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The Evolution of the Latin Dances through the Belly Dance & Roma Cultures

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The Evolution of the Latin Dances through the Belly Dance & Roma Cultures

Philosophy Club

Study on the Latin Dance Evolution for the Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, History &
Sociology

Inspired on the original lecture, 9 January, 2021

Futian District, Shenzhen, China

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Abstract: What possibly began 2,200 years before inside the country of Egypt, made its way up the Nile River and into the mainstream lives of the people who lived under the shadow of the former and glorious Egyptian Empire. This dance created was meant to symbolize the best of femininity in every way. The Belly Dance was a rite of passage for girls going into puberty, women about to get married or who wanted to get pregnant. The dance which started in the Egyptian temples long ago, made its way onto the streets of coastal Alexandria and Cairo. The dance would go both east and west by the Eighth Century, as the Arabs dominated with their Islamic Caliphate portions of the Middle East, Northern Africa and Southern Europe. The [Belly] dance or in French, 'Danse du ventre' would reach the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal & Spain) sooner than later, making an enormous impact/contribution in the Arabian-Moorish and Islamic cultures. The other influence were the Roma peoples, who left Northern India 1,500 years prior and immigrated in direction towards Spain. What this paper intends to prove how both [the Egyptian-Belly Dance and Roma cultures] would influence for the next several centuries Spanish life and how this fusion of peoples' cultures would become an impact in the creation of Latin Dances. Starting with the flamenco, and later growing in the New World. It wouldn't only be for Spain and Portugal, but these (influences) would later move into the Americas with the Conquistadors and African slaves.

Keywords: *Egyptian-Belly Dance, India, Roma (Gypsy culture) people, Spain, Portugal, Flamenco & the Americas*

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I. Acknowledgments

There has to be a series of thank yous, without these people there wouldn't be a paper on "The Evolution of the Latin Dances...", etc.

The first person I want to thank is a beautiful and eclectic teacher here in Guangming, Shenzhen. Her name is Ponyo and I started taking Belly Dance classes over a year before with her and now find myself introducing the dance to my daughter, Mia. May you always continue teaching and inspiring students to think beyond. Furthermore, to understand undoubtedly that thanks to learning Belly Dance, I came to the realization, how much this dance has inspired other forms of movement worldwide and in the Latin World.



Photo in Belly Dance outfit of Teacher Ponyo in Guangming, Shenzhen, China. Photo is a courtesy of Ponyo.

The second is to a very special group of people here in the city of Shenzhen. It is a group I found miraculously thanks to a friend (Kas) and quickly became in love and part of it. It became an addiction and my need. This is dedicated to the individuals inside the *Philosophy Club* who teach me so much in our two-hour meetings every Saturday. I am taught to learn and think more, leaving aside all pettiness to hopefully become a fair, balanced and an objective human being.

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Photo is a courtesy of the Philosophy Club. Photo taken by Ye Qing.

Last but not least, this is dedicated to my two Hunanese beauties: *Xiao qin & Mia* (my young belly dancer and dance partner). Girls, you both make my world with love! Thank you for being in my life.

II. Introduction

Twenty-two centuries before an artistic form developed back to what was then the Egyptian Empire. This dance was made exclusively, at the time, for females; whether it was to pass into puberty, womanhood, get married or do a fertility dance to get pregnant. It became a dance which later left Egypt and was taken far and wide across the Islamic Caliphate: Spain, Turkey and Lebanon, etc. But where it would make the biggest impact was when it entered Spain in the Eighth-Century with the Moorish conquest of Iberia (Spain & Portugal).

The dance itself would take another seven centuries to evolve into other forms, but it was here in Spain where the Belly Dance made its evolution into a Latin Dance.

As stated before, belly dance was something very much from the Egyptian culture and thanks to the Arabs, it would go further into the heart of the Middle East and Europe. This dance form wouldn't change much in several centuries.

And the changes were subtle, as the Roma people began leaving Northern India in the Twelfth-Century. Later to be known by the European populations as Gypsies, they would slowly immigrate into Europe and end-up in Spain.

When the Arab-belly dance culture came in contact with the Gypsy people, it evolved into another branch; which today it is known as flamenco. Flamenco grew with the added portions of the guitar, hand clapping and the fierce rapid-dance steps it would be known for. However, one element

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that the Belly Dance had originally worn were the castanets. This was retained into the flamenco repertoire, as the growth of this exciting new dance made its way not only into Spain, but Southern France and Portugal. Listen (presently) to a flamenco song and it still feels like listening to a Moorish or Arab lament. This fusion of cultures came by the 1500s, when already the Islamic Caliphate was at its dusk and the Gypsy (Romany) influence grew and made its way across the newly-formed Spanish Empire. Flamenco in itself is considered a Latin dance, not because it is originally from Latin America; but it is originally from Spain and the Latin-language countries left behind [in influence] by the Roman Empire—which greatly spread through the most Southern portions of Europe. Part of the Romany infusion into Europe has brought great acts across the Continent. Two such examples are: *Jose Monge Cruz* ('Cameron', 1950 - 1992) from Spain and the *Gypsy Kings* from France.



*Jose Monge Cruz (alias, 'Cameron de la Isla').
Image thanks to Surinenglish.com.*



Image by Eventful, showcasing The Gypsy Kings.

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III. Methodology

This study like all other studies written about dancing isn't perfect by any means. But it came out of an inspiration which began over two-years before.

When I decided to write for the *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* on the "Art of the Dance" (Otero, 2018). The study was a basic history lesson and it was theorizing on dances that still remained en vogue after several centuries. The most popular ones the paper illustrated were: waltz, tango, salsa (cha-cha), ballet and rock & roll. Sadly and mistakenly, I had left out of the five-page study in Humanities the most important dance that had influenced others the world over, the mighty Belly Dance.

After I had realized my mistake, I went back a year later and completed another study on the "History of the Belly Dance: Is it to entice men or a female's rite of passage?" for the *International Journal of Education and Social Sciences* (Otero, 2020). I soon learned that this dance was far more influential than the previous five mentioned. That belly dance in the world community held to an existence of 2,200 years, since its foundations back in Egypt. It didn't make its debut in the Americas, United States (Chicago) until 1893. However, it wasn't given its proper honors or dues. One of the biggest reasons for this has been where it came from and considered at times in contemporary culture as something 'bad'; which is from the Middle East. It has been easily discarded and treated with prejudice. Instead of placing this dance at the very top, considering that this is a dance still practiced and enjoyed all over the world. A dance that in 22 centuries hasn't disappeared and should be considered a gift for the world-class heritage.

Looking deeper into this dance (the Belly Dance), I began to realize how much it had influenced other dances throughout the Middle East and India. Some historians taking it as far back as 6,000 years (Lo Iacono, 2020). And, as this dance grew in popularity, it also spread throughout the Caliphate, reaching well into Spain (Derhak, 2005). The other culture was with the Roma people, when it made a fusion and it evolved into what became identified by the Eighteenth Century as flamenco.

Realizing in many ways how similar belly dancing was to flamenco with the movement of the arms and hips in a circular motion. How the dancers used the castanets. How the drums, tambourines and guitars blended too closely and in a wonderful way together. Not only in this way, but how the female dresses hugged beautifully the contours of the body; whether it was for the belly or flamenco dances.

The flamenco dance reached the Americas with the *Conquistadors* from *Spain and Portugal*. Here in the New World, the dance would make another fusion with the African people (the majority originating from Western Africa; furthermore, Angola) who were forced to come into these colonies via transport ships and work as slaves. The latter peoples contribution would be the greatest one of all! Thanks to flamenco and the African slaves, now dances like *Capoeira* and *Samba* were developed back in Brazil. This didn't only end here, but it went further south into Argentina, where the *Tango* was created. African slaves with their creole counterparts would develop dances like, *Cumbia* (such dance would be and is disputed between Colombia and Mexico). These influences didn't stop there, but grew in places such as: Cuba and Puerto Rico with salsa. Cuba would bring other influences to light with cha-cha and mambo. The musicians from Cuba: *Celia Cruz* and *Cachao* would make sure that

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these sounds went far and wide. Sooner than later, people realized that this music was here to stay, and Afro-Caribbean and Latin influences had made their mark worldwide. The latest evolution in the Latin World came in the early 1990s with *Reggaeton*. A mixture of music from *Jamaica, Panama and Puerto Rico*: with reggae, hip-hop, Spanish rap and its distinctive Latin beats.

What began in Egypt during ancient times hasn't stopped its evolution. It just got better, and other dances just grew from this main one. The Belly Dance would not reach American shores until the late Nineteenth Century. Several centuries later the already established Latin Dances had paved their way through the Americas; but it is an undeniable truth, how much influence belly dance had done. A dance which came long before all the others and in many ways it was relegated for being part of the contemporary-Middle Eastern dance society and its controversies.

There is hope to view in this study the importance of which and undeniably so, the belly dance has done in creating all other Latino dances. Further, without the Roma (Gypsies) who propagated it, the belly dance would have become extinct and flamenco wouldn't have been created to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, as it impacted Latin America, it created a wave of all other dances for millions of people to enjoy across 34 countries (for Spanish, Portuguese and Tagalog speaking populations alike) and around the world.

Presently, this influence hasn't stopped, but continues to grow. With a little of the historical background and truth on how these dances continue to flourish; what we will see here is how one dance and people are responsible for the phenomena which still exists in popularity into the Twenty-first Century.

Other than the previous written inspirations on dancing. The methodology followed also came from the inspiration in the 9 January, 2021 lecture on "The Philosophy of the Latin Dance" here in *Futian District, Shenzhen, China*. From this lecture, the written portion of "The Evolution of the Latin Dances through the Belly Dance & Roma Cultures" was created.

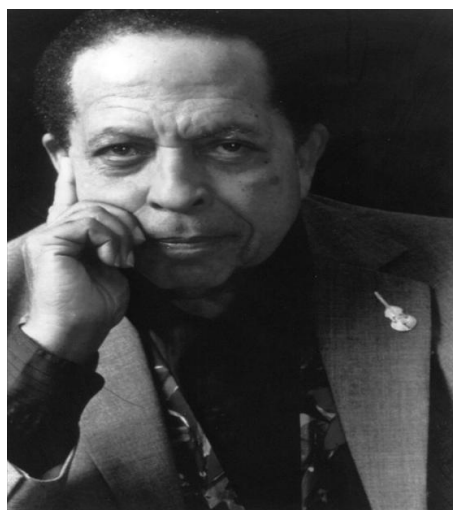


Image by All Music. Israel Lopez Valdes or better known As 'Cachao', was the co-creator of the mambo and one of the greatest composers in Latin Jazz to have originated from Cuba.

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Image by latintrends.com. Celia Cruz, one of the best voices in salsa music of the Twentieth-Century. Also born in Cuba.

How the Belly Dance & Roma Cultures made their way into Spain?

This was a 500-year process in the making. It happened as the Moors and Arabs began entering Spain through the south, and the Roma populations began their entrance from the north.

What came from modern-day India was a dance uniquely styled/based on two elements. This dance in its nature is made to fit a female's physique and by the colorful clothes she wears. But the elements are also to showcase the movements of arms and hips as in the form of the *Goddess Kali*. This formed part in the influence which impacted Roma culture, as they left India for Europe and to eventually settle in Spain.

As the nomadic Roma made their way through the Peninsula (Portugal & Spain), they later came in contact with Muslim-Spain by the Twelfth-Century. This was the 'Century of light', where the Empire had its capital in Cordoba. Known as the 'City of Light', this young and vibrant metropolis contained at that time the best learning centers of the known world. These were equal to any contemporary university. Cordoba was known for its clean streets, exquisite gardens and oil-lit system; but overall, it was an open-minded place of culture. When most cities in Europe were clogged with pollution, rubbish, disease, waste, excrement and urine on the streets (Burke, 1985). Cordoba came to life, as a glistening gem of beauty and cleanliness throughout the Empire! That for the Caliphate, it was the most important jewel in its conquest of Spain. Where the sciences, mathematics, humanities, architecture (examples remain in the beauty of Seville, Andalusia & Alhambra, Granada) and most importantly, the arts flourished at an impressive speed/pace. This city wasn't only part of the Islamic influence, but it later became what would be left behind for the Andalusian and Murcia Provinces to enjoy for hundreds of years after.

Many have stated that the flamenco dance was developed, coined and named by Eighteenth Century, as part of the Hispanic-Spanish culture. That may be true to an extent; however not completely, it had unique influences from two previous cultures before it was totally transformed into what is today.

One was the unique blend from the Roma culture. The Gypsies, as they influenced Spain and Spanish society, brought with them the colorful clothing and dance movements. The original form for these dances were done barefoot. Not until centuries later, the form of *el Zapateo* would be

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integrated, when the dancer uses the heels of his/her shoes to perform a rhythmic tapping on the wooden-dance floor.

When the dance came in contact with the Arab Empire, the clothes used were developed even further with a 'bedlah' (from the Arab, suit): it was used to exalt a female's hips, legs and arm movements.



Teacher Ponyo in one of her 'bedlah' outfits, with one of her young Belly Dance students, my daughter Mia.

Photo is a courtesy of Ponyo.

Moorish and Arab peoples made this dance into something special when castanets were integrated with: guitars, hand clapping, tambourines and drums.

The guitar was made the center piece of this folkloric dance. This instrument invented 3,000 years before in *Babylonia* came into Spain with its predecessor, the *Moorish Oud*. Something that during the Middle Ages would become 'La guitarra' (The guitar) (Beaumont, 2018).

The influence grew when to the dance or 'belly dance' version a song was added. This 'lamento' or lament was sung by the Moors and Arabs. It was a painful way to refer to the desolation or need for a loved one. The musical style wouldn't become something established until the Eighteenth Century in the flamenco music and Italian Opera (via Sicily); but it can't be denied, it was the influence

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of the Moors and Arabs which made this possible. When listening to some of the songs from *Silvio Rodriguez* (1978) or *Israa Al Aseel* (2020), these are the center pieces of their music: the guitar, hand clapping and constant way the song is sung in a form of lament. 'Cameron de la isla' did it in the same way with *Paco de Lucia*, listen carefully for their unique style in playful song, guitar and soulful-lament. Often, in these songs you can hear the 'Ojala' or 'Hala' (referring in the past linguistic Arab context of, 'Oh Allah' or 'Oh God').



Image by Spanishtrainers.com.

A flamenco dancer doing a hard 'zapateo', stomping of the feet.

How the Latin Dance made its way into the New World?

By the late Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Centuries, as *Columbus*, *Cortes* and *Pizarro* made their way into the New World, they carried the attitude of many Conquistadors. They came looking for gold; what came was to turn into centuries of colonial rule, genocide and horror (Zinn, 1980). However, not to justify, but what was left behind were a wealth of infused cultures.

The South American Influence

As the Spanish Empire grew in size, and lands were distributed, so did the Portuguese made their way into the Americas, by establishing Brazil.

It wasn't as simple as bringing flamenco into the lives of Mesoamericans. It had more to do when the cultures began to fuse together.

One of the biggest impacts and contributions in colonial times came from the African-slaves. Those who in their majority were sequestered from the western shores of Africa and brought by force

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into these new colonies to work as forced labor. The Africans who came, especially those who were transported to Brazil, came from Angola.

Powerful elements of the drums and beats came to life, as the guitar also made its way through the once born and established creole society.

Often African slaves were abused and without ways to defend themselves, they decided to invent a fighting system to ward off attackers. But they couldn't use it openly; therefore, they had to hide it from plain view. What was born, that later became an international-martial art, it came to be known as *Capoeira*. This Afro-Brazilian art was meshed with kicks, acrobatics and dance. Those who learned and used the kicking system by the early Sixteenth Century became deadly. Because not only was the kicking dangerous. A professional Capoeirista would strap blades to their ankles and toes. For this particular reason, the Capoeira system of fighting was banned for centuries by the Portuguese colonialist and later, the Brazilian government. In the Twentieth Century, gangs would slice and hurt their victims—especially when there was rivalry amongst political factions in Brazil. It wasn't until the 1930s (actually 1932) when the ban on Capoeira was lifted and recognized as part of the patrimony of Brazil. This didn't happen overnight. It was thanks to *Manuel dos Reis Machado* (Mestre Bimba), when he was allowed by the authorities to open a school and develop the art even further (Hassell, 2017). How it is practiced? Capoeiristas practice it in a contemporary 'roda' (circle), two or more people spar; while the musicians play the *berimbau* (Angolan single-string instrument), tambourine and drum. It is a dance and sight to behold once a Capoeira performance is viewed in an impromptu exhibition or seen in a show (dos Reis Machado, 1955). If people look at what break-dance (breaking or B-boying) looks like today, it has many of the Capoeira elements: with swings, slides, spins, head stands, round kicks and turns—while sliding on the dance floor. Part of this was thanks to the African-American and Latino influence in the United States. But nobody can deny the similarity between to the two. Yes, it's empirically possible and in theory that with the U.S. immigrant culture coming in from Brazil and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s (or before), that from Capoeira it exploded beautifully into break-dance moves (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Because as it later came to be, even martial arts were integrated into this wonderful mix of Break dancing.



Photo is a courtesy of Beren Ashton.

Beren is doing Capoeira in Shezhen Bay Park, China.

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Another dance which originated from Brazil through the African slavery was *Samba*. A form of dance in 2/4 steps (times). This dance has been traced far back as the *Congo* and *Angola*; brought to Brazil when the Africans came to work the fields as forced laborers. The dance today is rapid and with strong rhythms which aren't only used in shows and carnivals, but between two dancers in a 'roda' or circle motion (Marshall, 2017).

There was another type of dance transformation, the 'tambo' or gatherings amongst African slaves; these would later be called milongas or dance socials. The word 'tambo' was known at first, and it was later converted into Tango (Dance Facts, 2021); however, nobody is really certain. It has only been theorized. The Argentinean dance that would conquer multitudes in a tango craze by the 1910, would be one based on controversy since its humble beginnings. But the dance's origins were simple enough. By the mid-1800s, the immigrant Spanish, Italian and German working classes who immigrated into Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay needed a dance full of passion. This dance was one full of melancholy, charm and longing for home. From this point in time, the tango was born to help those gathered in ballrooms to socialize, dance away their loneliness and pain. Tango was done in different styles, in a 2/4 or 4/4 steps (times) and it made people want to enjoy this provocative dance. The problem, as with these kinds of dances (taking samba as another example), they were in its origins considered unattractive and vulgar; not the classical dance forms that are considered today. It was the literal, 'Dirty Dance' of its time. Tango brought a style of its own, with the passions of South America in tow and Andalusian rhythms for all to gather; whether it was with the guitar or violin. It was established, and here to stay for the duration. However, tango went through several periods when it was banned or it nearly died out, and it was brought back to life. While it was considered a craze in 1910 and it hit its height in 1921 with actor *Rudolph Valentino*, when he did a tango scene with actress *Beatrice Dominguez* in the movie, "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (Ingram, 1921). By the 1930s, it was considered old and passe. Thanks to two men, it was revived in the dance halls, music scenes and movies. One was the son of Italian immigrants, the composer *Juan D'Arienzo* and the other, French-born Argentinian singer, *Carlos Gardel* were the two men responsible for its rebirth and comeback (Rauscher & Shelley, 2014). The two men started bringing back the old style of song and music in tango, and the dancers just loved it! Tango would just take off and for the next 20-years its popularity soared. Its culmination or near end came by the 1950s and 1960s, with the birth of *Rock-n-Roll* and *The Beatles* coming into the spotlight. This was when tango would disappear into obscurity for the next 30 years. What brought tango 'back to life' once again? The end of the 1983 right-wing dictatorship and *Raul Alfonsin* coming into power would bring tango back into the spotlight for the 'old and young guards' alike to enjoy.

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Image is a courtesy by Li Xiao Qin. From left to right: Yuni Bai, Tiago de Matos Duarte Albino & Beren Ashton. The instrument that teacher de Matos Duarte Albino is holding, it is called a berimbau. Instrument used in Capoeira (The Brew, Futian District, Shenzhen, China).



Gardel with Mona Maris in the film "Cuesta Abajo", Paramount 1934



Image is a courtesy of moma.org. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. 1921. Directed by Rex Ingram (tango scene between Rudolph Valentino & Beatrice Dominguez).

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Post-colonization, independence, liberation of African slaves, and what other Latin dances came to be? The biggest influences after South America were in the Afro-Caribbean region. Over the last one-hundred-years, most of the Latin Dances to impact internationally our contemporary societies came from the Caribbean and Central American basin.

This would later dictate how these dances became popularized, came and went from places like: Cuba, Puerto Rico and Panama to the far off reaches of China, South Korea and Japan.

IV. End of Colonization

By 1815, with men like *Simon Bolivar* fighting for independence from Spain; this would cause a domino effect across the Central and South American colonies. Spanish power would wane in the following years, as most of Latin America became independent from Spain.

Already the Latin dances were established throughout the continents of Central and South America. When more and more countries gained independence from Spain, the newly-founded nations would establish their own patrimonial dance to become part of their arts and folkloric movement.

End of Slavery

The end of slavery came for many Spanish-speaking countries before and during the late 1870s. With this liberation, came a flourish of ideas. These ideas were more and more integrated in the form of African culture, religion, language, food and especially, dance.

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The end of slavery would bring greatness in movements across the Caribbean basin. In places such as: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic (merengue & bachata) and Panama would bring a wealth of dances to enjoy within the next century.

While Mexican culture with its zapateo dance (zapateado or rhythmic stomping) made its way into Southern and Western United States. Originally taken from the *Zapateo Flamenco*, the Mexican people made it more colorful and integrated the twist and turns when using a hat. The male dancer would throw his hat on the floor and the female dances around it!

Cuba and Puerto Rico's Impact in the World

Many have stated and even concluded that salsa's birth came with the growth of Latin culture into the 1970s New York City (U.S.A.). However, others have disputed that salsa started long before; going as far back as 1896 (Ilich, 2018).

When the African influence began to positively permeate across the Americas and with the arrival of slaves. As liberation came, and it brought those of African ancestry more freedom, so did the dances evolve.

One of the greatest influences which can never be denied, came from *Celia Cruz* with her trademark 'Azucar' (Sugar). A sound back in the 1950s that was spicy and beautiful. Cruz would quickly top the Latin American charts for over 50 years and there hasn't been no other artist quite like her. A Cuban exile of Afro-Caribbean origins was to become one of the most glamorous names and voices in the salsa world.

Before Cruz's rise was the jazz composer, bassist and pioneer, *Cachao* (Cuba) with

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his trademark bass and co-inventor of the mambo. *Tito Puente* (American musician of Puerto Rican ancestry) who was a master percussionist with the drums came into the music scene in 1948. He would be responsible for fusing the art of jazz with other musical-Latin styles. He later 1948. inspired those musicians like, *Sheila E.* ("The Glamorous Life", 1984).



Image by Clevelandscene.com. One of the greatest percussionist to have ever lived from New York City, Tito Puente.

What later men like, *Willie Colon* (Puerto Rico) and *Ruben Blades* (Panama) did in the 1970s; pioneers like Cachao, Celia Cruz and Tito Puente did it long before with their unique sounds.

Rumba, Cha-cha & Mambo Influences

The turn of the century and into the 1900s gave way into great artistic-dance creations. From the evolution of salsa, other sounds came to mark the first 50-years of the Latin- dance craze; especially when those years made possible the expansion and growth of the Afro-Caribbean sound. Puerto Rico and Cuba came with the elements of salsa. But it was later, that Cuba came out to what would transform into: rumba, cha-cha and mambo. The popularity of these dances wouldn't only make their way into New York City (Miller, 2021).

Around the depression era of the 1930s, one sexy dance made its way into the Latin musical mainstream. It was rumba and it caught the eye not only of the Latin-musical world, it travelled further north into North America and Europe.

Africa's part in all this wasn't yet brought to light, not until decades later, do to the ongoing racism against blacks. It would take another 60 years for Afro-Caribbeans to get their literal place 'in the sun' and be given proper credit for these dances.

Rumba was one of those particular dances, that came with a 'berbena' or 'pachanga' kind of environment; in other words, it was a 'party' moment or 'spree', and all would come together to celebrate. Taken from the word 'rumbo' (the way), and later converted into rumba. Most rumba

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dances started in the back streets and poorer communities in Cuba. But the effects would be long felt for the next-two decades, as other dances were invented and these evolved into the mainstream of Latin-American culture. It would cross the United States and ingrain itself into the cultural fiber of America and Hollywood.

Rumba with its faster beats and influences from the African community in Havana and Matanzas would bring a moment in history that would shine the light on this small-Island nation.

Most of these dances were also created during times of change and turmoil in the country. It was a way to help people enjoy, while they did suffer; but once inside a party, people came together to be happy and forget the daily troubles of life.

Alongside rumba and at a slower pace, came the cha-cha groove. One of the most iconic Latin American dances. It is one of the favorites and unquestionably so, integrated into the forms of ballroom dances to choose from. Cha-cha began and hit its peak by the 1940s. The pace picked-up, as time went on and it hasn't gone out of style; with the fast-paced rhythms of *Chelo* or *Jessica Jay*, it really took off into the Twenty-first Century!

As these music numbers grew popular in television shows like, "I love Lucy!" (*Desi Arnaz*) and the feature movie, "Mambo" (1954). Movies and T.V. series like these would help the dance later land in the continent of Europe and continue to expand; especially amongst the Hispanic community. But it was "Westside Story" (1961) with *Rita Morena* that brought to light in a *Romeo & Juliet* styled-tragedy the gangs and street life; however, it also brought the beauty of mambo to life into contemporary America. Its popularity like salsa and mambo never did wane. Cult classics like, "The Mambo Kings" (1992) showed what life was like for a struggling musician in exile; such as the case in this story, when two brothers are exiled from Cuba and have to start over in the United States.

How Afro-Caribbean & Brazilian dances such as: Lambada (Maxixe, 1920s) and Bossa Nova (The Girl from Ipanema, 1962) evolved into Reggaeton?

The majority of these dances started in their conception as something taboo and underground. Considered too sexual or sensual for the rest of society to enjoy. Therefore, these kinds of dances would become a bi-product of the people from the barrios (communities), minorities and poorer sectors of society.

It was the case with the controversial and illegal dance, *Maxixe*, which later turned into the *Lambada*. Originally banned by the government of Brazil and later it was permitted do to its popular nature, and once it got out of control from the authorities—all would be wiggling and swinging their hips sensually between male and female. Lambada was and has been recognized by its notable historians and connoisseurs as, "The Forbidden Dance" (as portrayed in the 1990 movie, "Lambada").

The same style can be observed with the evolution of Reggaeton, but in a slower form. Of course, this has been theorized, but the dance style has the same principles in movements as the Lambada. With the only exception here, that 'perreo' (doggy style) is incorporated, and if such was the case and as it happened, this dance began from the 'ground up'! In other words, it was a sensual and sexual manifestation in the underground-club scene; which later became popular with the youth by the mid-1990s.

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Dances continue to evolve & change in the Latin community

One thing is a constant, and while I was investigating and writing out this study, somebody did notice a particular pattern with the Latin dances. That most of these dances were born in conservative-Catholic Latin countries; whether Spanish (Latin America) or Portuguese-(Brazil) speaking countries. The dances were considered ‘too sexual, graphic or dirty’ to expose to the public. These movements usually came from the poorer sectors of society and minorities in the country. The art in the beginning was underground and not allowed to be shown to the masses. Therefore, most or all were banned by their respective governments at one time or another.

However, the same can be said about the Belly Dance and what is presently happening in Egypt (since the *Arab Spring Uprising* of 2010 - 2011); with the banning of the dance, any type of promotion or otherwise any photographic images taken aren't allowed to be shown.

The problem, as with Latin America in the past and now with Egypt is when religion and state mix their affairs together, and the birth of secularism gives way to extremism. Therefore, whether a person agrees with the dance and type of music or not, it's still away for governments to squash the sociological and anthropological movements of cultures; which is a way of going backward instead of forward. But in the long run, these dances and music come out one way or another. Further, the more a government or religion interferes with dance and music cultures, the more it will go underground and later flourish into mainstream society. It has happened through history and continues to happen today; people, especially the youth will always desire the ‘forbidden fruit’ and what's en vogue.



Image is a courtesy by Li Xiao Qin. The author doing a salsa dance number with a ballroom dancer, Elena (The Brew, Futian District, Shenzhen, China).

Presently, another dance making headway into the mainstream Latin-musical community is *Kizomba*. This sensual dance from Angolan origins came out of the ashes of the *Angolan Civil War*

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(1976 - 2002). Here, this art has little by little become a star and favorite in dance 'Kimbundus' or gatherings. Done in the Semba-style for parties. It is one of the sexiest dances I have seen, with elements of: tango, classical and strong movement of the hips in a four-step tempo. However, it doesn't try to be a ballroom dance in any way. It is one particularly for the masses, that began in Angola and has jumped to most Portuguese-speaking countries and now, it is considered also part of the Latin-dance culture. The birth of Kizomba is a mystery. Some say it started in 1984, but others have stated that it goes further back to the turn of the Nineteenth-Century (Sim, 2014). Angola's Kizomba integrates unique dance elements and in analysis, it is one of the dance forces which is now in style and cannot be contained. Considered a part in the evolution of the Latin dances.

Another dance/exercise which stepped in with Reggaeton in tow, was *Zumba*. In the 1990s its creator, *Alberto 'Beto' Perez* began experimenting with aerobic-exercise elements and united these with other dances, such as: jazz, cha-cha, salsa, rumba and other electronic musical forms (Helmer, 2020). 'Beto' added as a dancer and choreographer his unique perspective, and took this new-dance style to new heights; while at times adding elements of Cumbia from his native Colombia. What he created was this unique form and dance fever which has engulfed gyms throughout 180 countries (Williams, 2020).

These are the contemporary and neo-contemporary Latin dances born from the 1800s to the 2000s (post-colonialism and end of slavery). Its creations mostly in Latin American countries, Africa and New York City. These dances went the world over and haven't given any signs of slowing down yet. It is important to see what's around the corner, study anthropologically and enjoy it; because other dances will rise in the years to come.

It's important to understand, 2,200 years before, the Belly Dance influenced many other dances, and nobody ever knew how this dance's impact would create other forms of movement for the world's patrimony in cultural wealth and beauty.

V. Flaws with this study

As with all studies, nothing is completely perfect and of course, this one may contain its shortcomings and errors. Especially when theorizing where Latin Dancing came from.

For those who have studied about the Latin Dance culture, most would agree, it came from Spain and African roots which quickly spread and integrated into the Americas.

For the mysteries of the Latin Dance in Spain and the evolution of Flamenco, it has always been associated with the Romany and Arab-Moorish cultures in its origins. However, few times it has been noted or stated, unless to the contrary, that the evolution of the Latin Dances before arriving in Spain had its origins in something like the Belly Dance (Egypt) and North Indian cultures; as the Gypsies and Arab Empire migrated from these parts into Europe.

To actually say, it came only from these two points and these styles later meshed in Spain is a fallacy. Nothing is conclusive, since other Indian dances and cultures across the Middle East hold to the same movements in style with the arms, legs and hips, etc.

Often the empirical data which has arisen focuses more on the Roma people and Arabs—as those who brought these musical ideas, concepts and traits into Spain. Mainly they were given the credit by certain historians for Flamenco even before Eighteenth-Century Spain would ever do. This would

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take centuries to happen, given the problems presently between the Western World and Middle East.

Centuries later, as the two cultures came together (Arab and Romany), it spread further into Spain; this in essence took over 700 years. When the Moors and with the dusk of the Caliphate Empire, these musical traits which had enriched the Spanish culture were later to be dismissed by those in denial of the facts—that Flamenco was solely a Spanish creation; as the Moors, Arabs and Jews were being kicked out of Spain by the Fifteenth Century.

With the trans-Atlantic voyages done by the Portuguese and Spanish Empires (1500s), Latin Dances took root with the culture which the Conquistadors brought with them and the African slaves that mostly came/were taken from Angola. However, this is another highly disputed point, since other African societies (e.g. Nigeria) gave influence to the Latin Dances throughout Latin America; especially during the early days of these evolutionary manifestations. In contemporary times a Nigerian-born British singer known as *Sade* has been known to use Afro-Caribbean elements and influences in her work (e.g. in her Albums, “Diamond Life” and “Promise”, 1984 & 1985).

Also, in contemporary times, it has been disputed where does salsa belong. Does it belong to the Cubans or Puerto Ricans? Not like other dances, such as, *Merengue* (late 1700s and early 1800s) or *Bachata* (early half of the Twentieth-Century)—which can ‘firmly’ be identified with the Dominican Republic. However, a dance like merengue has also been accredited with French infusion and also originating from Haiti and Venezuela. Other than the Dominican Republic... But salsa is still that point of contention where its origins began or even the year the dance was born/established, etc. One thing is certain, whether from one place or the other, salsa belongs to the world and it is for all to enjoy!

As with the same issue in Reggaeton... Who invented this dance or music style? Most stating that it came from Puerto Rican origins, with musicians like: *Vico C* (Reggaeton, n.d.). But it has been argued that Reggaeton came long before. Some would say or argue that it is Panamanian in origins and came into the dance scene with musicians like *El gran General*. Undoubtedly Reggaeton was influenced by the sounds taken from Reggae's Jamaica and blended in with Spanish-rap (Jamaicanmusic.com, 2021). Further investigations and inquiries will have to continue before reaching a conclusion. But for now, as with reggaeton, other Latin Dances continue evolving. Therefore, never dying out.

There is the need for these dances to be further investigated and understood to reach a final conclusion. Because with these dances—which continue expanding—those who bring/invent it musically can be influenced by the Indians, elements of tango (e.g. ‘Camaron de la Isla, “Arte y Majestad”, 1975), Arab or Egyptian sounds; which made it possible in the last 2,000+ years for all to be enamored with the art of dance. This is a reality which continues to permeate in the evolution of music, dance and certainly, Latin sounds.

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Image by Music Stack, this is a picture of Sade Adu for her albums, "The Best of Sade" & "Jezebel".



Image by marriedbiography.com. Vico C is considered by many to be the inventor and pioneer of the Reggaeton-musical genre.

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Image by wikihow.com. Showing the Reggaeton dance. If compared with the Lambada dance, it shows many similarities to Reggaeton, but without taking away its contemporary edge.

VI. Conclusions

What began 2,200 years before in Egypt with the Belly Dance and Roma people leaving Northern India 1,500 years ago, translated into what would become flamenco in the Spanish Peninsula. At least that's the understanding through this study.

There was a fusion once the Conquistadors left for the Americas and it didn't stop. It only got more powerful/stronger when slaves were brought into the Latin American scene (Vila, 2017).

The dances followed in a lineal path according to their origins and history: *Belly dance - flamenco - capoeira (although considered a martial art, dance and later possibly, break-dance) - samba - tango - salsa - rumba - cha-cha - mambo - reggaeton (possibly with the infusion of lambada) - kizomba and zumba* made their way as these dances full of culture, folklore, sports and exercise variations. Therefore, they are part of the cultural history of these countries, and holding to the top popularity around the world. This colorful art has been accepted as part of the humanities for these Latin, Afro-Caribbean countries and Angola (Africa); furthermore, a patrimonial gift to the world (Rouhani, 2020). The same Belly dance and Latin dances considered banned, too sexual/sensual, obscene and immoral, became the fiber of many societies throughout: Latin America, Africa and Europe. These dances have hit the mainstream, an all time high and have reached far-off places like Asia. Now, according to the empirical evidence, this is what happened through the evolutionary process of two-plus millennium; however, it doesn't mean there weren't other influences from other cultures into these dances. We must stay open to further investigations and see what is discovered in the future. Because, we can only theorize upon what we have seen, what has happened in the last-two-millennium and not what hasn't happened yet.

One thing is clear, Latin dances as well as its music continue to fuse, and other forms of movement are born or created. This is a generational pattern and growth process which happens every 20-years or so. Compared to centuries before, when it took a dance to be created every 100 years and centuries for it to gather momentum for the world to continue enjoying it. Part of this happens nowadays because of the rapidity of the worldwide-web (Internet) and social media when something new comes into everyday life.

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Not only the above dances have made headway. Cumbia has fused with reggaeton, as is the case with the Puerto Rican band, *Calle 13* (in their hit song, “Atrevete”). When elements of reggaeton are placed in a Colombian-styled cumbia. Another case and point is the rock band, *Los Juanes* (Colombia); the artist has been able to beautifully create a fusion between American rock & roll and cumbia that is certainly genius. *Carlos Vives* (Colombia) is another artist that he frequently fuses: rock, cumbia and reggaeton. *Shakira* is one of the best Colombian musicians to also have fused: rock, cumbia, reggaeton with her Belly Dance routine [and Lebanese ancestry], to create something superb. Other than being a talented artist, she (Shakira) is considered and recognized as one of the top-ten best belly dancers in the world.

The singer and songwriter from Guatemala, *Ricardo Arjona* took the Latin sound and dance, and made it his own in a bolero style. Throughout his career, he has used: rock, African, Latin, Cuban and Tejano-music styles to achieve his unique blend of musical taste. He has been so successful at it, that during his career, he has sold over 80-million copies of his music. That’s an amazing feat for an artist in the Latin Dance and music genre.

One thing is for sure, this unstoppable sound-wave will just continue to evolve and expand further into different countries. When any day of the week, a person, whether they live in Puerto Rico, the U.K. or China can listen through a loudspeaker a tune by *Vico C*—it’s amazing! Then, the youth starts to do a ‘perreo’ (doggy style) or reggaeton-dance style—it is clear that it is for all to embellish. *Carlos Fonsi* with his tune, “Despacito” made it certain that reggaeton holds this magnetic power and worldwide influence (Perez Taylor, 2019).

And to think that it all started with the Belly Dance 2,200 years before, which by the way continues to be a popular-global dance. This is the case with: samba, salsa, cha-cha, mambo and reggaeton themselves. These amazing dances which have never given any signs of waning, on the contrary, they have garnered more popularity for all its fans to enjoy even further into the future. For those who stated in the past these dances as a passing fad, oh how wrong they were.

With this concludes, “The Evolution of the Latin Dances through the Belly Dance & Roma Cultures”. I thank you sincerely for reading, hope you all enjoyed and learned something from this Humanistic study. Kind regards.

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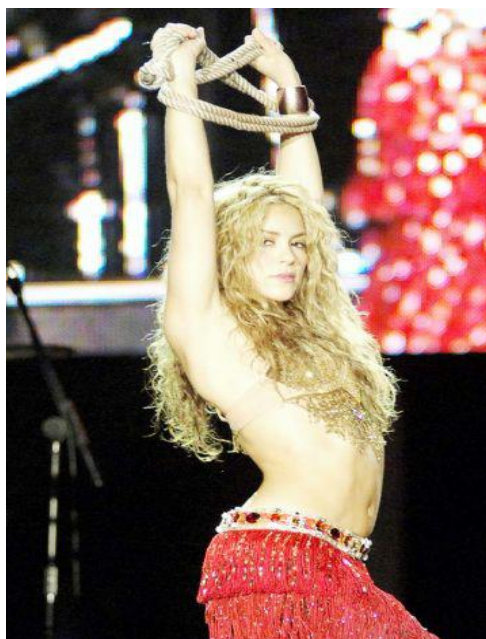


Image by India Today. The Colombian-rock star Shakira, integrating Belly Dancing into her act. She is considered one of the 10-best Belly Dancers in the world.

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