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Mambo On 2: The Birth of a New Form of Dance in New York City

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**Though** much scholarly attention

has been paid to the development of salsa music in New York City, academics have so far given little consideration to the dance that accompanies it. Salsa dancers, on the other hand, have given the matter much thought, actively researching their art form's history and, in the process, developing a community-based dance theory. They are fully aware that salsa is a dance music that would not and could not exist without the support of dancers; even the great Tito Puente credited the rise of mambo music, salsa's most immediate precursor, to the dance's "explosion," stating, "without a dance the music cannot be popular" (Feuerstein: "Tito Puente"). Ethnomusicologist Marisol Berríos-Miranda has noted, "Dancing parallels music making in the sense that it is localized or domesticated" (2002: 44): in other words, as local styles of salsa music have been developed in such places as Colombia, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, so have local varieties of salsa dancing. It is thus unsurprising that a unique style of salsa dance should have evolved in New York City, salsa's place of origin and a hotbed of salsa creativity. What *is* surprising is that so many people are unaware of the history, the creative artistry, and the intricacies of New York salsa and mambo dancing.

for travel to major dance events. Even beginning dancers must attend two- to three-hour workshops up to three times a week, which are usually taught from a “syllabus” or codified list of steps each dance company composes. The intense devotion of all levels of “on 2” dancers has led to the formation of a tightly knit “on 2” community in New York, which maintains its bonds through a multitude of web sites promoting the style (e.g. [www.salsaweb.com](http://www.salsaweb.com), [www.salsaroots.com](http://www.salsaroots.com), [www.planetsalsa.com](http://www.planetsalsa.com), [www.salsanewyork.com](http://www.salsanewyork.com), and dance company sites), online discussion groups, and monthly events called “socials.” At the student level this community is formed of New Yorkers of all ethnic groups; at the professional level, it is formed mainly of Puerto Rican New Yorkers. Specialist DJs<sup>5</sup> cater to them, while nightclub owners must make special concessions in terms of music, flooring, and lighting, in order to attract “on 2” dancers (see Navarro 2000; Espinoza: “Club owners”).

New York dancers also have a unique dynamic that allows an exchange between the street and the stage, and they maintain a style that lies somewhere between the two. The designation of a style or movement as either “street” or “ballroom” is a contentious endeavor in the salsa/mambo world. Though for ballroom dancers “street” may be a derogatory term used to describe unpolished, unschooled dancers, the same term carries a positive connotation for salsa/mambo dancers. “Street” moves are those that arise organically, from “the people,” while “ballroom” is often seen as artificial or inauthentic. Because of this, “on 2” dancers occupy a tricky space and must continually negotiate between the two categories in order to achieve their artistic goals while still remaining “authentic.” The demanding technique and high level of showmanship clearly set “on 2” dancers apart from “street” or “nightclub” dancers, but it is an art that takes much from the street. While it is hard to imagine a “street” foxtrot or waltz that would influence competitive ballroom dancers, that is exactly the situation that exists in the salsa/mambo world. Many dancers take movements seen in clubs or learned from friends and relatives and adapt them to the stage, and most try to maintain the relaxed, improvisatory feel of “street” dancing.

Finally, the emphasis on counting and rhythm gives New York dancers a unique relationship to their music. “On 2” dancers realize that their dance style requires a particular type of salsa, specifically classic *salsa dura* (hard salsa, an “old school” style made in 1960s–’70s New York) in the classic Nuyorican style that features a tightly locked rhythm section and clearly audible, repetitive percussion patterns (Berríos-Miranda 2002). “On 2” instructors teach their students to listen to specific rhythms; dancers frequently discuss particular songs and rhythms at length and in great detail on web sites devoted to the subject.<sup>6</sup> Such discourse has led to the development of what might be called a community-based dance theory, too detailed to be fully explained here, which explains their perceptions of how dance and music should interlock.



*Tito Puente and Eddie Torres. Courtesy Eddie and Maria Torres. Reprinted, by permission, from Sydney Hutchinson.*

Cuban composer and bandleader Dámaso Pérez Prado brought it to Mexico in the early 1950s. His early mambo recordings, which included “Mambo no. 5” and “Qué rico el mambo,” were such hits that he toured the United States and Latin America in 1951, eventually relocating to Los Angeles.

When Pérez Prado and other Cuban musicians brought the mambo to New York, they entered an atmosphere in which the mixing of cultures and music had become commonplace. Ever since the first Latin Americans began to settle in El Barrio or Spanish Harlem and in Brooklyn around the turn of the twentieth century, they had been interacting with their neighbors and exchanging musical styles. Cubans and

Puerto Ricans, who dominated New York’s Latino community since the early 20th century, worked particularly closely, often playing together in musical ensembles. Even Tito Puente, the great Puerto Rican composer, bandleader, and percussionist, was mentored by Cuban pianist José Curbelo and performed with Cuban singer Frank Grillo’s Machito Orchestra in the early 1940s (Loza 1999: 3–4). In addition, though a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that Cuban and Puerto Rican music were closely related since long before their arrival in New York; in fact, musicologist Isabelle Leymarie calls Puerto Rico “Cuba’s musical sister” (2002: 3). Many tropical musics became known as “Cuban” only because of that country’s dominance of the Latin American recording industry from the 1920s through the 1950s (Quintero Rivera 1999: 100). The exchange of musical ideas between Cubans and Puerto Ricans continued and even increased in New York (see Berríos-Miranda 1999:47–8), but of particular importance to the development of the mambo were both groups’ interactions with African-American musicians.

The first collaborations between Latino and African-American musicians in New York date to the time of World War I, which the United States entered shortly after Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship in March 1917. Later that same year, African-American bandleader James Reese Europe traveled to Puerto Rico in search of musicians to play in his famed military jazz band, the Hellfighters of the all-Black

Miguelito Valdes and Mongo Santamaria, were touring the country;<sup>7</sup> even pop singers were recording mambo tunes, for example Rosemary Clooney's "Mambo Italiano" (Roberts 1999: 130, 136). The dance was so popular that *Downbeat* magazine announced, "Dance schools find these days that a mambo class is as essential as a credit payment plan" (October 6, 1954). The mambo had become a true craze.

Two distinct styles were already in evidence even at this early time. A contemporary *Dance Magazine* article provided a mambo "how-to" that describes them:

The term Mambo is today used to designate two forms of Rumba which are quite dissimilar in appearance. As a foundation for either the smooth or the hectic style, however, the same or similar basic rhythm and step variations are taught. The outward differences come later, depending on the skill attained, the predominance of smooth or jazzed up band music, conservative or Jitterbug temperaments and a predilection for closed dancing or for opened up fancy steps (Butler 1953: 52).

The distinctions made between these two 1953 styles seem to parallel the differences between modern nightclub or "street" salsa and New York mambo. The "smooth" or "conservative" style is analogous to international nightclub style, while the "jazzed up," "fancy" style seems to describe a precursor to current "on 2" dancing, with its flashiness and focus on open footwork. Further support for the appearance of "on 2" at this stage appears in an Arthur Murray-style footprint chart in the same article which shows the basic mambo step on a 234 678 count.

Such descriptions demonstrate that New York mambo was unlike the Cuban version since the very beginning; they simultaneously offer clues as to its actual origin. Rather than a back-and-forth or a side-to-side partner dance, Cuban mambo was and is a simple step-tap step performed solo, seldom with a partner (significantly, the Cuban dance group Las Mulatas del Fuego, who performed in New York in 1949, was all female, so it could not have included partner dancing).<sup>8</sup> This basic Cuban step is quite similar to a New York mambo shine or freestyle step called "*pachanga taps*" (*pachanga* was another Latin dance/music craze in NYC during the 1960s). So, although New York mambo music did have a Cuban basis, the new mambo dance seemed to take little from its Cuban predecessors. The basic American mambo step was instead derived from the ballroom-style rumba popular

to idealize that place and time, glossing over some realities of the situation, such as the club's predominantly middle-class orientation and the fact that dancers in other clubs, such as the Savoy in Harlem, also influenced the 'Palladium' mambo. However, although the situation was most likely considerably more complex than that described by Torres and Rodríguez, the setting remains central to discourse about "on 2" origins.

The Palladium was as important for musicians as it was for dancers. It was there that Tito Puente earned the nickname, "the King of Mambo." *El Rey* himself commented on the importance of the place:

It was 'in' to learn to dance the Mambo no matter what part of society you came from. And so here was a place, the Palladium, where everybody could come to dance or learn the Mambo. Dance studios sent their students to the Palladium, where they could learn and see great dancers—ballet stars, Broadway stars, expert Mambo dancers—all in one place. And I geared my music to these dancers.

(Puente in Feuerstein: "Tito Puente")

Puente's sensitivity to the needs of dancers, perhaps a result of his own background as a ballroom and tap dancer (see Loza 1999: 2), appears to be one of the reasons for the symbiotic relationship that came to exist between mambo music and dance, each feeding off of and growing in relation to the other. For instance, the quick tempo and impressive solos performed by instrumentalists like Puente demanded that dancers improvise more complicated steps. As pianist/arranger Eddie Palmieri recalls, "Back then, the dancers had a communication with the band. It was one on one. You'll never see it again" (Ratliff 2002).

Fans of New York mambo are to this day on a first-name basis with Palladium dancers they have never met; such was their renown. Many of the "show" dancers and contest winners even went on to achieve national fame. Palladium dancers came from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and were trained in a wide variety of dance styles—a diversity that was possible only in New York. For example, today's dancers are indebted to the cabaret dance team of Augie and Margo Rodríguez<sup>9</sup> for their blending of ballet and mambo (Craddock and Aguilar 2003), use of dramatic Spanish flamenco steps and styling (SalsaRoots: "Eddie Torres"), and acrobatic lifts that came from ballroom dance (SalsaRoots: "Ernie Ensley"). Augie and Margo's distinctive style helped them to land television performances on the Ed Sullivan and Johnny Carson shows (Wetzel 2000), as well as appearances before three

Andrew Jarrick, Mike Ramos, and Freddie Ríos later performed with the Cha-Cha Aces (Boggs 1992: 147; Leymarie 2002: 165), a group that became famous for blending tap dance and cha-cha by combining “ballet arm and hand gestures with Afro-Cuban body movement and tap footwork” (Stearns 1994: 360).

The Palladium dancers created a style of dance that, though based on antecedent forms such as swing, jazz, rumba, and ballroom dances, was really a new genre unique to that place and time. (One might also surmise that the soloistic, improvisatory, often acrobatic tradition of bomba dancing may have had an influence.) One Palladium dancer, José Torres, remembers, “There was something fresh and amazing about the dancing [there]” (Boggs 1992: 130). Unusual moves were invented to take advantage of the particulars of the space. For example, since a railing and columns enclosed the dance floor, “One of [the Palladium mambo’s] indelible hallmarks was for a male to dance a few steps and to ‘fall’ against one of these structures with an outstretched arm and [right] himself . . . all the while in time with the music. The smooth execution of this movement was one clear sign that one had mastered the dance” (ibid). Eddie Torres also recalls that Palladium dancers performed more openwork than partner work, which encouraged the inventive hand and arm movements for which they were known (SalsaRoots, “Eddie Torres”).

The flashy style these dancers practiced was a product of several factors. First, necessity: in order to be noticed, and particularly in order to make money as dancers in highly competitive New York City, one needed to find a way to stand out from the crowd. Angel Rodríguez explains, “The only way to impress [the other dancers] was to do something jazzy” (2003). Secondly, the New York mambo was strongly influenced by other flamboyant styles such as Broadway theater dance and competitive ballroom dance. This may be partly owed to the Palladium’s physical proximity to the Broadway theaters—indeed, Broadway dancers could be seen on its dance floor (Feuerstein, “Tito Puente”)—but it probably has more to do with the popularity of movie musicals during the mambo’s heyday. Millie Donay remembers, “I went to the movies a lot and musicals were very big then. Each time I went to a musical, I would walk home dancing” (Feuerstein 1992).<sup>11</sup> The integration of so many diverse and demanding dances into the New York mambo ensured that the virtuosity of the Palladium dancers was at the same level as that of the musicians they went to hear.

A whole generation of musicians and dancers were inspired by the energy of the Palladium. Larry Harlow, a Jewish pianist who was to become one of the pioneers of salsa music in the early 1970s, recalls:

I started to go to the Palladium when I was 15 years old.



effectively argued by scholars like Marisol Berríos-Miranda (1999, 2002); in addition, the term lost some of its commercial veneer as the music became increasingly political in New York as well as widely distributed throughout Latin America, where a variety of national and local styles were created. Further exploration of the topic is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to remember that Cubans were no longer present in such force in New York after the United States severed relations with Cuba after the 1959 revolution, effectively ending the era of musical collaboration that marked the early twentieth century. New Yorkers in the 1960s and '70s experimented with a wide variety of musical styles and rhythms—a practice, it has been noted, that Nuyorican musicians had initiated in the early decades of the century.

The New York Puerto Rican musicians who created salsa began with Cuban rhythms like son and *guaracha* and instrumentation like the flute-led charanga ensemble, but they quickly made these their own through experimentation and innovation, “juxtaposition and syncretism” (Berríos-Miranda 2002: 28), in a story that parallels that of the mambo. Just as in the old Palladium, early salsa artists came from a variety of backgrounds, from Jewish New Yorker Larry Harlow, to Panamanian Ruben Blades, to Dominican Johnny Pacheco and Italian-American Jerry Masucci, the founders of Fania Records. However, New York-born Puerto Ricans such as Willie Colón, Ray Barretto, Eddie and Charlie Palmieri, Ritchie Ray, and Bobby Cruz, were the most numerous and among the most influential of this new crop of Latin musicians. Stylistic innovations such as Eddie Palmieri’s addition of trombones to the traditional charanga ensemble, Rafael Cortijo’s experiments with *bomba* and *plena*, and Willie Colón’s use of *jibaro* music produced a distinct musical genre that lived up to its spicy name. This music sounds much different from its Cuban predecessors and is far different from current Cuban styles such as *songo* and *timba*, and it became an important symbol of Nuyorican identity and culture (see Berríos-Miranda 1999).

Of course, this new music had to have a new type of dance as well. Early *salseros* and *salseras* danced a basic “on 1” three-step with a limited repertoire of simple turns (Rodríguez 2003). This was similar to the basic step still done today in most parts of the world (see figure 4, page 133, and SalsaRoots: “Mambo”), and is still included in its original form (albeit to new timing) on many “on 2” instructors’ syllabi as the appropriately named “salsa step.” However, in the 1970s talented young dancers were drawn to another, more demanding popular dance. The Latin hustle developed out of swing dancing but became a symbol of the disco years. It is a flashy, performance-oriented dance that features fast spins, “tricks” such as aerial lifts, and distinctive turn patterns that “were longer and more explosive [than in salsa]” (Rodríguez 2003). Angel Rodríguez (2003), founder of Razz M’Tazz Dance Company, recalls,

the great New York mambo dancers Eddie hoped to emulate (Ortiz 2001). Instead, he learned primarily from watching and emulating other dancers. Eight years later, Eddie went to Tito with his wife Maria and showed Tito two numbers he had choreographed. Tito was suitably impressed, and in 1980, Eddie and Maria began performing with the orchestra as the Tito Puente Dancers.

Again Puente, having been a dancer himself, was a great supporter of mambo dancing and the idea that the music and the dance were a symbiotic pair. While other dancers were warning Torres that he would never succeed as a professional dancer if he did not do the hustle, Puente was simultaneously cautioning other dancers not to abandon the mambo for the hustle. Torres recalls,

Tito actually used to make a little speech before we would perform. He would say, 'Listen, right now you guys have to get back to the salsa and back to the mambo, back to the dance, and keep it alive, because right now Eddie and Maria are the last of the Mohicans.' He said, 'If this couple retires tomorrow, we may never see professional Latin dancing again.' He said, 'You've got to send your kids to school . . . and we've got to keep this alive. Because the music is dying also, but if the dance dies, it's over and we're going to lose this' (2003).

Meanwhile, Torres teamed up with a ballroom mambo instructor, June LaBerta, who encouraged him to put counts to his dancing, to name his steps, and to come up with a syllabus: an endeavor he compares to "science and poetry coming together" (Torres 2003). It was she who helped him to come up with his famous "on 2" counting system by putting his basic step to a musical count. Aided by his new understanding of music and dance theory, Torres taught mambo classes but remembers that interest was still low: "A full class for me in those days, in the seventies, was maybe three to five people" (Torres 2003). However, around 1983 the Copacabana nightclub began to give salsa nights on Tuesdays, and the organizer made a concerted effort to attract New York's best dancers (Rodríguez 2003). This effort was successful, and shortly thereafter Eddie Torres was hired to give lessons there (Rodríguez 2003).

Torres traces the mambo's revival and the beginnings of the current "on 2" scene to one historic event in 1987. Puente had hired him to choreograph some numbers for a show at the Apollo Theater, a tribute to Machito that would be televised. Torres hand-picked sixty of the best nightclub dancers and put them through four months of training prior to the show, noting, "The real story behind this was the preparation." Torres relates a conversation with the show's costume designer to illustrate his point

less legitimate (since most “on 2” dancers see themselves as far removed from ballroom dancers); most untrained or “street” dancers naturally dance on 123, so the Torres count is more legitimate. In truth, the two versions are not so very different since, in practice, Torres dancers actually step well ahead of counts one and five, pushing their count nearly a half-beat closer to a 234:

MUSICAL COUNT:	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8
DANCERS' COUNT:	(1)		2		3		(5)		6		7					

Still, these two schools of mambo are different in more ways than timing: style and steps also vary. In addition, each version has its own pedagogical merit. Torres's is easier to begin with since most students find it easier to step on the downbeat than to hold it; it simultaneously forces them into finding the “2” because they must break on it (see figure 3, page 132). The learning curve is steeper with the RMT count, but Angel believes that in the end his students will be stronger dancers who are able to dance with any partner because of their understanding of the music (2003). Both instructors teach their students to listen for the clave and the conga slap in order to find the all-important “2” count, but opinions differ on whether starting the step on count one (as in the Torres method) or on count two (RMT method) best matches with the clave rhythm. The controversy is not likely to be resolved any time soon because of the nearly fanatical dedication some dancers have to one system or the other.

In conclusion, during the twenty-year period from 1966 to 1987, the mambo was in decline and in fact nearly died out. Most Palladium dancers had retired; even those who still performed were not actively teaching. Most performing, teaching dancers were doing Latin hustle instead, or a combination of salsa and hustle. Meanwhile, salsa dancing was purely social and had not yet developed as an artistic, staged dance. The mambo revival did not begin until the late 1980s, following the televised Apollo Theater performance by Eddie Torres and Tito Puente. After that, Eddie Torres and Angel Rodríguez formulated and systematized their two distinct methods of teaching and dancing “on 2” mambo, each eventually incorporating ideas from salsa and/or hustle. This set the stage for the current proliferation of “on 2” dance schools and companies.

### **Third generation: The “On 2” era**

Though the Palladium era dancers laid the kinetic foundations for “on 2” dancing and the salsa/hustle generation laid the theoretical ones, it was not until the current generation of dancers emerged during the 1990s that “on 2” dancing became a genre in its own right and a true “movement,” in the sense of having coherence, aim, and numbers. The current generation is characterized by growth, dissemination, commercialization, and codification of the “on 2” style, combined with the ever more demanding technique that is a result

of each company also are recorded through steps named by the company members and instructors who invented them. For example, the RMT syllabus includes “Konig’s Grapevine” for instructor Carlos Konig and “Addie’s Tradition” for company director Addie Rodríguez.

The emphasis on labeling steps extends to an increased concern for the proper labeling of the dance as a whole. As noted, the word salsa has been controversial ever since it was first applied to music in the 1970s. Though most now consider it an acceptable term for the musical genre, it is still the subject of intense debate among dancers. Many, even most, “on 2” dancers prefer to call their style “mambo” rather than “salsa,” possibly as a result of Eddie Torres’s preference for the former term. Some differentiate between the two, saying that salsa is “on 1” while mambo is “on 2,” or that “salsa is the music, mambo is the dance” (Bello: “Salsa music”). To others, either term is acceptable and both refer to the same thing (Espinoza: “Breaking”). In the words of Angel Rodríguez, “For me, it’s all the same. Three steps back, three steps forward, and put the kitchen sink in” (2003). These differing opinions are most likely a result of different life experiences—Eddie’s a product of his partnership with Tito Puente, who also disliked the “salsa” label; Angel’s a consequence of his extensive experience with non-salsa dances like the hustle.

Though the basic steps of New York mambo are the same as in the past, much stylistic innovation is taking place. Shines become ever more complicated as older steps are dissected, speeded up, or recombined in novel ways. In addition, Eddie Torres notes, “Palladium dancers used to do a lot of open work. The second generation of where I came from started to develop a lot of partner work. But now the youngsters who are coming to Mambo are influenced by hip-hop and reggae. . . . [And] I see the new dance groups performing using a specific storyline” (SalsaRoots: “Eddie Torres”). Storyline or themed dances, such as Razz M’Tazz’s recent “Mission Impossible” sequence and Cultural Explotion’s “Salsa Circus,” increase the theatricality of the mambo, while the mixing of hip-hop and reggae moves with ‘traditional’ mambo steps parallels recent experiments in the fusion of salsa and hip-hop music by groups such as DLG (Dark Latin Groove, now defunct). Thus, the dance reflects the transcultural experiences of the young, New York-born Puerto Ricans who perform it, just as the mambo music of the 1950s reflected the musical exchanges between Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and African Americans during the first half of the 20th century. One scholar has claimed that salsa music is in fact defined by its “free combination of diverse rhythms and genres from the Caribbean” (Quintero Rivera 1999: 89—author’s translation); salsa/mambo dancing might also be defined by its free combination of movement vocabularies from the Caribbean and the United States.

Another new development on the scene has been the rise of “socials,”

Today's "on 2" community is based not only on a common interest, but also—for some—on nostalgia, and on a nearreligious devotion to salsa/mambo music, dance, and especially the clave that ties the two together. One might expect that dancers who were there would remember the Palladium ballroom with a certain wistfulness, but even dancers who are too young to have any actual memories of the Palladium "remember" it through community discourse. The Palladium seems to represent a kind of utopia, free of prejudice, where a near perfection of music and dance was attained. The style in which dancers write and talk about the Palladium encourages its mythic status. An otherwise straightforward article on early mambo dancers by Alan Feuerstein (1992), a mambo enthusiast who began dancing in the 1950s, opens like a fairy tale with a description of the Palladium:

It was the early 1950s. The Mambo craze gripped New York City. All the great Latin music, musicians and dancers could be found congregating in one place – The Palladium dance hall on 53rd Street and Broadway. It was called the Home of the Mambo. Although the Palladium no longer exists as a physical structure . . . it remains in people's memories as a spiritual center for all that was authentic and exciting about the best days of the Mambo.

Another dancer wrote a short story on the subject in similarly heightened language, describing an idealized Palladium as "a different world, rich with people, cultures, melodies and rhythms in counterpoint" (Kellin 2001?).

Clave is another subject that is elevated to a magical status in mambo discourse. In describing his introduction to "on 2" mambo, instructor Mike Bello writes,

I have to say that almost from the moment I was first made really aware of its existence, something rang true and I GOT IT—the truth of the clave as the life force that drives the music and dance. I accepted the truth about clave kind of like one might accept religion, even without 'proof' at the time, because deep down it FEELS RIGHT, and like a religion, I embraced the 'word' of the clave (Bello: "How Mike"—original emphasis).

Such speech seems unusually dramatic, even to enthusiastic dancers.

For academics, much work remains to be done in the analysis of salsa/mambo dancing. For example, this researcher plans to write further on dance-related discourse and localized dance styles and communities. One hopes that others may also find dance an important lens through which to examine cultural values, continuity, and change, as important as is music to the formation and maintenance of ethnic and other group identities and boundaries. For dancers, no such work is necessary. Their beautiful, inventive, elegant movements already have described Nuyorican history, culture, and artistic achievements more eloquently than can any research paper. Eddie Torres asks, “You know why this dance is so unique? Because you can go out tonight in New York City and find a club and dance the night away. You can do mambo all night, and then tomorrow night you can invite your friend to come see you at the Madison Square Garden. How many dances can actually do that?” (Torres 2003). Equally at home in the club, on the street, or on the stage, mambo is a living art, continually reshaped by its practitioners to fit their new realities. In the mambo, history is being made every day.



**FIGURES**

*Key to figures: Black footprints indicate the inactive foot (no motion); Grey footprints indicate the active foot. The number inside indicates on which musical count the motion occurs; White footprints indicate the previous position of the active foot.*

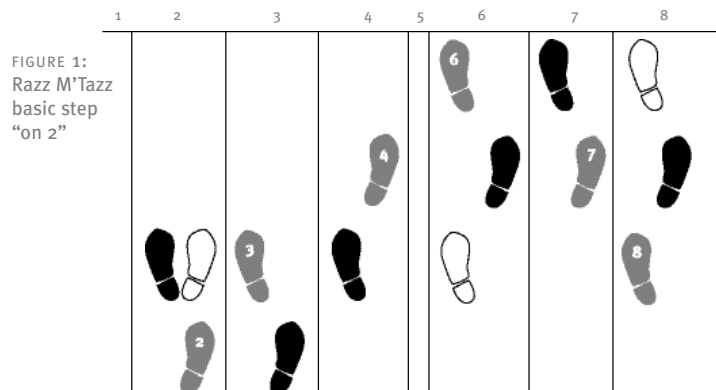


FIGURE 1: Razz M'Tazz basic step “on 2”

In the 1950s, dance instructors called this the “diamond” pattern (see figure 2; Butler 1953). However, the step can also be performed with less forward-and-back motion by placing steps 4 and 8 next to the inactive foot, rather than behind or ahead of it, which produces the same floor pattern used by many nightclub dancers (see figure 4).



FIGURE 2: The diamond pattern, shown on Razz M'Tazz count.



FIGURE 3:

<sup>6</sup> Articles frequently appear on [www.salsaweb.com](http://www.salsaweb.com), [www.dancefreak.com](http://www.dancefreak.com), [www.salsanewyork.com](http://www.salsanewyork.com), [www.salsacrazy.com](http://www.salsacrazy.com), and other sites.

<sup>7</sup> According to Cuban Pete, Mambo USA was a terrible failure because of the integration of white and black performers (2003, personal communication). Though integration was an important factor in the birth of the mambo in New York, when the dance was taken out of its home context it did not go over well with audiences.

<sup>8</sup> The author traveled to Cuba three times during 2000–2001, where she studied popular and traditional dances with the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, Cuba's official folk dance troupe. They teach mambo as a combination of the step-tap pachanga step and a waltz-like step; Cuban social dancers also perform the step-tap upon hearing a mambo tune. More like “on 2” mambo is the Cuban son, which is taught with the first step on count 4 and a pause on 1, effectively producing the 234 count of New York mambo.

<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, Cuban Pete was Augie's first teacher and was responsible for introducing him to Margo (Craddock and Aguilar 2003).

<sup>10</sup> In addition, “Cuban” seems to have been synonymous with all things Latino for the general American public. Puerto Rican conga player José Calderón, a major progenitor of the boogaloo style that combined Latin and soul musics during the 1960s, was nicknamed “Joe Cuba.”

<sup>11</sup> Angel Rodríguez also cites Gene Kelly as an important influence on the Latin Hustle (2003).

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Craddock, Cuban Pete's partner, confirmed in a telephone conversation that he does not count—instead, he dances to the clave. My conversations with Puerto Rican dancers on the island showed that this is the way that most of them conceive of and teach the dance—to the clave, rather than to counts (Pion 2000; Martínez 2000; Ortos 2003).

<sup>13</sup> While many other “on 2” dance companies have contributed unique moves and stylings to the dance, I focus on these two because they have both the longest histories and the most clearly defined musical-choreographic theories.

<sup>14</sup> The movement of mambo from the street to the ballroom and dance studio has certainly resulted in or contributed to its becoming a more middle class dance form. However, this should not be understood as referring to a white middle class. “On 2” students are an ethnically diverse group, though most hold white-collar jobs and belong to or aspire to join the middle class. “On 2” professionals are nearly all New York-born Puerto Ricans, most likely because their identification with salsa/mambo drives them to pursue it more than other dance forms, but also because of subtle pressures sometimes exerted against dancers of other ethnicities who “don't belong” or who are seen by audiences or students as “less authentic.”

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