

## **Rhumba and Rumba**

Rhumba and rumba are two very different though similar stylistically and in name. Rumba has become a large part of national identity and its African roots are easily noticed through both its sound and dance. Rumba is closely linked to the past and present condition of the Cubans who celebrate it and it has always closely mirrored the life of the Afro-Cuban and like the Afro-Cuban held a strong tie to Africa. Rumba as described by Yvonne Daniel is an event that originated in the mid 1800's where free and enslaved blacks gathered to dance and socialize and at these Rumbas where rumba, the dance and music, was first practiced.

Rumba can also be considered to be the name of a dance, a rhythm, and a group of related dances, together called the rumba complex, which evolved in the nineteenth century (Daniel 18). The rumba is a set of rhythms and their associated dances, with three main divisions: the yambú, the guaguancó, and the columbia. According to some Kongo Elders, the modern rumba grew out of older rhythms that had been played on the yuka drums, with which there are some stylistic carry-overs: the rumba stick part is also called guagua; the wrist rattles worn by yuka drummers also appear in some forms of rumba; and the rumba song leader and chorus are called gallo and vasallo, respectively.

Rhumba is a ballroom dance that originated out of the Cuban rumba style. Its music and dance is related to the Cuban rumba though it is importantly and decidedly different in several key aspects. In the first part of the 1900's, before

the Cuban Revolution, Cuba was one of the hottest vacation spots in the world. Political corruption made mafia casino development a profitable avenue in Cuba, where American tourists could drink and do drugs without the consequences these actions incurred in the USA. Prostitution, alcohol, and drugs were very much a part of the Cuban economy and as always seemed to hurt the impoverished the most. The impoverished Afro-Cubans brought with them not only their labor but also their culture and art to this nightlife. Cuban dance, especially the rumba, became a sort of infatuation with conservative American tourists who marveled at its sexuality and rhythm who came to Cuba to “let loose.” The Rhumba then went to the US, though its strong sexuality and rhythm was toned down for the more conservative American public who was dancing Waltzes before this Cuban invasion. Though stylistically similar, the ballroom Rhumba is not a genuine part of Cuban identity like the rumba and merely has the same sound without the internal philosophy and tradition of the rumba de campo.

Cuban Rumba has differing styles that evolved depending on the circumstances of their particular locales of origin. These include two main styles that can be categorized into the following: 1.) Evolved in the urban areas of Havana and Mantanzas provinces that involves couples dancing 2.) Developed in the rural areas and is a male solo form which may reflect the large imbalance between males and females during the slavery years, influence of the Carabalí, or the continuum of competitive male dances from Africa. The Catholic Church

and the Caribbean slave plantation environment set boundaries in Cuban dance forcing a creolization of the African forms brought by the slaves. The Rumba has become an important emblem of Cuban national identity because it is distinctly Cuban and Creole and not identified with elite or bourgeois origins and ideals. It has been shaped to express the desires of both the revolution and the Cuban people. Rumba truly expresses the essence of post revolutionary Cuba and its efforts toward egalitarian organization. The African roots in rumba can be seen in its strong sensuality and sexuality where sexual invitation characterizes the heart and soul of the dance and its movements. The separation of men and women also points towards the African heritage of the rumba originators and how they carried over traditional African dancing and made a Creole style distinctly Cuban, or more generally Caribbean. Many forms of contemporary Cuban music, including many of the rumba and carnival styles, are full of Kongo references and influences and display continuity with older Kongo forms. The *vacunao*, a pelvic movement also found in Kongo-derived dance styles elsewhere in the Americas, is an integral part of the rumba again pointing to African roots.

Rumba has become very structured and rigid with its inception as a commodity of Cuban nationality African origin. Its strong individualist background and free-form improvisational style has been confined by a tradition of dance, music, and social identity. The lack of spontaneity in occurrence and the rigid organization of Rumba events has limited and structured the artistic

freedom of the rumberos and unless this changes an integral part of the Rumba  
will be lost forever.