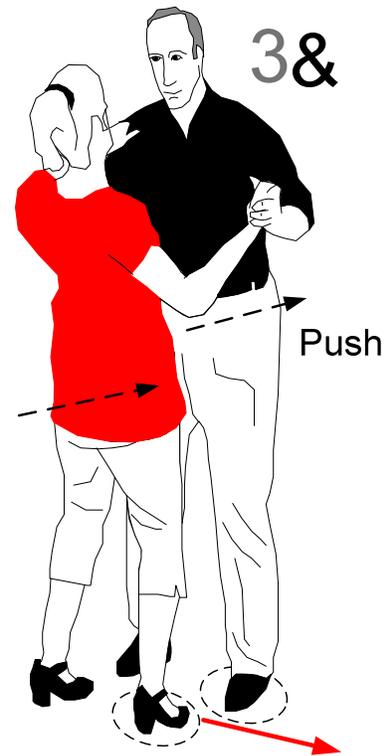
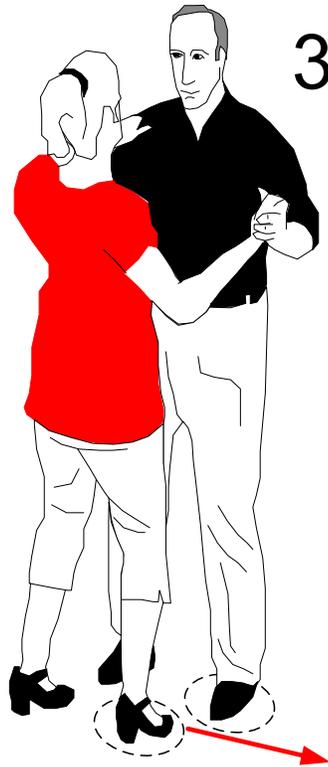
On the heavy beat count of 1, the gentleman carries the lady one step sideways to his left.

On the heavy beat count of 2, the gentleman moves the lady sideways to draw the trailing foot beside the leading foot and place the weight on the trailing foot.



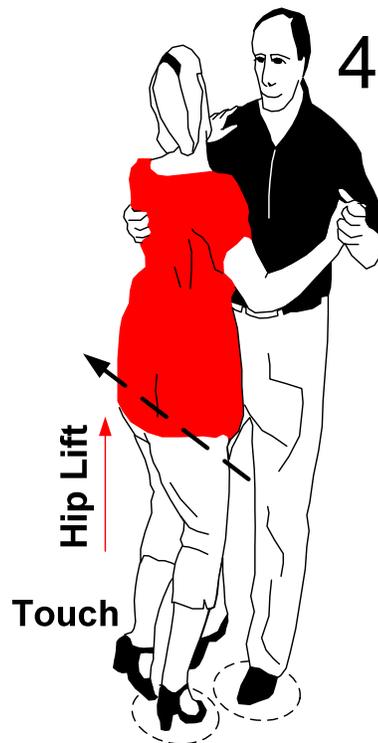
Side Step and Pop Preparation

On the heavy beat count of 3, the gentleman moves the lady to his left to take a side step. Between the counts of 3 and 4, he pushes his hip to his left – his connection to the lady causes her to do likewise in preparation for the hip pop in the other direction.

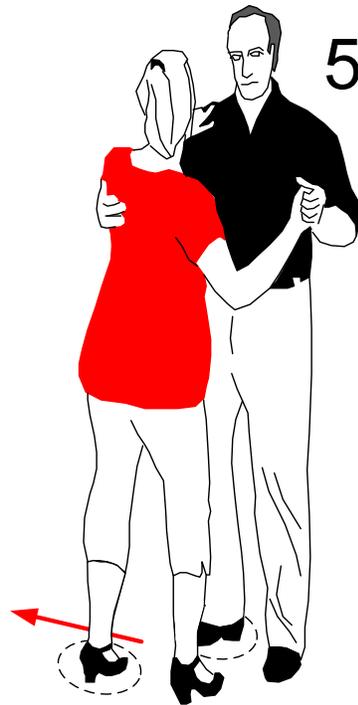


Touch and Reverse Direction

On the downbeat count of 4, both dancers swing their hips the other direction to form a hip lift at the same time as they touch the trailing foot to the floor (right foot for the gentleman and left foot for the lady.)

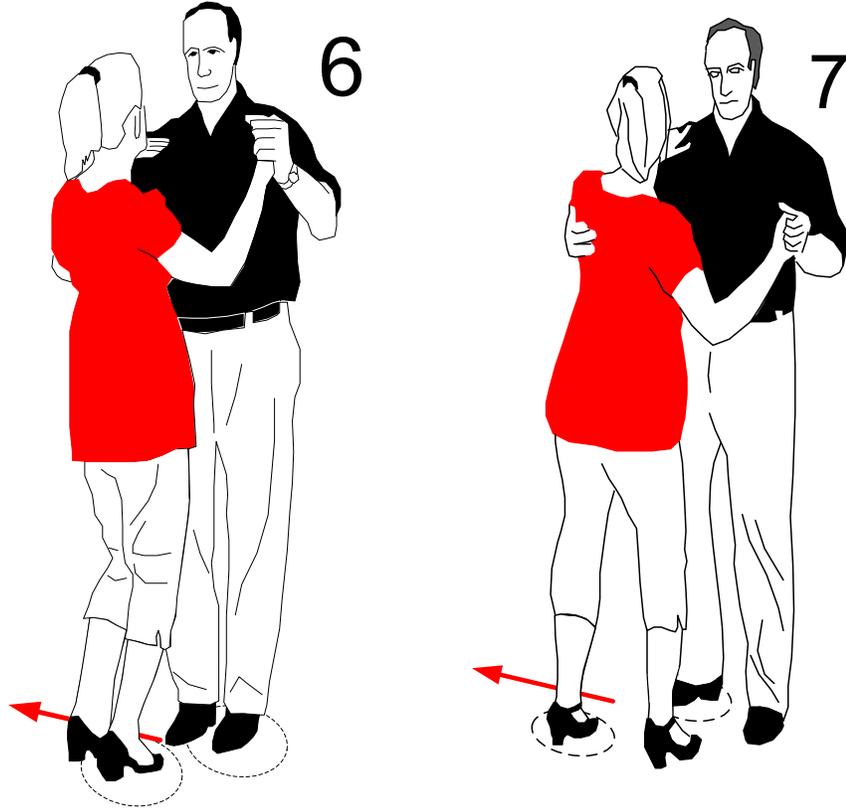


On the count of 5, the gentleman carries the lady to his right to cause both to do a side step.



Together and Side

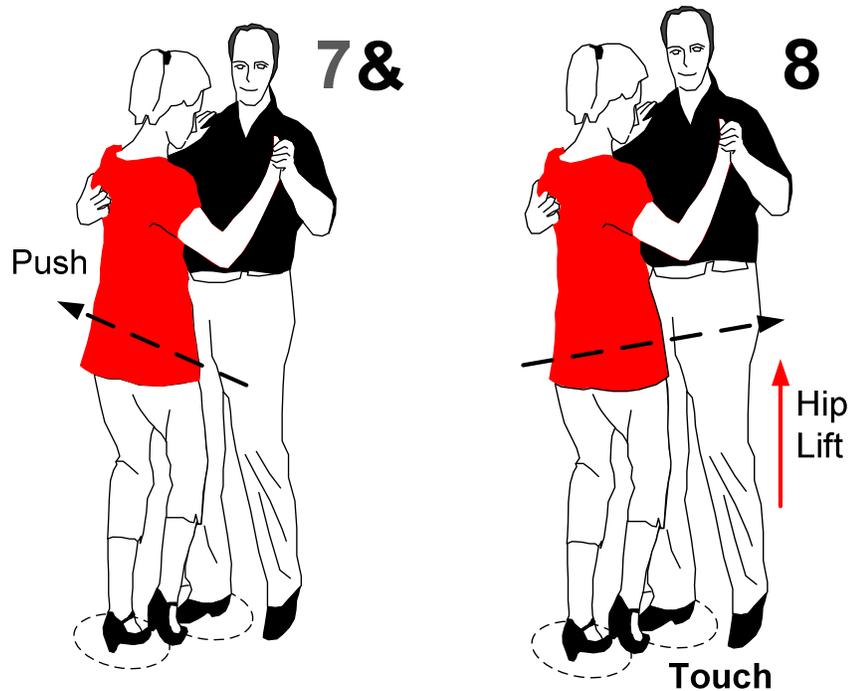
As the dancers move to the gentleman's right, they bring the trailing foot beside the lead foot and transfer weight to the trailing foot on beat 6. On beat 7, the gentleman carries the lady again to his right to cause both to do a side step to the right.



Pope and Touch

Between the counts of 7 and 8, the gentleman pushes his hip to his left – his connection with the lady causes her to do likewise in preparation for the hip pop in the other direction.

On the count of 8, both dancers swing their hips to the trailing side for a hip lift and do a touch step with the trailing foot.



This completes the basic bachata footwork. In the following description of the lady's turns, only the items that are different are described. All other follows the basic footwork.

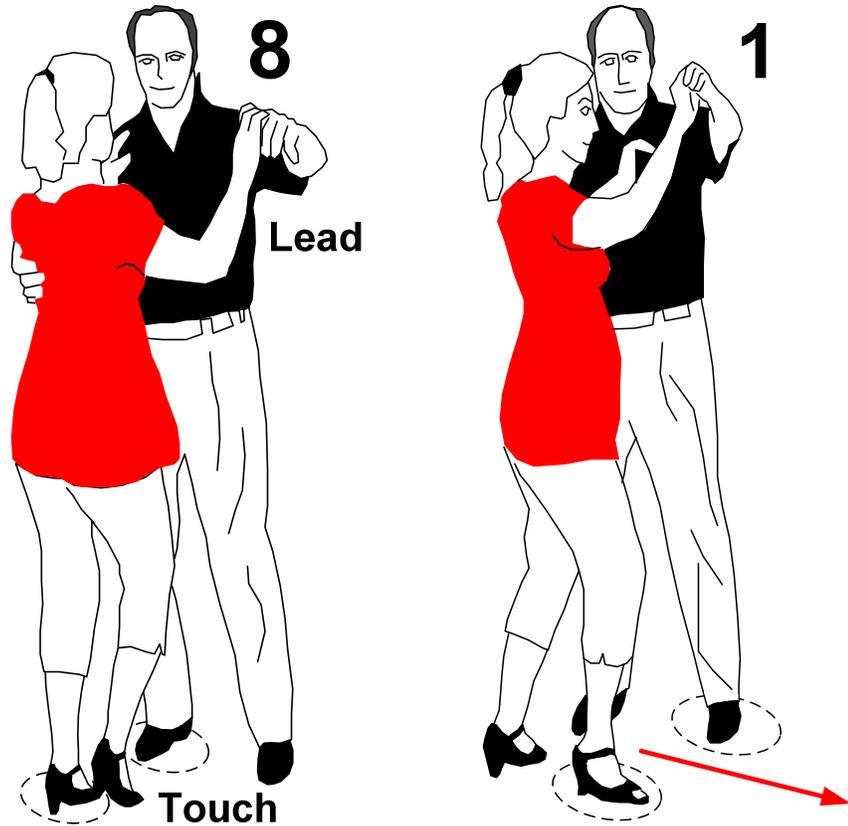
Lady's Turns

The Lead

The gentleman tells the lady he wishes her to turn by holding the connected hand up to her eye level on the count to tell her she will turn in one more step. When the connected hands are lifted above eye level on the count of 1, it is telling her to turn immediately. As the lady turns, the gentleman does a side step to his left.

Note that the lead for the turn occurs on the last step of the previous set – this will nearly always be on the count of 4 or 8 depending on which direction the dancers last moved.

CAUTION: Lady takes hand off gentleman's shoulder to prevent trapping and/or injury.



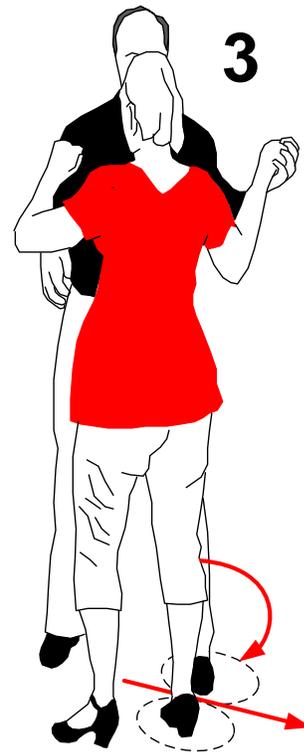
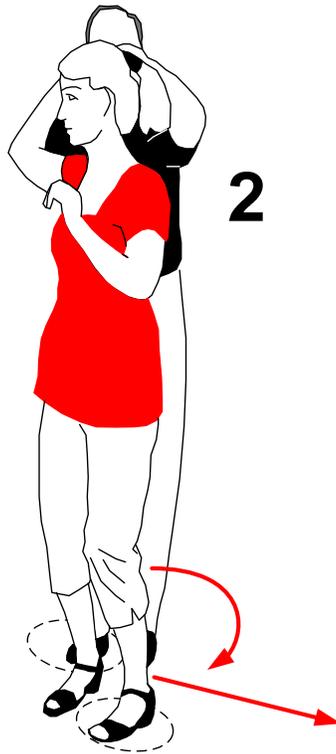
The structure of the turn is as follows: the first step of the lady is with her leading foot **along the line of the dance**. **As illustrated in the following pages**, on the second step, the lady turns a **quarter turn** so she faces the same direction as the gentleman with her feet side by side. Her weight is on the leading foot. On the third step, she makes a **half turn** so she is again facing the gentleman with her feet side by side and weight on the leading foot.

This is followed by the necessary moves to create the hip pop.

2 Step Turn

On the count of 2, the lady makes a quarter turn. Her weight is now on her left foot – now her lead foot. The gentleman brings his feet together. The lead hand moves over the top of the lady's head.

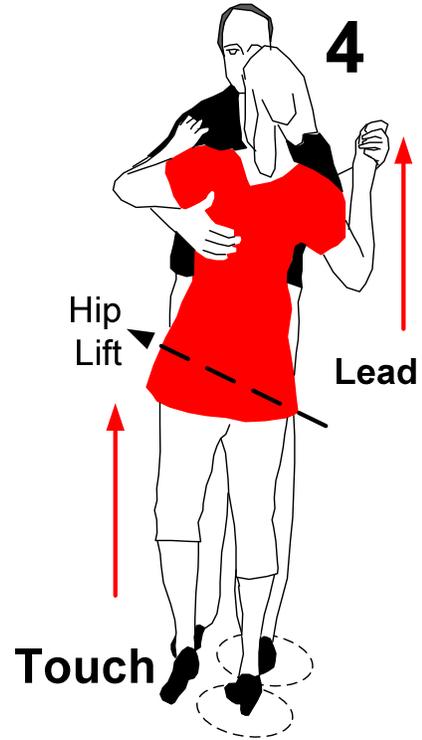
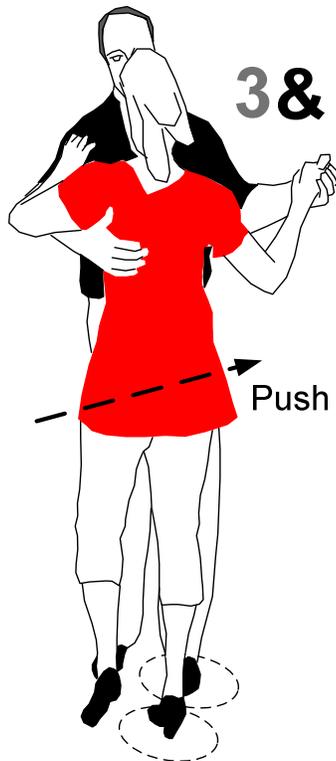
On the count of 3 she makes a half turn – her weight is on her right foot. The gentleman steps to his left and closes with the lady.



Recovery

Between the counts of 3 and 4, the gentleman pushes his frame to his left that causes the lady to push to her right. On the count of 4, both dancers move the trailing hip to complete the hip pop and touch step together.

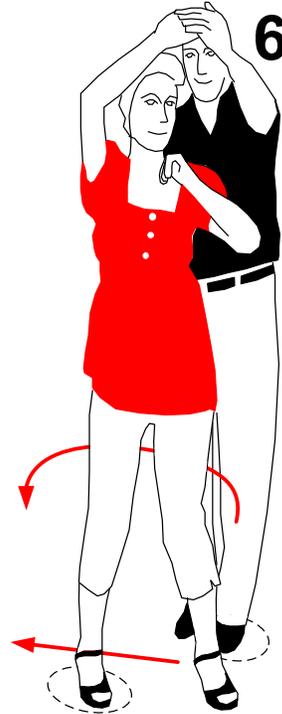
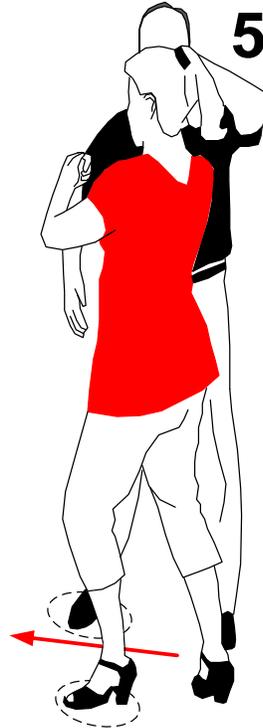
Note this is also the point where the gentleman lifts the connected hand to signal a turn going the other way.



Turn

The turn from left to right is the same as the other direction with the exception that the lady is turning in reverse. The same footwork applies – step 5 is down the line, and step 6 is a quarter turn to the left.

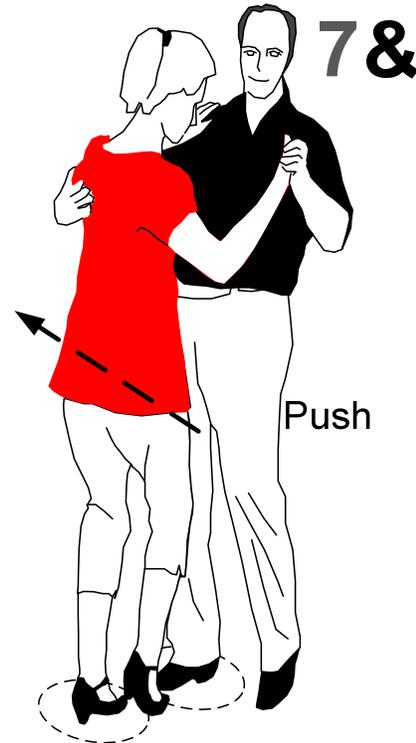
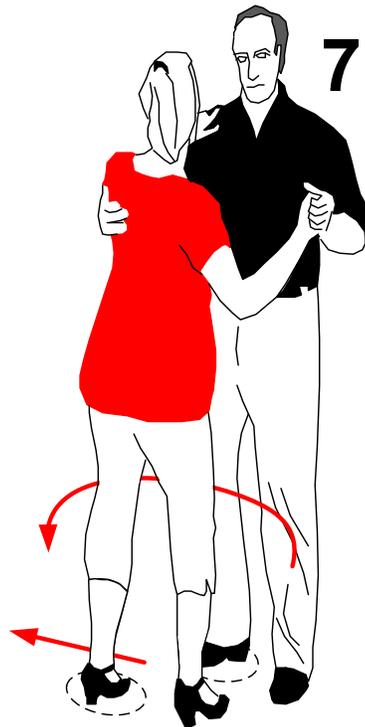
On steps 5 and 6 the gentleman steps side and together.



Recovery

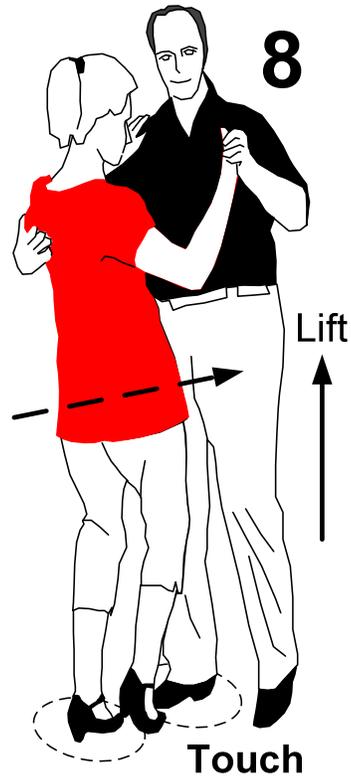
On the count of 7, the lady makes her final half turn and places her weight on her left foot (gentleman's right foot) for the final side step.

The gentleman pushes his hips to the right and his frame causes the lady to push to her left in preparation for the hip pop.



End Position

The end position is on step 8 with both dancers lifting the hip to produce the hip pop action at the same time as the touch step.

**Tips**

Gentleman – Track with the lady as she turns ready to close with her and support her. Move the lead hand so that it just clears her head. Keep your free hand above your waist for a better look.

Lady – Keep your knees bent and soft. Step on the balls of your feet as you turn and not flat footed. Keep your feet close together during the turns. Some ladies look down the line as they are turning – others look at their partner. As soon as the turn starts, take your hand off the gentleman's shoulder to prevent trapping the hand and injuring your arm. Keep your free hand above your waist for a better look.

Conclusion

The material presented here is not all-inclusive, but only touches the high points. There are many other tips to help in your bachata technique. Some of these tips will be presented in the course of other dance segments, while others may have to be taught in conjunction with an instructor present.

This concludes the segment on Bachata Basics and Lady's Turns.