

# Dances of colombia essay



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Colombia is a country with diverse influences attributed to their geographical location, vibrant history, and various ethnic groups (Davis, 1990). Venezuela and Brazil in the east; Ecuador and Peru in the south; Atlantic Ocean in the north; and Panama and the Pacific Ocean in the west are the borders of Colombia, a Republic in South America (Davis, 1990). The rich and diverse culture of Colombia is reflected in the colorful manifestations of its various dances. These dances are combinations of ethnic dances from different parts of the country and the adaptations of dances from neighboring Latin countries.

African and Native American influences can also be observed in their dances. Colombia is gifted with enormous indigenous rhythms and rich folkloric traditions. The colorful life in Colombia is represented by different types of dances for different occasions. Among these dances are: courtship dances that have elements of pursuit, retreat, and surrender - Cumbia and Bambuco; folk dances that illustrate various local customs - Guabina and Torbellino; a dance which is similar to flamenco - Joropo; an African-originated marimba dance - Currulao; and a rapid waltz-like dance - Pasillo (Davis, 1990).

The Bambuco, Porro, Pasillo, and Cumbia have been the most popular dances that originally started as folk dances but have evolved into urbanized versions (Bethell, 1998). Bambuco is the national folk dance of Colombia with indigenous styles and European cadences. This national dance originated from the Aedean zone of the country (Britannica, 1974). The first dancers of Bambuco were only the natives but later on it became a part of

the ballroom dances. Though this is a courtship dance it does not necessarily mean that it can only be danced by one couple at a time(Olivella).

Courtship is acted upon in the dance with pursuing characteristics of the male and flirting of both parties. Handkerchiefs are used as props in the dance that they wave with their movements(Britannica, 1974). Bambuco, when compared to Joropo, and Pasillo, is the most formal because the dancers though are partners dance separately. The African influence of the music and dance manifests in the rhythm that is erratic and irregular though the melody is smooth like that of the Spaniards music melody.

Bambuco represents the Colombian people well because it depicts its ancestry through having both the African and Spanish influences. This dance song uses an alternation of six-eight and three-quarter meter that is accompanied by a fairly quick tempo. The dance Cumbia originated from Afro-Panamanian and Colombian's of the Atlantic coastal area. African, Spanish, and indigenous influences are blended in this folk dance resulting into the creation of a characteristically unique rhythm and movements.

This dance gained an undying popularity in Latin America but due to the urbanization process some steps were erased like the typical hip movement and the male dancers zigzag motion. The musical characteristics though remained in its generally similar form(Bethell) . The term Cumbia was coined from Cumbe or Kumb, an African word which means " to make noise". It was originally a slave (black) dance but at present already a mixture or mestizo dance. The feet of the dancer most of the time is one in front of the other. The rhythm structure in which Cumbia is based is four-quarter.

Performing the dance does not require any partner unlike salsa. Costumes used in Cumbia dances exhibits the vibrant, colorful lives of the Colombians. Usually white pants and shirts, handmade hats from native materials, colorful large handkerchiefs, and sandals made also of indigenous materials are the usually outfits of male Cumbia dancers. The female dancers on the other hand wear long, colorful skirts that usually have many folds, white short sleeved shirts layered with fabrics, and sandals made of indigenous materials.

The dance reflects the colorful traditions and beautiful music of their culture(Program, 2005). A person who is interested to learn how to dance Cumbia can do the following: enroll in Cumbia classes, watch a video of Cumbia dance, visit a Latino club, and ask any one who knows the dance. Dancing Cumbia was traditionally done in the beach around a bon fire. As a courtship dance, the man is soliciting attention from the female dancer and in return the female dancer tries to deny the feelings she felt through her dance movement. Eventually though the dance will exhibit the flirtations of both man and woman dancer.

In the past, Cumbia is thought to be vulgar by aristocracy due to its street style of dance but with the popularity it gained today many are enchanted already by this dance. Cumbia music that gives life to the Cumbia dance is created originally using only percussion instruments and vocals but nowadays trumpets, saxophones, keyboards, and trombones are also used. The classic Cumbian song is Cumbia Cienaguera which echoes the atmosphere and flavor of Colombia(Program, 2005). A modification of the

Cumbia is another dance Bullerenge, the dance's music is not instrumental like in Cumbia but will vocals.

Bullerenge was created and secretly danced by pregnant women who were not allowed to accompany their husbands to participate in village dances. Women who dance this wear balloon dresses and perform the movements with hands on the side(Program, 2005). Another dance which is derived from Cumbia is Porro or " el porro palitiao". The " palitiao" refers to the striking of the bombo drum along its rim to create a cowbell sound. This genre belongs to the tropical or raspa or mainstream Colombian dance music. Through a syncopated two-quarter meter this dance put in the picture stories and different activities(Program, 2005).

The pasillo or vals de pais is a waltz like dance but a moderately slow where in the rhythm has no stress on the down beat(Bethell). This dance reflects the courteous environment of the new bourgeois, Spaniard's semi feudal society and wealthy creoles during the year 1800's. It is patterned in the European waltz and given faster choreographic movements. Salsa Colombian style which is known as Pachanga engages speedy foot works and spins. From head to toe the bodies of the dancers are almost completely stroking each other. Cha cha cha and Mambo are fused with only seven original steps to serve as foundations of Pachanga.

Salsa dancing though most of the time stimulates images of sexuality and playfulness to those who do not dance this art also represents a fusion of different cultures and political ideals. The dance movements of salsa are manifestations of the struggles undergone by the Latin people. Though

contemporary salsa originated from the African slave trade in Cuba, it has not resisted evolution; and has also been adopted and danced in different ways in the various parts of Colombia. Rural areas of the country danced salsa with an embrace of a closed-couple whereas salsa in Cali is performed in a “ showy” manner.

The unifying factor of Colombian salsa is that it is devoid of the foot’s forward and backward movements. Cumbia style or the foot pattern which involves either an alternate to the back or to the side step series is accompanied by movement to the rhythm without many turns and spins. Unique to the Colombian salsa music and dance is the simplicity along with on-the-beat rhythmic texture. Melody, exciting lyrics, and simple horn sections are given emphasis in salsa of this country. The Colombian salsa dancers step on the beat to echo the rhythmic phrasing of playing on the beat(Pietrobruno, 2006)..

Over a four beat measure salsa’s basic movement involves step quick-quick-slow. Beats one and two are the quick steps , beat three is the slow step, and then beat four is used to transfer weight either slowly or with a tap or kick. The Colombian style though begins with three step sequence on beat two. Partner’s in Colombian salsa dance side-to-side mirroring each others moves. The third beat is the break or spare beat which is always utilized for a tap or other decorative movements. Colombian salsa is danced with cumba music. In the past, this dance is performed in gatherings but in the modern society it is danced in Salsa clubs.

Pachanga dancing involves the basic step which is to move to the music. There are eight beats in a measure used in this dance craze. The male steps are first step in place with left foot on, then back with right foot on, on third count step in place with left foot on, and then on fourth count side step on the right and left. Opposite steps are done by the female dancer to match the male's steps. While dancing these steps the male and female dancers hold each others hand. After a complete successive two full eight counts with holding hands, spin on the side is done.

The spin is followed by a fully extended pose for a split second. Then after that the female is twirled back to the male dancer. The twirl can be varied either single or double. Repetition of the basic Pachanga step then follows after. To add artistic moves, pass your partner's hand around your head and spin out behind you to the other side after the spin to the side. A dance popular to the Colombian citizens is the Joropo, which is characterized by a very speedy tempo with quick and complicated movements. The dance is done by couples that are faced to face with each other.

Heel and toe movements and body posture are exhibited dynamically. This dance is a derivation of the Spanish Flamenco and originally from Venezuela. Joropo is a Spanish word that means "party". The slaves use the term Joropo instead of Fandango which is also word for party and dance. The hand turns and movements of the feet of Flamenco are combined with the turns of waltz in this dance. First part of the dance involves the dance partners holding each other as in waltz, and then there is a change in foot works wherein there is a backward and forward movement but in small steps.

In the last part the man stomps his feet accompanying the rhythm of the music while the woman executes the intricate movements. The Guinean slaves brought to Colombia an erotic dance called El Mapale which includes wild movements such as jumps, falls, and man -woman encounters. The dance is a representation of a good fishing time and is performed in pairs to express happiness. Routine movements in Mapale dance mimics the actions of the fish called Mapale which is found in the Colombian coast. Clapping is an element of this dance that is an influence of the Atlantic coast(Eric Blom, 1955).

The tempo of the dance is up beat and it is fast speed. The rich folk dances which the Colombians are proud of, is continuously evolving and are intermixed with different influences to suit the people who are dancing it. Urbanization of their music and dances revives and informs the other people of the world about their country's rich cultural heritage. Today the Bambuco, Salsa Colombian style or Pachanga, and Cumbia are not only danced in the Colombian territory but in various parts of the world.

The Pachanga or Colombian style salsa, gained its popularity in the west after being featured in the movie " Dirty dancing". Nowadays, Pachanga is combined with cha-cha creating a fusion called Pachangacha. Though the popularity waned in time, it was able to impart the Colombian dance culture into the world. Side by side with the modernism of the dance culture of Colombia is the urbanization of its music. The influences of modern Colombian music are: African, Indigenous, Spanish, European, American, and Caribbean(Program, 2005).