

# Introduction to Cha Cha Cha

**General Information** The Cha Cha Cha is a development from the Mambo, originally a Haitian dance which migrated through Cuba to the United States in the late 1940's. There are three forms of Mambo, single, double, and triple. The triple has five steps to the measure, and it is this form of the Mambo that evolved into the Cha Cha Cha. It has been suggested that the name Cha Cha Cha was derived from imitating the sound of the "shoes" of the Cuban women when dancing the triple or chassé steps.

The Cha Cha Cha also has close ties to the Rumba in fact the English considered the Mambo as a fast version of the Rumba. All three forms of dance originated as Haitian dances and consequently many of the named figures were common for the three forms of dance and were varied mainly in the number of steps being danced and the tempo of the music. The Rumba was first introduced in the United States in the 1930's and in England in the late 1940's. What has become the Cha Cha Cha was recognized by the English in the early 1950's and characterized at that time as a Rumba danced with extra steps. Walter Laird (IDTA) is recognized as the first person to standardize and publish figures of Latin Dancing. The publication included the Rumba, Cha Cha Cha, Samba, Paso Doble, and the Jive.

**Musical Timing** The time signature for Cha Cha Cha is 4/4, with a normal tempo range of 28 - 34 measures per minute. Five steps are normally taken to each measure of music using a rhythm of 1, 1, 1/2, 1/2, 1. This is interpreted as whole beat, whole-beat, half-beat, half-beat, whole beat. In authentic music a very definite rhythmical beat is heard in each measure with the second beat being accented resulting in an overall rhythm of 1, **2**, 3, 4/&, 1, **2**, 3, 4/&, 1, etc. This would have the dancers normally taking their steps on beats 2, 3, 4/&, 1. This is the step timing used by ballroom dancers and in most competitive dancing. In Round Dancing it seems easier for the dancers to recognize the first beat of a measure, therefore dancing a step timing of 1, 2, 3/&, 4. Because most Round Dancers prefer the step timing beginning on the one beat, this manual will be written to that timing. If using this timing, the dancer must remain true to the timing of each step to keep the proper feel or "flavor" of the Dance. It is very easy to "slop" the chassé timing and accomplish the three steps over both whole beats. Remember it is Cha/Cha Cha not Cha Cha Cha. The first two steps of the Chassé are 1/2 beats. The last step is a whole beat. This is true whether danced on the first or second beat, which is occasionally used by Round Dance choreographers.

Occasionally routines use Guapacha timing (pronounced whappacha). Guapacha timing is a variation of normal timing and is usually only included in some higher level routines. The time value is to hold the first beat and take the first two steps of a figure on the second beat, e.g., hold, &/2, 3/&, 4. This timing lends itself to certain figures such as the Time Step or Cross Basic.

**Footwork** Most steps are taken with pressure on the ball of the foot and as weight is taken the heel is lowered to the floor. The primary difference between American style and International style Cha Cha Cha is the knee action on the whole beats and the chassés. There is more bending of the knee, and the heel is raised farther off the floor in American style Cha Cha Cha than in International style. There is a slight bending of the knee in International style, however it almost appears that the dancers are stepping onto a straight leg. Also on the back break the dancers hold the forward leg almost straight in International style and allow it to bend in American Style. As the dancer lowers weight to the heel, the weighted leg straightens. As the weight releases from the opposite foot, the hips move softly sideways in the direction of the weighted foot. This is not a forced sideways action. It should

only be the natural movement sideways of the hips caused by straightening of the leg and the starting of movement to the other foot. The farthest displacement of the hip is when you are about to take weight on the next step. Any variations to this general principle will be explained in the figure descriptions. The lengths of the step are relatively small, allowing the body to be comfortably moved over the weighted foot. If the steps taken are too long, loss of balance will often occur, especially on turning steps. Generally steps one, two and five will be of the same length and steps three and four will be only half as long, as they use only half beats. Normally keeping the weight forward with the hips pulled back will enable the ball flat action. The toeing out of the feet will allow better balance control.

**Dance Position** Closed Dance Position - Stand facing partner about six inches apart. The man's right hand will be on the lady's left shoulder blade. The lady's left arm will be on the man's right arm. Join the man's left and the lady's right hands at about the man's eye level. If viewed from the top down, the dancers' arms should almost make a circle. Unlike in the smooth rhythms there will be little or no offset or exaggerated top line. The dancers should be nearly eye to eye.

Open Facing position – Man's right and lady's left hands joined with the elbows bent and tucked in towards the waist. The joined hands will thus be at waist level. Both dancers should "push" very slightly toward one another with these joined hands to create a feeling of being "connected" so the lady can receive the man's lead.

Left Open Facing position – Man's left and lady's right hands joined with the elbows bent and tucked in towards the waist. The joined hands will thus be at waist level. Both dancers should "push" very slightly toward one another with these joined hands to create a feeling of being "connected" so the lady can receive the man's lead.

Other dance positions will be explained in the descriptions of the figures as necessary. The important thing to remember in any position with a handhold is to maintain the "connection". This is so the dancers can move together, so to speak, even when they are apart and accomplishing different foot patterns.

**Hand and Arm Positions** A "rule of thumb" is that the free hand is held in close to the body when the couple are close to each other and out and slightly up when the couple are in any of the open positions. The lady's hand and arms are generally used with more expression, some might even say seductively, whereas the man's are more subtle. Personal interpretation or feeling is a good guide; the actions should look and feel natural to the dancer and not detract from the figure. There should, however, be some hand and arm movement with most figures to fulfill the "nature" of the dance. Hand and arm actions will be included in some figure descriptions when considered common to the figure.

**The Cha Cha Cha Chassé** In its basic form this figure consists of three steps, danced on counts 1&2 or 3&4. There are six basic directions of the chassé, side to left, side to right, forward (left foot), forward (right foot), backward (left foot), and backward (right foot). Each form of the chassé will be detailed in the charts that follow. The chassé may be taken with or without turn in any forward, backward, or sideways direction. It may also remain on the spot.

An alternate form of the chassé utilizes the Latin Cross and may be danced by the man, lady or both when dancing forward or backward. This action adds a slight crossing of the moving foot on the "&" count. When moving forward the toe of the back foot is placed near the heel of the front foot, with the toe turned out. The knee of the back foot will tuck behind the knee of the forward foot. The footwork on the forward chassé would be ball-flat, ball, ball-flat.

When moving backward, the instep of the front foot is placed near the toe of the back foot [half-crossed], with the toe turned out. The knee of the front foot will close to the knee of the back foot. The footwork on the backward chassé would be ball, ball-flat, ball-flat.

Other types of the chassé are the Rondé Chassé and the use of three steps of a Cuban Break. The different chassés will be described with technique, individually, on the following pages. They will be included with each figure description in which they are commonly used; however, they will not be described in the detail they are here in the introduction. If more than one type of chassé can be used with any figure only one will be noted in the body of the figure description. The others will be noted in the "General Notes".

## Chassé to the Right

1/2 measure - 1&amp;2 or 3&amp;4

Level of Difficulty 2

### MAN

CP fcng WALL - sd R/cl L almost to R, sd R,

### LADY

CP fcng COH - sd L/cl R almost to L, sd L,

### MAN & LADY (Lady opposite)

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	WALL	sd R	nil	BF	sd Chassé to the R	knee sltly bent and hips strtg to move to the R - half sized stp using 1/2 beat
2	&	-	almost cl L to R	-	BF		both knees sltly bent & hips undr bdy - half sized stp using 1/2 beat
3	2	-	sd R	-	BF		both knees strtg and hips to the R - full stp

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### MAN & LADY (Lady opposite)

Start in Closed Position facing the WALL. **[Step 1.]** Side on the right foot, ball-flat. The leg will start to straighten and the hips will start to move to the right. The length of the step should be half that of the normal step. **[Step 2.]** The left foot will almost close to the right foot, ball flat. Both knees should be slightly bent and the hips should be directly under the body. Do not try to close the feet as there is not time when only a half beat of music is available. **[Step 3.]** Side on the right foot, ball-flat. Allow the right leg to straighten fully and the hips to move strongly to the right. The left leg should be straight also.

## GENERAL NOTES

The Chassé to the Right may also be danced in Butterfly position, Open position, Left Open position and without hands joined. The direction stated above is only to describe the figure. The figure may be danced facing any direction. The Chassé may be repeated in a single measure with timing 1&2 3&4 by man and lady interchanging footwork and direction between the 1&2 and 3&4. The Chassé to the Right is used in the last half of the Back Basic and similar figures started with man's R (lady's L) foot as steps 3&4.

# Chassé to the Left

1/2 measure - 1&amp;2 or 3&amp;4

Level of Difficulty 2

**MAN**

CP fcng the WALL - sd L/cl R almost to L, sd L,

**LADY**

CP fcng the COH - sd R/cl L almost to R, sd R,

**MAN & LADY (Lady opposite)**

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	WALL	sd L	nil	BF	sd chassé to the L	knee sltly bent and hips strtg to move to the L - half sized stp using 1/2 beat
2	&	-	almost cl R to L	-	BF		both knees sltly bent & hips undr bdy - half sized stp using 1/2 beat
3	2	-	sd L	-	BF		both knees strtg and hips to the L - full stp

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

**MAN & LADY (Lady opposite)**

Start in Closed Position facing the WALL. **[Step 1.]** Side on the left foot, ball-flat. The leg will start to straighten and the hips will start to move to the left. The length of the step should be half that of the normal step. **[Step 2.]** The right foot will almost close to the left foot, ball-flat. Both knees should be slightly bent and the hips should be directly under the body. Do not try to close the feet as there is not time when only a half beat of music is available. **[Step 3.]** Side on the left foot, ball-flat. Allow the left leg to straighten fully and the hips to move strongly to the left. The right leg should be straight also.

## GENERAL NOTES

The Chassé to the Left may also be danced in Butterfly position, Open position, Left Open position and without hands joined. The direction stated above is only to describe the figure. The figure may be danced facing any direction. The chassé may be repeated in a single measure with timing 1&2 3&4 by man and lady interchanging footwork and direction between the 1&2 and 3&4. The Chassé to the Left is used last half of the Forward Basic and similar figures started with man's L (lady's R) foot as steps 3&4.

**Forward Chassé (Right Foot)****Backward Chassé (Left foot) \* See General Notes**

1/2 measure - 1&amp;2 or 3&amp;4

Level of Difficulty 2

**MAN**

LOP fcg LOD - fwd R/XLIB of R, fwd R,

**LADY**

LOP fcg RLOD - bk L/XRIF of L, bk L,

**MAN**

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	LOD	fwd R	nil	BF	fwd Chassé	R shldr ldng - R T trnd out and knee sltly bent with hips mvng to the R
2	&	-	L T bk of R H	-	B		maint bdy pos - L T trnd out pl near H of R, both knees sltly bent with hips undr bdy
3	2	-	fwd R	-	BF		R shldr ldng - R T trnd out with leg strtgng & hips mvng strongly to R

**LADY**

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	RLOD	bk L	nil	B	bwd Chassé	R shldr ldng - L T trnd out and knee sltly bent with hips mvng to the L
2	&	-	R 1/2 crossed in front of L	-	BF		maint bdy pos - R T trnd out instep to T of L, both knees sltly bent with hips undr bdy
3	2	-	bk L	-	BF		R shldr ldng - L T trnd out with leg strtgng & hips mvng strongly to L

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION****MAN**

Start in LOP facing LOD. **[Step 1.]** With the right shoulder leading, step forward with the right foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The right leg will not fully straighten. The hips will move to the right slightly. **[Step 2.]** Place the left foot near the heel of the right foot (Latin Cross), toeing out, ball-flat. Left knee tucked behind the right, both knees will be slightly bent and the hips will be directly under the body. **[Step 3.]** With a right shoulder leading, forward on the right foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The right leg will straighten, and the hips will move strongly to the right. The left knee will flex, releasing the heel from the floor.

**LADY**

Start in LOP facing RLOD. **[Step 1.]** With the right shoulder leading, step back with the left foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The left leg will not fully straighten. The hips will move to the left slightly. **[Step 2.]** Stepping on the ball of the right foot, place the instep near the toe

of the left foot (Latin Cross), toeing out. Left knee closed to front of right knee, both slightly bent. Tips will be directly under the body. **[Step 3.]** With a right shoulder leading, back on the left foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The left leg will straighten, and the hips will move strongly to the left. The right knee will flex, slightly releasing the right heel from the floor.

## **GENERAL NOTES**

As described, this figure is also called the Chassé Lock or Cha Cha Lock.

The foot action on step two is the Latin Cross, a lock step; however, the feet do not lock at the ankle as in the Quickstep, for example. The cross is when the feet cross each other's line of movement.

In its basic or simplest form, step 2 (man & lady) of the Forward Chassé would be a half-closing step, the Latin Cross would not be used.

The Forward Chassé (Right Foot) may also be danced in Butterfly position, Open position, Left Open position and without hands joined. The direction stated above is only to describe the figure. The figure may be danced facing any direction. The Forward Chassé (Right Foot) may be danced as steps 8, 9, 10 of the Open Basic [Basic Movement from Open Facing Position] or as steps 3, 4, 5 of figures started with man's R (lady's L) foot.

When the Forward Chassé (Right Foot) is danced in a facing position the lady is dancing the man's footwork for the Backward Chassé (Left Foot). To dance the Backward Chassé (Left Foot) we need only to reverse the positions of the man and lady such that the man is backing, as described briefly below.

## **Backward Chassé (Left foot)**

1/2 measure – 1&2 or 3&4

Level of Difficulty 2

### **MAN**

LOP facing RLOD, backing LOD - Dance the lady's part of the Forward Chassé (Right Foot).

### **LADY**

LOP facing LOD, forward LOD - Dance the man's part of the Forward Chassé (Right Foot)

## **GENERAL NOTES**

In its basic or simplest form, step 2 (man & lady) of the Backward Chassé would be a half-closing step, the Latin Cross would not be used.

The Backward Chassé (Left Foot) may also be danced in Butterfly position, Open position, Left Open position and without hands joined. The direction stated above is only to describe the figure. The figure may be danced facing any direction. Either form of the Backward Chassé (Left Foot) may be danced as steps 3, 4, 5 of the Open Basic [Basic Movement from Open Facing Position] or as steps 3, 4, 5 of many figures started with man's L (lady's R) foot.

**Forward Chassé (Left Foot)****Backward Chassé (Right Foot) \* See General Notes**

1/2 measure – 1&amp;2 or 3&amp;4

Level of Difficulty 2

**MAN**

LOP fcg LOD - fwd L/XRIB of L, fwd L,

**LADY**

LOP fcg RLOD - bk R/XLIF of R, bk R,

**MAN**

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	LOD	fwd L	nil	BF	fwd Chassé	L shldr ldng - L T trnd out and knee sltly bent with hips mvng to the L
2	&	-	R T bk of L H	-	B		maint bdy pos - R T trnd out pl near H of L, both knees sltly bent with hips undr bdy
3	2	-	fwd L	-	BF		L shldr ldng - L T trnd out with leg strgtng & hips mvng strongly to L

**LADY**

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	RLOD	bk R	nil	B	bwd Chassé	L shldr ldng - R T trnd out and knee sltly bent with hips mvng to the R
2	&	-	L 1/2 crossed in front of R	-	BF		maint bdy pos - L T trnd out instep to T of R, both knees sltly bent with hips undr bdy
3	2	-	bk R	-	BF		L shldr ldng - R T trnd out with leg strgtng & hips mvng strongly to R

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION****MAN**

Start in LOP facing LOD. **[Step 1.]** With the left shoulder leading, step forward with the left foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The left leg will not fully straighten. The hips will move to the left slightly. **[Step 2.]** Place the right foot near the heel of the left foot (Latin Cross), toeing out, ball-flat. Right knee tucked behind the left, both knees will be slightly bent and the hips will be directly under the body. **[Step 3.]** With a left shoulder leading, forward on the left foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The left leg will straighten, and the hips will move strongly to the left. The right knee will flex, releasing the heel from the floor.

**LADY**



Start in LOP facing RLOD. **[Step 1.]** With the left shoulder leading, step back with the right foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The right leg will not fully straighten. The hips will move to the right slightly. **[Step 2.]** Stepping on the ball of the left foot, place the instep near the toe of the right foot (Latin Cross), toeing out. Right knee closed to front of left knee, both slightly bent. Hips will be directly under the body. **[Step 3.]** With a left shoulder leading, back on the right foot, toeing out, ball-flat. The right leg will straighten, and the hips will move strongly to the right. The left knee will flex, slightly releasing the heel from the floor.

## **GENERAL NOTES**

As described, this figure is also called the Chassé Lock or Cha Cha Lock.

The foot action on step two is the Latin Cross, a lock step; however, the feet do not lock at the ankle as in the Quickstep, for example. The cross is when the feet cross each other's line of movement.

In its basic or simplest form, step 2 (man & lady) of the Forward Chassé would be a half-closing step, the Latin Cross would not be used.

Chassé may also be danced in Butterfly position, Open position, Left Open position and without hands joined. The direction stated above is only to describe the figure. The figure may be danced facing any direction. The Forward Chassé (Left Foot) may be danced as steps 3, 4, 5 of the Open Basic [Basic Movement from Open Facing Position] or as steps 3, 4, 5 of figures started with man's L (lady's R) foot.

When the Forward Chassé (Left Foot) is danced in a facing position the lady is dancing the man's footwork for the Backward Chassé (Right Foot). To dance the Backward Chassé (Right Foot) we need only to reverse the positions of the man and lady such that the man is backing, as described briefly below.

## **Backward Chassé (Right Foot)**

1/2 measure – 1& 2 or 3&4

Level of Difficulty 2

### **MAN**

LOP facing RLOD, backing LOD - Dance the lady's part of the Forward Chassé (Left Foot)

### **LADY**

LOP facing LOD, forward LOD - Dance the man's part of the Forward Chassé (Left Foot)

## **GENERAL NOTES**

In its basic or simplest form, step 2 (man & lady) of the Backward Chassé would be a half-closing step, the Latin Cross would not be used.

The Backward Chassé (Right Foot) may also be danced in Butterfly position, Open position, Left Open position and without hands joined. The direction stated above is only to describe the figure. The figure may be danced facing any direction. Either form of the Backward Chassé (Right Foot) may be danced as steps 3, 4, 5 of the Aida.

## Rondé Chassé

1/2 measure – 1&amp;2 or 3&amp;4

Level of Difficulty 4

### MAN

Any pos fcng any direction - XLIBR/sd R sml stp, sd L,

### MAN

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	any	Rondé L bhnd R	nil	BF	Rondé Chassé	L foot ends in a Latin cross pos with hips undr body
2	&	-	sd R sml stp	-	F		hips to R
3	2	-	sd L	-	BF		left leg strgtens with hips strongly to L - R leg also strgt

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### MAN

Start in any position facing any direction. **[Step 1.]** Cross left foot behind right using a slight Rondé action, left knee tucked behind right knee, left knee compressed [right knee slightly compressed]. The left foot ends in a Latin Cross position behind the right foot, ball-flat. The hips will move slightly to the left. **[Step 2.]** Step side on right foot, using a very small step, to flat of foot, almost like closing to the left foot. The right hip will be to right side, full weight. **[Step 3.]** Step side with the left foot, straightening the leg, ball-flat. The hips will move strongly to the left and the right leg will also straighten.

## GENERAL NOTES

This figure is almost exclusively danced by the man. The more experienced dancer will use the Rondé Chassé as an option to replace a Left Chassé.

## Hip Twist Chassé

1/2 measure – 1&amp;2 or 3&amp;4

Level of Difficulty 6

**MAN & LADY \*See General Notes**

WALL for man, COH for lady - fwd R XIFL/cl L to R, sd R,

**MAN**

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	WALL	fwd R XIFL	1/4 LF	TF	delayed fwd walk well acrs body	hips twist to L – L knee compressed, R knee slightly compressed
2	&	-	cl L to R	1/4 RF	F		both knees compressed, hips central
3	2	-	sd R		BF		knees strgt, hips to R

**LADY**

Step #	Timing	Facing Alignment	Step & Direction	Amount of Turn	Footwork	Action Used	Lead/Technique
1	1	COH	fwd R XIFL	1/4 LF	TF	delayed fwd walk well acrs body	hips twist to L – L knee compressed, R knee slightly compressed
2	&	-	cl L to R	1/4 RF	F		both knees compressed, hips central
3	2	-	sd R		BF		knees strgt, hips to R

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

**MAN & LADY**

**[Step 1.]** Step forward and across the left leg with the right foot. The knee will be bent or compressed. The foot placement is toe-flat and the hips will start to move to the right.

**[Step 2.]** Close the left foot to the right, ball-flat. Both knees will be compressed and keep the hips under the body. **[Step 3.]** Step side with the right foot, ball-flat. The knee will straighten and the hips will move to the right. The left leg should be straight also.

## GENERAL NOTES

**MAN**

The Hip Twist Chassé may be used to replace any Chassé to the right.

**LADY**

The Hip Twist Chassé may be used for steps 3, 4, 5 of the Closed Hip Twist however the amount of turn will be slightly greater.