

History of Salsa Dance

Name _____
Ballroom Dance | Period 7
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Source: Dancefacts.com

Salsa is one of the most popular **Latin dances** that is today practiced worldwide. Salsa dance emerged in the **Central American country of Cuba** during the **late 19th** and early years of the 20th century. This country's rich musical history enabled many Latin dances to thrive, grow, and morph into new forms, leading to modern Salsa dance and Salsa music by the 1920s. The contemporary Salsa as we know it evolved from several earlier Cuban dance forms, including Son, Son Montuno, Mamba, Cha Cha Cha, and was also enriched with **Puerto Rican influences** of dances Bomba and Plena.

After the initial burst of popularity in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Salsa quickly spread across Latin America and the United States, becoming one of the most popular Latin dances.

Salsa Etymology

The full origin of the term "Salsa" was **never** precisely **identified**. Although the same Spanish word was used beforehand in close connection with Latin dance, the modern version of the term was popularized not organically but with the marketing push of the record labels and promoters who wanted to introduce this dance to the broader public. In its earliest form, "salsa" is a Spanish term that means "**spice**."

The word "salsa!" was used extensively in Latin music since the mid-1800s as a cry that musicians shouted during their performances. The term was used in energetic songs, spurring the dancers and other musicians to become more frenetic, acrobatic, introduce freestyle changes, and "spice up" their act.

The term "Salsa" could also signify the origin of the dance, which can be traced to the fusion of several other dances. Some music and dance historians believe that the term "salsa" has the same meaning as "sauce," signifying the **mixture of ingredients** used in the creation of this dance.

The term "Salsa" was promoted more by the international dance and music industry than by original Cuban artists and promoters.

The modern popularization of the term salsa started around 1910 when the first records of this music style started being produced in Cuba. With the arrival of the Salsa dance and music style into the United States (primarily Miami and New York, both areas with a rich history of Latin American immigrants), Salsa started receiving heavier promotion by record labels and radio stations. By the 1960s, the term Salsa was forever fixed to this incredible Latin dance and music style.

Origin on Cuba

While historians agree that modern Salsa was born in Cuba near the turn of the 20th century, its exact roots can be traced several decades earlier in this country's musical history.

Salsa's basic components have been brought together by countless immigrants who came into Latin America from various parts of Europe and African slaves who were transported against their will to Central America during the age of the Slave trade.

At its core, Salsa was made from the elements of the **Són of Cuba**, **troubadour music** from Spain (Flamenco and others), **Rumbas of African slaves**, **Danzón of French**, and Haiti immigrants, and various instruments that were popular in Cuba. While Salsa started gripping the Cuban population in the final years of the 19th century, other regions of Central America became aware of it during the first years of the 20th century. Tourists and music performers brought Salsa to several other South and Central American countries, enabling this music style to morph, grow, and become an influential cultural heritage of entire Latin America.

Salsa is not only a partner dance. Some of its styles can be danced in a line or with two distinct male and female dancers who dance alone and face each other.

During the early 1900s, Cuba and neighboring Puerto Rico were regarded as "melting pots" of Latin dance and music, enabling musicians and dancers to quickly and quickly morph various styles into new art forms. During that time, Cuba popularized dances such as [tango](#), mambo, and flamenco. With the popularity of the new dances on the rise, local radio recording studio "Fania" decided to **promote a dance called Salsa**, quickly popularizing it all across Cuba.

Not long after that, the Salsa dance exited Cuba's borders and started spreading across the Caribbean, North America, and the entire world.

Expansion to the United States

Salsa's popularity exploded once this dance arrived in the United States in the early years of the 20th century.

The first notable exposure of Salsa by American people happened during the **Cuban war of 1898** when American Soldiers started enjoying the early version of this Cuban dance. In years following the Cuban war, Salsa became a fascination point with numerous American jazz musicians who incorporated Latin styles into their performances. By the end of the 1st decade of the 20th century, Cuban musicians and promoters started creating and distributing the first radio recordings of Salsa songs. These songs quickly found their way to the U.S. mainland. Confronted with the new and exciting Latin music style, American record labels and radio promoters quickly coined the new term "salsa." They started using it during the promotion of any upbeat Latin music that was imported to the U.S.

During the 1920s, an explosion of Latin music sounds started spreading all across Central and South America, leading to the development and **popularization of modern forms of tango, mambo, flamenco**, and several other kinds of music and [dance styles](#). During that time, **nightclubs in never-sleeping Havana** even more increased their focus on popular Salsa and provided an incredible variety of new sounds to the neighboring United States who were enforcing Prohibition. With an increased influx of American tourists in Cuba, Salsa quickly traveled back to the United States and several other countries of the western hemisphere. By the end of the 1920s, Salsa and several different Latin music styles become widely popular on U.S. radio stations.

The peak of salsa popularity in the United States happened during the 1970s. Fueled by the influx of Dominican and Puerto Rican workers to the continental U.S., Salsa became known as one of the most popular dances in several major music hubs of the country and was popularized across the entire U.S. and the world with the works of several notable musicians such as Johnny Pacheco, Fania All-Stars, Willie Colon and Reuben Blades.

Salsa's early popularity in the United States is closely tied to one specific dancing venue – **Palladium Ballroom**. Located on the corner of 53rd Street and Broadway in New York City, this second-floor dance hall became home to many Latin musicians and immigrants who practiced and popularized several dances from their homeland. Starting with 1948, dance promoter Federico Pagani transformed Palladium Ballroom into a Latin dance hotspot of the city. The dance hall frequently hosted musical acts of Arsenio Rodríguez's band, Machito and his Afro-Cuban band, and Tito Puente, one of the most famous salsa artists of all time. In addition to regular bands, Palladium Ballroom also regularly hosted musical artists and dancers who traveled to NYC from many Latin countries. Music and dance historians regard Federico Pagani and the Palladium Ballroom as the key ingredients of popularizing the Latin dance arts in the United States and paving the way for many other similar Latin dances and nightclubs in the Bronx and Manhattan. Palladium Ballroom closed its doors in 1966.

Salsa Styles History

In the decades after the initial popularization of Salsa in Cuba, several distinct styles of this dance appeared. These new forms quickly became famous in the regions where they were developed and best fit the local music tastes and worldwide. For example, the most popular Salsa dance style that is danced worldwide, including the majority of the beginners and amateurs, is the Colombian "Cali" style.

The three most popular Salsa dance styles are Cuban Casino style, Colombian Cali style, New York style, and Los Angeles style.

Here are the brief origins of each of the popular Salsa dance styles:

- **New York Style** – While Salsa was created in Cuba, it reached planetary fame when it arrived in New York. Local musicians and numerous Latin immigrants (most notably those from Puerto Rico) started adapting it for local tastes. It has infused themes from popular U.S. genres, such as (Jazz, R&B, and others) and other popular Latin dances such as Mambo.
- **Los Angeles ("L.A.") Style** – Even though it was developed quite recently during the 1900s and very early 2000s. L.A.'s style of Salsa became famous for its acrobatic and theatricality. Musical influences that reshaped Salsa into this style came from Latin dances ([Argentine Tango](#), Swing, Latin Hustle, and Latin [Ballroom dance](#)) and more [contemporary dances](#) (hip-hop and jazz).
- **"Casino" style** – Even though it was danced earlier, the Cuban "Casino" style became popularized outside of its shores and distinguished from other Salsa styles only during the 1970s. With its name originating from the Cuban "dance halls," today, this style is practiced in the Americas, Europe, and even the Middle East.
- **Miami-style Casino** – Cuban immigrants who settled in Florida brought various Latin dances with them, and Salsa was one of the most popular ones. Miami-style incorporated backward diagonal moves, and that made it very different to dance than other Salsa styles.
- **Colombian / Cali style** – While Salsa is danced in the more subdued and tight style in rural Columbia, Salsa became known for its showy and sensual dance in urban zones. In modern Columbia, Salsa's popularity did not wane with the arrival of the 21st century, with it still being danced in nightclubs and ballrooms.
- **Rueda de Casino** – This popular Cuban style is often described as circular and twister-like. Initially developed in the 1950s in Havana, this style evolved into a modern dance where one of the dancers in the circle calls out the moves for the entire group to perform (including the steps for swapping partners on the fly during the same song).
- **Ballroom Salsa*** – Popularized in the late 20th and early 21st century, ballroom Salsa is often danced by partners with prepared performances, who know upfront what song will be played. This type of dance is practiced by professionals or by dance pairs who want to showcase their Salsa skills.