

The latin dance

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When people think or talk about latinmusic, often relates it to happy times, sensuality and drums. However, there is a big part of the story that is not looked into and not many talk about or take into consideration. It is a big mystery, on how this dance came to be what they are known today in the world. There is a wide list of dances originated in central and south America, although, there is only a hand full that are world wide known. These dances have the influence of Africanculture, Native culture and European culture.

To explain, " Latin Dance" generally refer to dances in Latin America and the Caribbean. Countries that speak romance languages derived from Latin. But when is related to dance it refers specifically to Hipic countries. According to Mark E. Perry " Music and dance are means to signify identity and demonstrate differences of ethnicity, social class, gender, age, occupation, religion, and politics" (par 2). Giving an insight to help understand the importance and the mark that the practice of this rituals left in order to define the Latin American culture.

Furthermore, Indigenous dance in the Americas where to the bits of a drum. Each culture expressed their stories and emotions in the dance; harvest, weddings, funerals, births, coming of age, and war. Some dances where simple steps in line, circles, or zigzags. The step would be done by the leader of the tribe, and the rest would follow dancing and repeating the same as their leader. This dances where sometimes for everyone or women and men only. This celebration would last many days. Many of the dances where considered religious ceremonies so they where very important for the tribe.

Also, after colonization, Europe influenced the tribes greatly. Colonist from France, Spain, England and Portugal. According to Musmon on her book "Latin and Caribbean Dance" she explained that " These influences included classical music of the era and, more important, folk and popular songs and dances of the period... including the quadrille, the contredanse, and the zapateo." (pg 18, 19). these dances can be seen in many south American traditions, but in the rural areas of the cities, famous with in the country, but not internationally.

In the first place, we will start with Carnival. It is very traditional in Latin American countries, usually very loud and extravagant. Carnival was very influenced by Catholicism, starting forty days before Easter. The word carnival comes from the latin word " carne" and " vale", meaning no eating meat during lent. This Carnivals are very similar throughout the different latin countries. They came into place right after colonization, the masters would allow the slaves to participate in them, in doing so, the slaves would introduce pieces from their African Nations; costumes, masks, feathers, dancing in circle and drums. The masks often meant hiding from supernatural beings or capturing the attention from the spirit world.

Countries that celebrate Carnival until now are Brazil, Cuba, Argentina, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Colombia.

In like manner Samba, which comes from Brazil, discovered by the Portuguese. As Europeans, they imported slaves from the west coast of Africa to work for them. The Maxixe was the first stablished dance as the popular dance. This dance became popular in Europe, North America, and south

America countries at the beginning of twentieth century. Samba came into place as a happy Afro Brazilian dance from a west African dance called the "Lundu"; evolving into the "Zemba Queca" transforming into Samba in 1885. It became the official dance for the carnival at the same time as "capoeira" infiltrating the circles of "candomblé", African religion. even though Marc A. Hertzman explains in his book making Samba that "the relationship between music and religion shifted during the 1029s and 1930s" (pg120). Providing a little more liberty on the composition of Samba music.

The individual dance performed by the Carnivals' participants is called "samba No pe". There are several variations, depending of the music of the region from where the piece is. Lambada came from the samba. This is a very sensual couple dance. The dancers sway their hips from side to side interlocking their feet. Lambada was briefly famous in 1989 because of a French singer that tried to make it popular in Europe, he succeeded in Japan for some years but did not last.

Coupled with Samba there is Capoeira as explained before. This dance is a mixture of martial arts, music, dance and games. Some believe capoeira came form Africa, others claim that is Brazilian, created by the slaves to defend themselves. It is told that in the seventeen century a group of forty slaves rebelled against their master, killing all the whites; they hid in the mountains, founding the "palmares", a refuge for run away slaves. The number came to be over twenty thousand people living in the "palmares", It is believed that Capoeira was formed there.

In fact It's a martial art that the slaves disguise as singing and dancing so their masters would not find out they were training. Eventually became a punishable practice in the nineteen century. Experts claim that the secret in the dance is what is called " malandragem", Meaning con artist. Katia Wesolowski explains in her article Professionalizing Capoeira: The Politics of Play in Twenty-First-Century Brazil that " Malandragem is survival, it is surviving the fight that is every day life" (pg 86) explaining that the practice with out the touch of Malandragem is just exaggerated movements and in would lose its core.

In the same fashion Mambo which is known to come from Cuba. Thru 1950's Mambo was famous all in North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia and parts of Africa. Before it was so famous in 1930's to early 1940's Mambo had newer ways of playing and dancing. It included short and syncopated rhythmic patterns. Instruments were charangas, conjuntos and big bands. This rhythm was the cue for dancers to perform innovated moves. This bands where modeled after American swing bands and performed mostly for the Cuban white upper class. The name Mambo was not given to the specific style at the time, but instead was used to identify a new trend.

Also, Mambo was very criticized by North America, Central America and Latin America, considered a depravation and attack to customs and traditions. Even in Cuba, critics where afraid of the influence of African American dance forms. Anything that reminded them of the diversity of the nations race with the racial miscegenation and specially the black population. Many dancers

along the Americas felt that when they were dancing Mambo, it made them empowered to re-appropriate, and resist this stereotype.

At the same time Rumba also originated in Cuba in the nineteenth century. It traveled to Spain, parts of Africa, Mexico, across the Caribbean and United States. Original dancing stayed in the rural and urban homes of mainly black Cuban neighborhoods. By the end of the twentieth century it had such a variety of styles that it traveled to flashy cabarets, intimate theaters of international display. Original rumba was mimetic, it would tell stories about dolls and flying kites. It had male and female with hip isolation and improvisation, three drums, bamboo box and shaker.

Used to be called " Rumba Yambu" or " Rumba de Cajon" because of the bamboo box. Ivonne Daniel shares with us in his article Rumba then and Now that " Rumba acquired a quicker tempo and a chase rather than polite flirtation" this statement explained how we see the Rumba dance now days were the man vehabes like possessing the woman called " Vacunao" and the woman a deflecting movement this is now called " Rumba Guaguanco". This rhythm was related to the old colonial generation and enslavement period. Rumba was into the first transforming creolizing dances, taking form and structure from central and West African dances. Rumba would sound on the common patio areas, mostly among freed slaves and symbolized its position on the Cuban Soul.

Then, there is Salsa. Many Salsa dancers feel that when dancing their culture and traditions reaffirm. The salsa dancers consider it as a connection to their background or nationality, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican Republic,

Colombian etc. This genre was known in the late 1960's from Latin American musicians that were living in New York. Salsa is a variation of Cuban Mambo under the label of Salsa. The movements of Mambo evolved to weight shifts of Salsa. The Salsa community shares their Spanish language and also their cultural experiences, low economical situation and environment. All is reflected in their lyrics and the improvisation and unpredictability patterns at dancing.

In addition, Merengue. Word originated in Haiti in 1822, believed to come from the Mozambican word "maringa". Originally was Ballroom merengue, but later got mixed with the Afro Cuban influence and became very popular outside the ballrooms, being rejected by the upper European class. It's a march like walk, performed by couples in circle. This rhythm is connected at the same time to Mambo, Rumba, and Tango, all connected to Caribbean music. In 1980 Merengue was very famous in Dominican Republic and spread to Puerto Rico and New York, giving some competition to Salsa dance. Merengue is easier to dance than Salsa, which consists of steps between the left and the right foot.

By the same token, Cumbia. There are different opinions to which where the dance came from. There are two types, the Colombian style is more African and more hip movement, with a tambora which is a type of drum.

The Mexican style has more small hops with trumpets and horns. Cumbia originated in 1800, from the slaves at the coastal area, it was away of the slaves to imitate the Spaniard owners. It was done barefoot, long skirts, African rhythms and south American Indian instruments.

The dance can be performed in groups or couples. When is done into couples, is a flirtation between man and woman, moving towards and away from each other, with wide arms open but never touching each other. Cumbia became more famous in the fifties because the instrumentation was more orchestrated. Writer Heather Wisner wrote on her article for Dance Magazine that Laura Altman who is a Cumbia danceteacher in Miami says "Miami's annual two-week March Carnival festival, typically features a Colombian Cumbia contingent along with the Salsa Dancing Cubans" providing us an idea of how popular this dance is in modern times.

Lastly, Tango. This dance has been always associated with Argentina and is history. The dance movements have become the symbol of passion, sensuality and erotic love. The origins come from the black Argentine population. The nationals have completely ignored the existence of this population in the construction of the country. Tango was adopted in the nineteenth century by the whites in middle class, working class, dance halls Parisian salons. Tango is considered a word from African origins and referred to dancing to the bit of a drum.

The salves where the first ones to go to a Tango. Music composed is often full of silences, expressive accentuations, sudden dramatic turns and glides and the lyrics of a faithless love. The writer John Charles Chasteen expresses in his book Latin American popular Culture Since Independence that " In fact I will argue that the modern tango was created as a caricature, when the whites mockingly imitated the dance of blacks" (par 5). Leaving a window open to assume that this is true. This suggestion was also made in 1883 by

the scholars of the time. Tango is believed to mean " dancing at the bit of a drum" by the slaves. The slaves would congregate at night with the kings of their original tribes in Africa and created new traditions and rituals. One of these new dances is what is called " Candombe" which came into place in the 1800's.

However, the slaves use to dance in secret, but in 1760 they were already participating in the Corpus Christi procession in Montevideo according to the city council. The participation of the black dancers became so important in the religious events, that the type of dancing became exempted from the law, that prohibited black dancing at any other time. Margaret Musmon states that " in 1816, the waltz, came to Buenos Aires, and by mid-century it was followed by the polka, the mazurka, and the schottische" (pg59). This can be an explanation of the variation of Argentinean dance besides Tango, such as Milonga for example.

In this case, the polyrhythms of the African culture has had a lasting effect on Latin America, its emphasis is on rhythm with regular beats and off beats accents. The Europeans always considered the slaves dance as vulgar and inappropriate, but for the slaves was a commemoration of where they came from and their believes and spirituality. At the same time for the slaves the white dances where vulgar because it involved touching.

In conclusion, its learned that the colonization period change the new world, the believes, traditions, customs and liberty. But, more than that, they did not count on the great impact the slave trading would do to their new kingdom. As the white race was being a contributor to one of the biggest

injustices in the history of mankind, which was slaving another race, life took its toll, and recorded their roots into their colonized. The development of these dances throughout history shows how strong the African culture is, so much that it prevailed the oppression of the white race, and continues to show us a little of what it was thru dance and music. The person that grows up listening to this music and enjoying these dances can never shake the rhythm off the blood stream, he or she is forever trapped in the passion and romanticism of the drums of Latin music.