

## Cha-Cha Basics

### Pre-requisite

None

(These are basic patterns)

### Introduction

Although Cha-cha is one of the Cuban family of dances that is danced throughout the Latin American countries, it is one of the most popular of dances practiced in the Western world, including the United States. It is a stationary dance, like the Rhumba or Mambo, (also East Coast Swing or West Coast swing), except that it has a distinctive cha-cha-cha step that gets its name from splitting the 4 count into two steps so that the 4 and 1 create three quick steps.

The dance was originated by Enrique Jorrín in 1948 as a variant of Mambo and Rhumba. It caught on quickly and its popularity spread throughout the world. It was picked up by the country-and-western genera in the last few years dancing to such songs as “Gulf of Mexico” by Clint Black, “Out on the Boardwalk”, “I Want to Dance With You”, and “I’m Going to be Your #1” from the rock and roll era. Today, cha-cha is danced equally as 2-step, polka, Jitterbug, and East Coast Swing.

In this segment, we are going to discuss:

- The music – how to step to the beat and how determine if it is a cha-cha.
- Contact – how to hold your partner.
- The basic foot work.

### The Music

Although it is not important to know, Cha-cha is played to 4/4 timing. Each basic covers two bars, or eight beats of music. That means you go through the 4 count twice for a basic to return to your starting place. All the beats are slow counts with the exception that the fourth beat of each four count is split into two parts to give it the distinctive 2, 3, 4, & 1 rhythem. (Note that the count actually starts on 2.) The group of 4, & 1 makes up the characteristic cha-cha-cha.

### What is a beat?

A beat in music is a heavy guitar strum, a drumbeat, or some other heavy sound in the music. It is the **natural** place you would snap your fingers or clap your hands if you were keeping time to the music.

The important thing to remember here is that in dance, you put your foot on the floor on the beat as opposed to picking it up. To practice, you can snap your fingers and stamp your feet as you listen to the music (guys use the left foot and ladies use the right.)

Is it a cha-cha? Listen to the music. If you can hear a quick, quick, quick followed by two slow beats, it may be a cha-cha. In cha-cha, the last quick beat (actually the count of 1) is accentuated. If it is a cha-cha, you should be able to count to the beat as follows:

When you hear the three quicks, say “four, and ONE, two three”. The “four and one” are the “quick, quick, quick” with the last quick accentuated. The “two, three” are slower beats. If the dance fits these criteria, it is probably a cha-cha.

Knowing this, a little phrase makes it easy to determine if the music is a cha-cha. While listening to the music, if you can say, “cha, cha, cha, rock, step” with the chas spoken quickly, it is a cha-cha.

An alternative is to watch what other dancers are doing before you go out onto the floor. If they are generally dancing in place in a zig-zag pattern with quick steps to the left or right and rock steps backward or forward, it is a cha-cha.

If you still cannot determine what it is, ask someone nearby. Country and western dancers are friendly and they will be glad to tell you.

### Contact

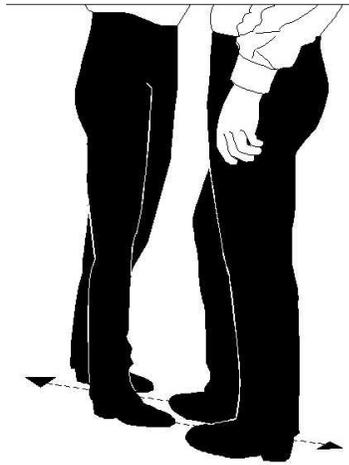
Face each other. There is no line of dance with cha-cha, but try to dance in the center of the floor so that moving dancers can dance around you. On a crowded floor, cha-cha dancers try to dance the same direction to conserve space and avoid bumping other dancers.



Gentlemen – Put your right hand under the lady's left arm and place it gently on her left shoulder blade. Keep your fingers together and turn the tip of your hand down so that it raises your right elbow to create a shelf for the lady to rest her arm. Hold your left hand out to the side about level with her shoulder. Hold your palm forward and fingers pointing to the outside to create a fence for her right hand.

Ladies – Rest your left elbow on the gentleman's arm and cup your left hand on the ball of his right shoulder. Gently rest your right hand on top of the gentleman's left hand.

Finally, hold each other slightly offset so that your right foot is pointing between your partner's feet.



We do three things to prevent stepping on each other's toes:

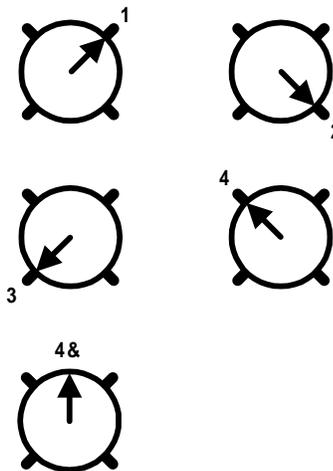
1. Ladies and gentlemen dance with opposite footwork – guys start with the left foot and ladies start with the right foot. Provided they are facing each other, as the gentleman steps forward with his left, the lady steps back with her right and there is always a place to put the foot.
2. Ladies and gentlemen dance parallel but offset to each other so that the right foot is lined up to always pass between the partner's feet. This prevents bumping knees and toes.

**The Footwork**

The pattern for dancing basic cha-cha is a zig-zag track known in international circles as a chassé. The cha-cha-cha portion is danced to the side (right or left) followed by a rock step (called a break ) either forward or backward. The International style begins with a rock step on the count of “2” with the gentleman rocking forward with his left foot or backward with his right. However, we choose to start on the count of “1” (the last cha and the heaviest beat) in a starting step to the gentleman’s left. This is followed by the first break with the gentleman rocking back on his right foot. The first cha-cha-cha is to the right followed by a break step forward with the gentleman’s left.



The dance clock

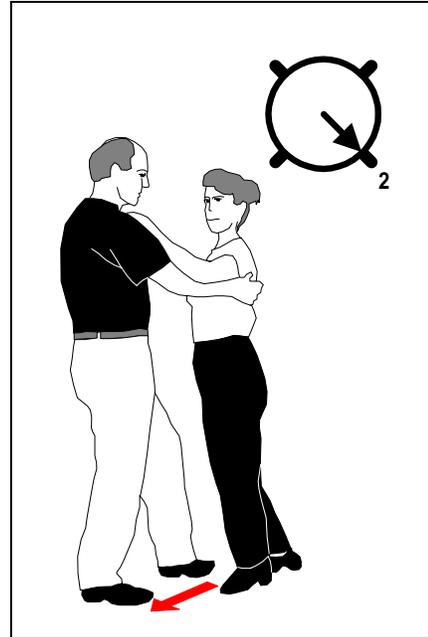
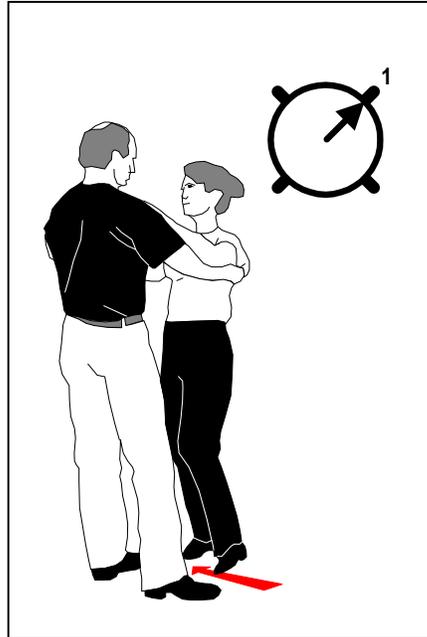


Unlike the regular clock, the cha-cha dance clock is divided into only four segments to correspond to the beats of the basic music. Clocks for other dances will be different. Step number 1 is the last “cha” step and has the heaviest beat or stress. Step numbers 2 and 3 are the rock steps or break, followed by the 4 and the & of the first two chas. You will note that when you have finished these four beats, you are only half way through a basic. This is followed by four more beats to take you back to your original position.

An important point to note is that the timing occurs after the step, not before it. Therefore, the timing for the first step occurs between point 1 and 2 in the diagram. The second step begins at point 2, the third step begins at point 3, and the cha, cha, chas begin at point 4.

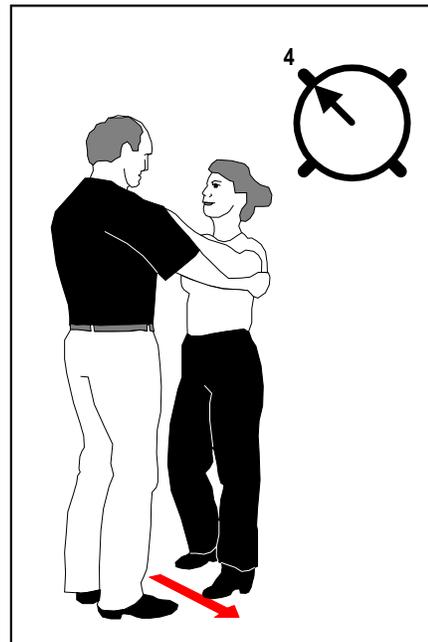
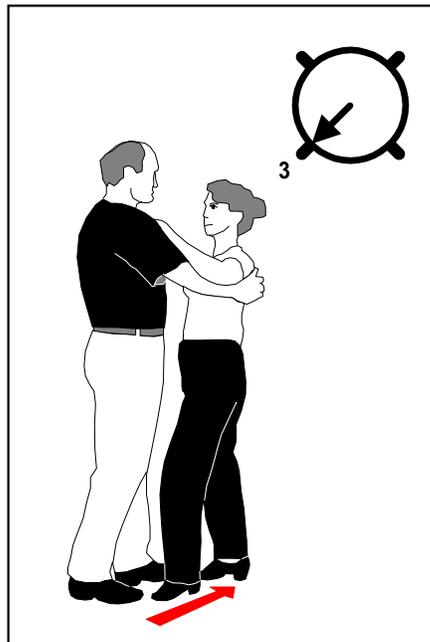
**The Steps**  
(First four beats of the chassé)

Step 1 is a starting step on the heaviest beat of the cha-cha-cha.

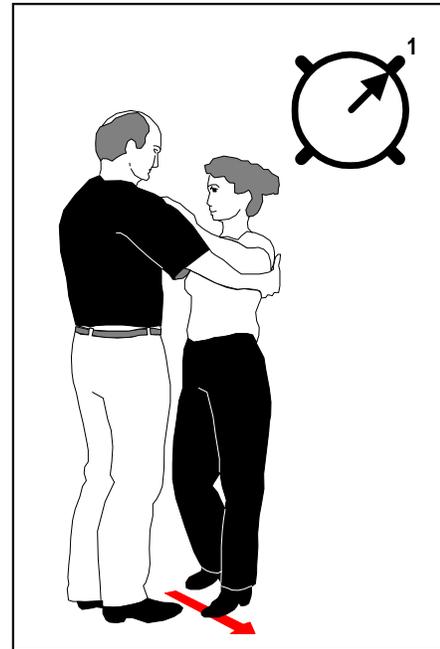
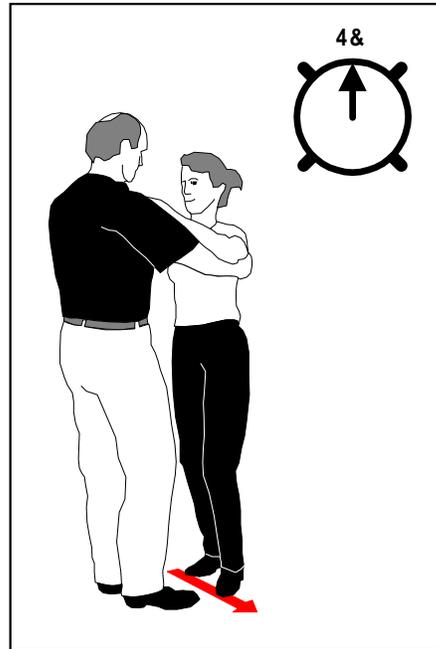


You will note that the gentleman rocks backward with his right foot on count 2 and returns to the line on count 3. The lady responds with opposite footwork.

Step 4 is the first of three quick steps to the side in the cha-cha-cha.

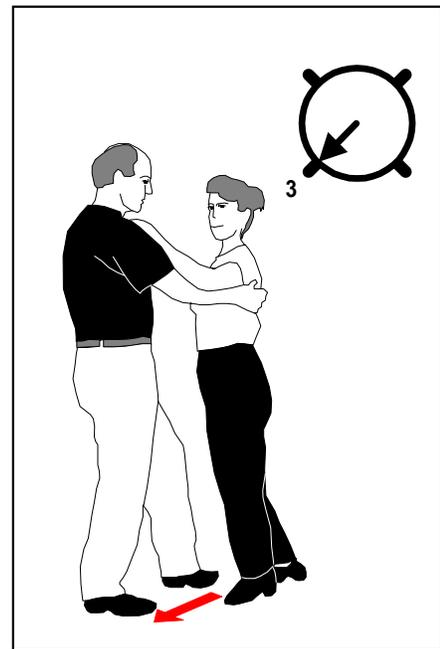
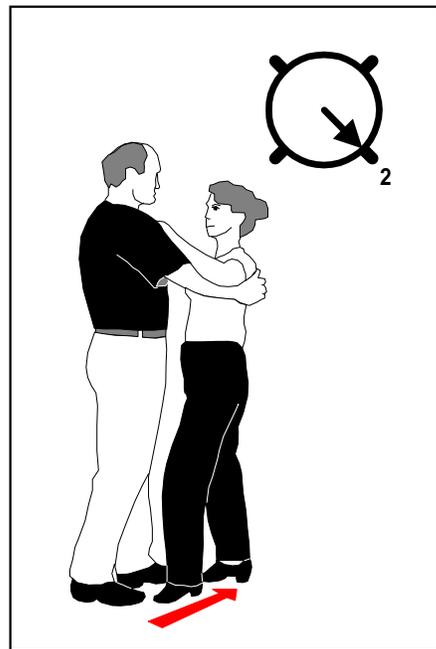


Steps on 4&, 1 are the second and third quick steps to the side of the cha-cha-cha.



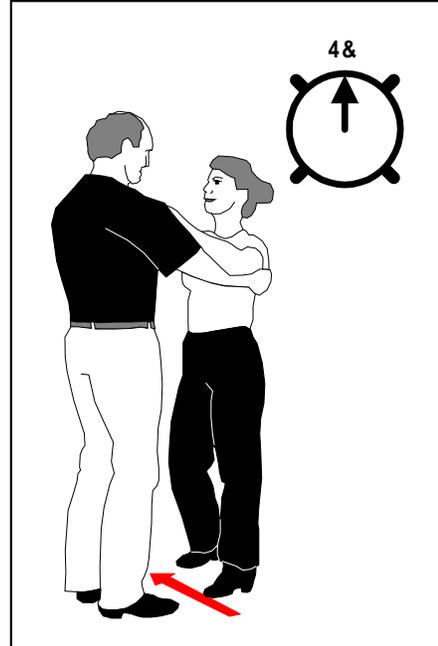
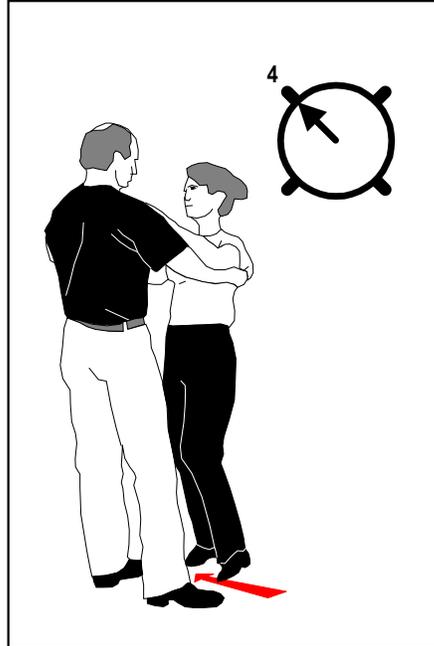
**The Steps**  
(Second 4 beats of the chassé)

In this case, note that the gentleman rocks forward with his left foot.

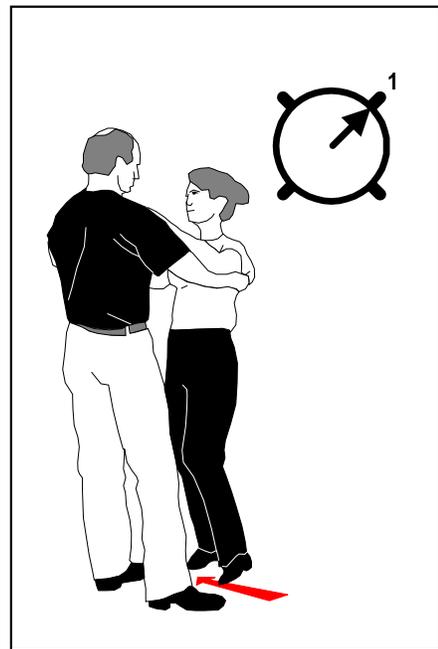


In this break, the gentleman rocks forward with his left foot and replaces his weight on his right foot on the count of 3 ready for the cha-cha-cha to his left. The lady follows on opposite footwork.

In this cha-cha-cha portion, the gentleman takes the three quick steps of the 4 & 1 to his left. The lady follows with her corresponding footwork.



The entire basic ends on the count of "1", the heavy beat of the last cha. The gentleman is now ready to rock backward with his right foot for a new backward break.



**Don't be Afraid**

Every dancer out there has "paid their dues". They have struggled just like you. However, they are concentrating on their own efforts and not upon you. They do not care if you make a mistake, so go ahead and make them. You have just as much right to be on the dance floor as they do, so get out there and dance. It may be a struggle, but that is ok. Dance as if no one is watching you.

**Protect your Lady** As you are dancing, check often around you to be aware of the traffic and patterns that are happening nearby. Do not run your lady into another dancer and do not allow them to collide with her. Take smaller steps or maneuver her into an open spot if necessary.

**Take the Blame** If a collision does occur, remember that it does no one any good to get upset – this is just recreation. The best policy is to apologize regardless if it is your fault or not.

And last, but not least – if you do bump into someone and knock over their drink, offer to replace it, and try to be more careful.

**Conclusion** The material presented here is not all-inclusive, but only touches the high points. There are many other tips to help in your cha-cha 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 basic cha-cha.