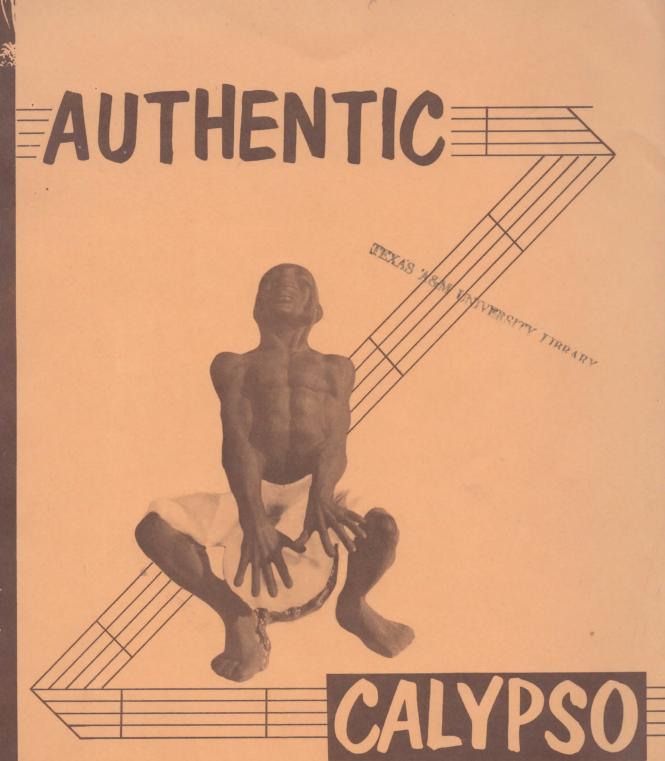
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1631

the SONG the MUSIC the DANCE

by ROBERT LUIS

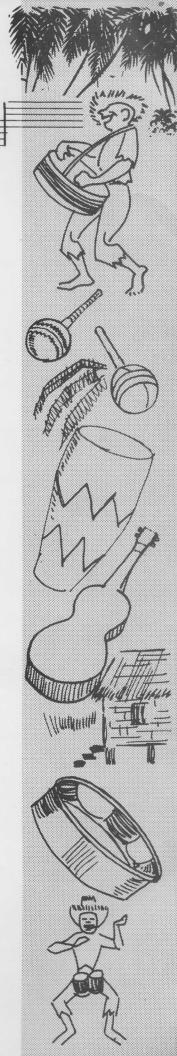
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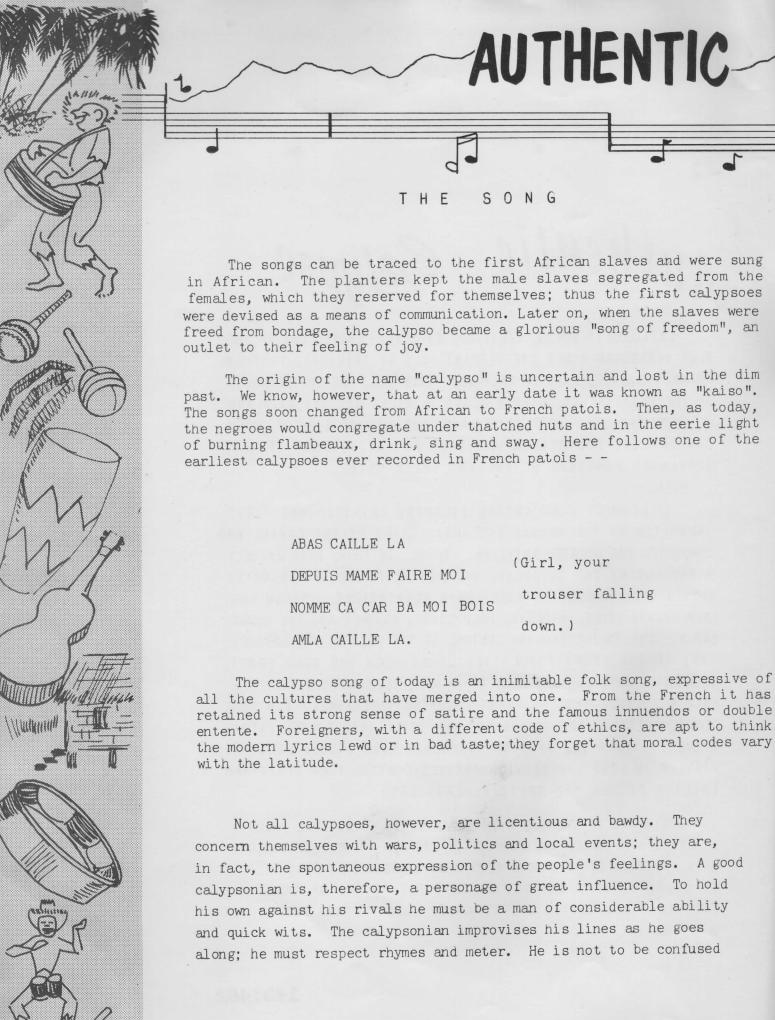
Authentic Calypso

LATITUDE 10 NORTH, LONGITUDE 61 WEST. THERE, OUT OF THE BLUE CARIBBEAN RISES THE VERDANT ISLE OF TRINIDAD, TROPICAL ISLAND PARADISE, LAND OF CALYPSO. TRINIDAD, THE SOUTHERNMOST OF THE WEST INDIES, LIES A SCANT 16 MILES OFF THE MAINLAND OF SOUTH AMERICA. LEST YOU BEWARE, THE CALYPSO GIRL OF TODAY CAN ENSLAVE YOU WITH A MAGIC AS POTENT AS THAT OF HER UNRELATED NAMESAKE OF ANCIENT GREEK MYTH.

LIKE MOST WEST INDIAN ISLANDS, TRINIDAD WAS FIRST INHABITED BY THE ARAWAK INDIANS; LATER BY THE CARIBS WHO CONQUERED THE GREATER ANTILLES. THESE, IN TURN, WERE LARGELY WIPED OUT BY THE EUROPEANS WHO REPLACED THEM BY BRINGING SLAVES FROM AFRICA TO WORK THEIR PLANTATIONS. THESE CAME FROM SIERRA LEONE, NIGERIA, GOLD COAST, DAHOMEY AND THE CONGO BASIN. DUE TO THE ENGLISH CONTROL OF THE ISLAND, THE LARGEST PART OF THE NEGRO POPULATION COMES FROM THE GOLD COAST. AT A LATER DATE INDIANS FROM INDIA WERE ALSO BROUGHT IN. THE FRENCH CULTURE WAS THE FIRST EUROPEAN INFLUENCE. (IN SOME REMOTE PARTS OF THE ISLAND YOU MAY STILL HEAR FRENCH PATOIS SPOKEN.) THEN THE SPANISH INFLUENCE MADE ITSELF FELT AND FINALLY IN 1797 THE ENGLISH WRESTED CONTROL FROM SPAIN AND ENGLISH BECAME THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE.

TRINIDAD IS BLESSED WITH GREAT GIFTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY, WEALTH AND CLIMATE; THE POPULATION HAS NOW PASSED THE 600,000 MARK. CENTURIES HAVE BEEN REQUIRED TO ASSIMILATE THIS WELTER OF CIVILIZATIONS AND OUT OF THIS POT POURRI OF RACES HAS EMERGED A NEW NATION . . DYNAMIC, COLORFUL AND FABULOUSLY RICH IN FOLKLORE.







with the calypso singer who merely sings others' material. The best calypsonians achieve fame and fortune. They boast such bombastic names as: The Black Prince, Lord Kitchener, Lord Caresser, Lord Invader, Attila the Hun, the Spoiler, the Duke of Iron, etc.

The following lyrics by Count Bernardino will bring you up to the minute on how calypsonians satirize the events of the day --

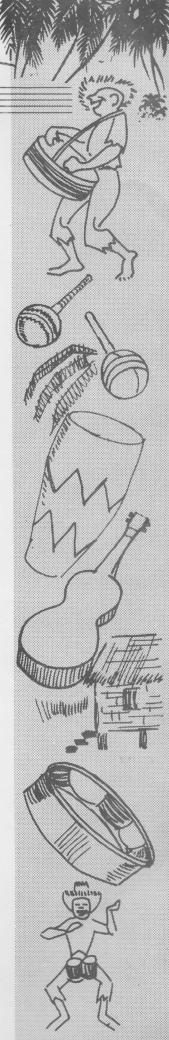
DON'T BLAME IT ON ELVIS
FOR SHAKING HIS PELVIS;
SHAKING THE PELVIS HAS BEEN IN STYLE
EVER SINCE THE RIVER NILE.

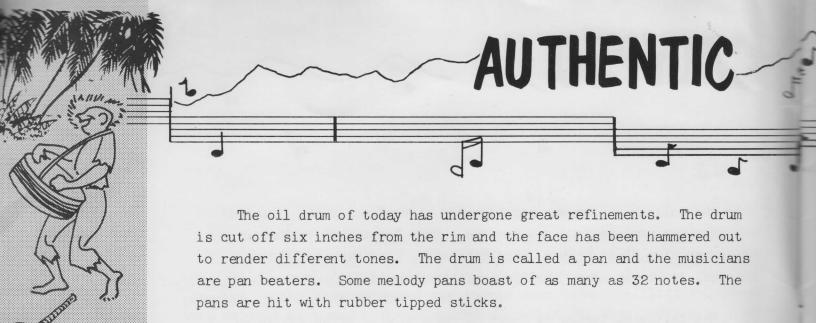
THE MUSIC

Calypso music is mostly written in 2/4 or 4/4. Succinctly, it may be described, like most West Indian music, as a Spanish melodic theme with an African base. It is an admixture of several African rhythms as we shall see more exhaustively in the chapter on calypso as a dance. The main purpose of modern calypso music is to please the senses; it is rhythmic, relaxing, sensuous and vivid. The instruments used in a typical calypso ensemble are: drums, cowbells, guitars, rattles, scrapers and flute.

The ingenuity of the natives is so great however, that given a junk pile, they can create a whole orchestra capable of the most tantalizing rhythms. This, naturally, brings us to the sensational development of the STEEL BAND.

The first all steel bands made their appearance in the early thirties, but did not reach the zenith of their popularity until 1946. Due to war induced shortages there was then a very great scarcity of musical instruments. The ingenious natives hit upon the idea that the utilitarian steel drums had musical potentialities. Garbage cans, brake bands, kettles, dust bins and other sundry discard were pressed into service and thus the all steel percussion orchestra was born. The first steel bands were crude, unwieldy affairs.





Every year at carnival time is when the steel bands reach the peak of their glory. For the duration of the festivities the strict English laws are relaxed. Night and day the streets echo to the music of the steel bands, while the entire population marches through the streets, trudging and jumping with rhythmic abandon. There are now more than 200 steel bands in Trinidad. While we do not wish to minimize the picturesque appeal of the steel band, it must be stated that it is not best suited for dancing, but has a definite place for carnival "jump-ups".

The sudden demand of the American public for calypso music is most gratifying. Audiences everywhere sway to the lilting rhythms and hum the haunting melodies. It is, however, a mixed blessing and we hope the craze does not carry within itself the seed of its own destruction. The sudden demand for native talent is far greater than the available supply. This situation is apt to produce a crop of pseudo calypsonians and pseudo calypso dancers. As it is the case for rumbas and mambos, the enjoyment of the dance is entirely dependent upon the authentic feeling and ability of the musicians. This situation is further aggravated by the native talent's aversion to leaving its island home and carefree way of life, which, perhaps wisely, it prefers to the Yankee dollar of Coca Cola fame.



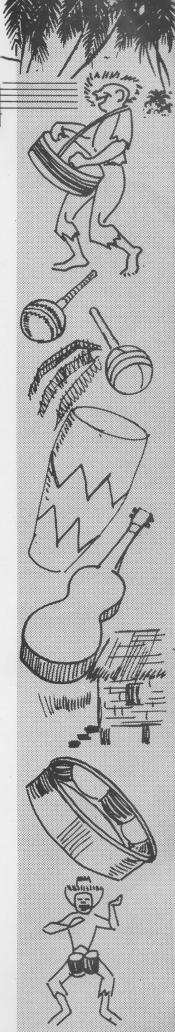
THE DANCE

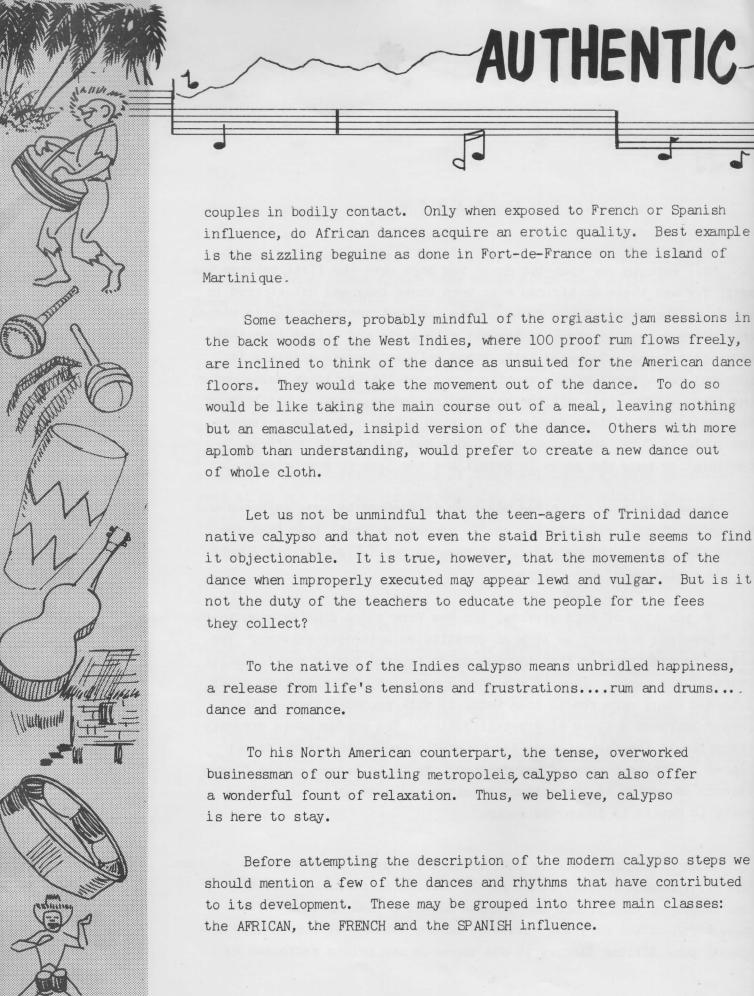
'Tis safe to say that the dance was born when the first calypso was sung, for was there an African ever born whose body was not stirred to motion at the sound of the drums. True, several centuries had to elapse before the dance had acquired the definite style and unique form that today is calypso. To watch tall, reedy calypso dancers undulate is somewhat reminiscent of the swaying fronds of the Caribbean palms under the trade winds. Like all the West Indian dances, calypso was born of the marriage of African rhythm and Spanish melody. To name a few:— the rumba in Cuba, the merengue in Santo Domingo; on the American continent we have the samba in Brazil and the jazz in New Orleans.

As we have seen, Trinidad has been influenced by many cultures and the dance clearly reflects it. As we proceed we shall find that the rumba, the samba, the merengue, the beguine and nanigo all had a part in the evolution of the calypso.

At the time of this writing, the New York dance studios seem to be in a hopeless quandary as to what constitutes authentic calypso. The mix-up is even greater than the one which existed during the formative years of the mambo. Then it was more a question of timing than steps. Trinidad being more remote than Cuba, it will probably take a little longer to reach a state of crystallization. The confusion is directly traceable to the fact that different studios have gone to different places for their source of information. To go to Nassau or the Virgin Islands in search of the authentic calypso is just as irrational as going to Mexico to learn the rumba.

Some mistakenly believe that because the dance originates in the British West Indies, it is purely African in origin. History has taught us that French and Spanish melodies plus African rhythm gave birth to the calypso. Besides, as any student of African rhythms knows, pure African dancing is not sensuous and seldom performed by







I AFRICAN INFLUENCE

CONGO. Done in a crouching position with movements limited to the naunches.

CALENDA.. A lively folk dance with toe and heel and fast foot work.

V00D00. Originally religious in character. Characterized by violent shaking of head and shoulders; convulsive body contortions. Apt to induce self-hypnosis.

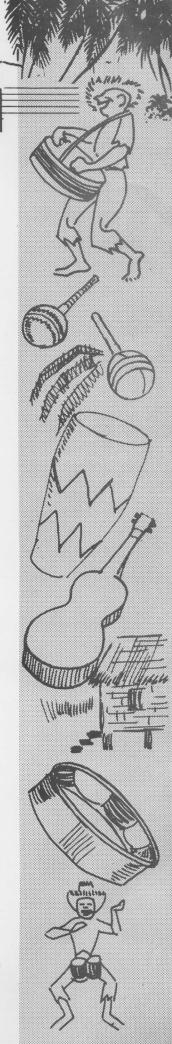
LIMBO. A ritual dance. Man leans far backwards and shuffles forward on spread out legs. He must pass under a stick. The dancer's skill is measured by the height of the stick; the lower the stick, the greater his ability. The incredible record is ten inches from the floor.

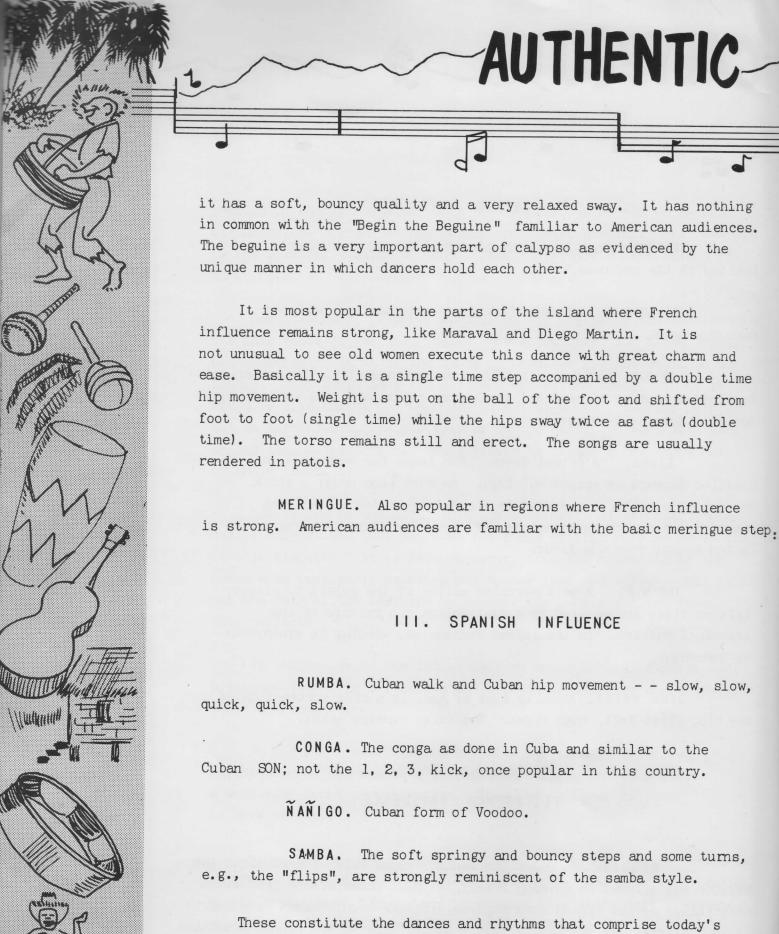
THE WIND. A soft circular motion of the pelvis to either left or right accompanied by a contraction and release of the abdominal muscles. In the island vernacular, winding is synonymous to dancing.

JERK WAIST. Usually done by men, is a side contraction of the hip, first left, then right. The torso remains quiet.

II. FRENCH INFLUENCE

BEGUINE. Under the benign French rule of Martinique the beguine was allowed to develop freely, without interference from stern officials. As its French name implies, (French beguin means sweetheart) it is a flirtatious and highly erotic dance; true to the French tradition it accents feminine charm and grace. It comprises a variety of steps;





These constitute the dances and rhythms that comprise today's calypso. As one can readily see . . quite a pot pourri, worthy of the cosmopolitan denizens of Trinidad.



Today calypsoes are performed solely for pleasure and have lost any religious significance. Different types of movements may be observed in different regional sections of the island.

We shall now attempt to describe the main steps of the calypso for ballroom use, such as a visitor to Trinidad could expect to see.

CARNIVAL

IN PORT OF SPAIN

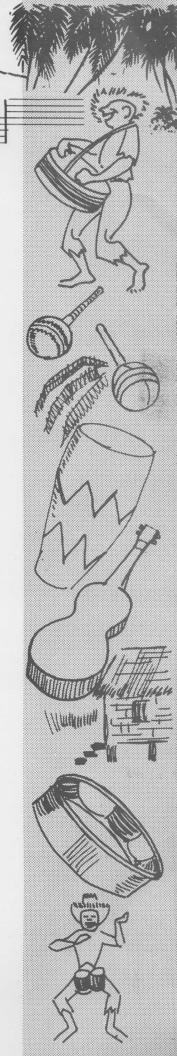
If you should land in Port of Spain at carnival time you would find yourself in a world of frenzied rhythm. An orgy of clashing colors, a cacophony of sounds produced by the most heteroclite musical instruments. Steel bands everywhere, followed by dancing and jumping hordes ecstatically happy with rhythm. After watching a while, you will discover that what at first seemed wild, undefinable and aimless dancing follows a definite pattern. You are witnessing the three basic steps or movements of the calypso; namely, the TRUDGE, a lazy, swaying walk; the CANTER, with bodies swaying back and forth; and the JUMP UP, self descriptive.

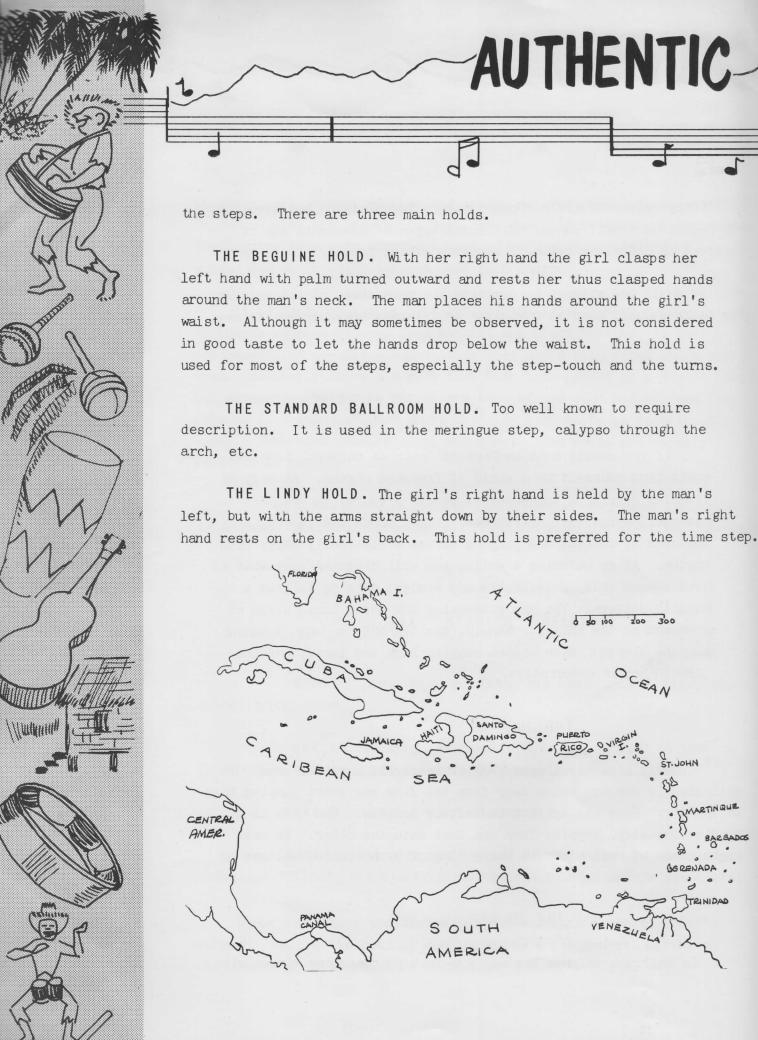
THE JUMP UP

Strictly a carnival step. After cantering a while, some enthusiastic dancers break away from the line and start jumping high in the air. Some can achieve incredible heights. The step is a single time step. hopping from one foot onto the other. In most night clubs of Port of Spain these jumpers are about as welcome as jitterbugs at the Waldorf.

THE HOLDS

In ballroom calypso the way you hold your partner varies with





CALYPSO

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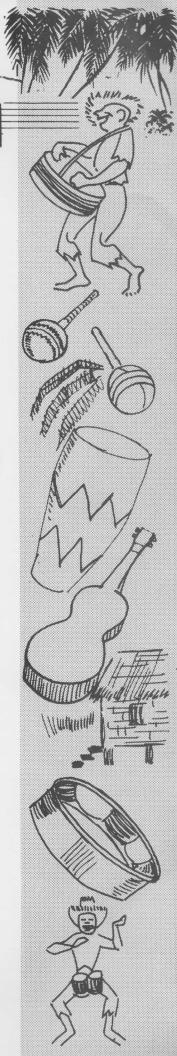
THE TIME STEP

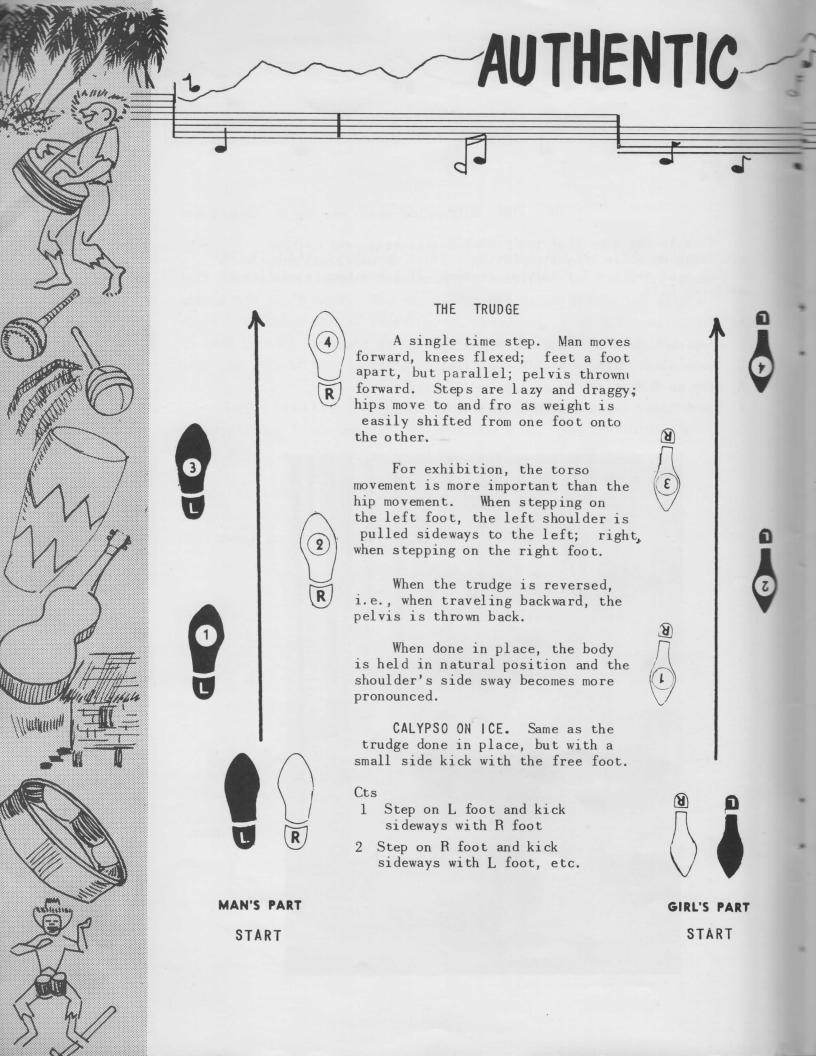
This is the step that you probably will have seen calypso musicians do while they are playing. It is an excellent step to develop your feeling for calypso rhythm. It has a bouncy quality. Use lindy hold.

Cts

- 1 Step on L foot and raise R knee slightly
- 2 Touch floor lightly with R foot flat
- 3 Step on R foot and raise L knee slightly
- 4 Touch floor lightly with L foot flat

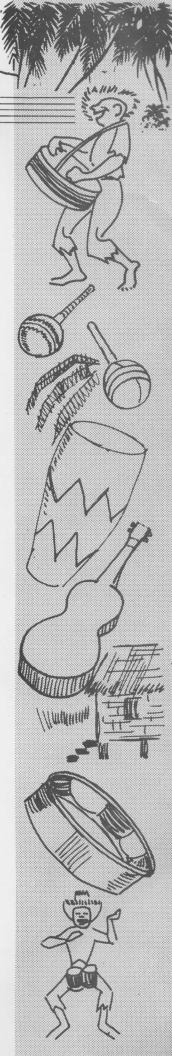


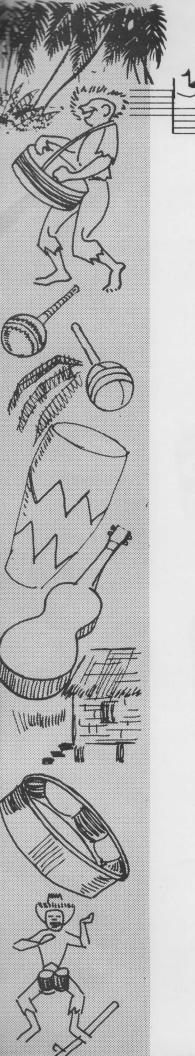




CALYPSO_







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THE CANTER

The canter is a movement unique to the calypso. It is a pendulum like movement forward and backward, without any up and down surge. As the knees are thrown forward on the down beat the body will tilt back; as the knees straighten on the up beat, the body will tilt forward. A few hours of practice will allow most people to canter gracefully and effortlessly. Keep knees a foot apart and parallel

CANTER IN PLACE

Cts

- 1 Throw knees fwd; upper body tilts bwd
- 2 Straighten knees completely; body tilts fwd
- 3 Same as Ct 1
- 4 Same as Ct 2

When you have mastered the canter in place and not before, practice the same movement but keep your full weight on L foot for Cts 1 and 2 and transfer it to R foot for Cts 3 and 4. You are now ready to travel with the canter step.

First, travel fwd. As the body straightens on the up beat (Ct 2) the foot free of weight will automatically move fwd a few inches; first the R foot, then the L foot.

Next, practice traveling bwd. Now the free foot will reach back a few inches each time the body straightens on the up beat (Ct 2)

THE CANTER BREAKS

Use the same rhythm and movement.

Cts

- 1 Throw knees forward, weight on R foot; facing partner
- 2 As knees straighten man takes 1/4 turn to L, girl 1/4 turn to R
- 3 Throw knees fwd, weight on L foot; facing partner
- 4 As knees straighten man takes 1/4 turn to R, girl 1/4 turn to L

As the knees straighten on the up beats (Cts 2 & 4) the toe of the foot free of weight will automatically rise and the leg will rest lightly on the heel:





CANTER BREAKS

THE CANTER PROMENADE

Same as the canter traveling fwd, but holding partner in an open promenade position, traveling fwd. After one closed canter, the direction of the canter promenade may be reversed.

BACK TO BACK, BELLY TO BELLY

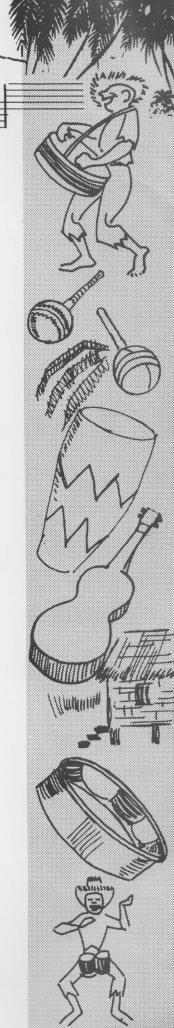
This is one of the most popular steps amongst Trinidad teen-agers. It is a variation of the canter. Man starts canter as usual in closed position.

Cts

- 1 Throw knees fwd
- 2 As knees straighten man takes 1/4 turn to L, girl 1/4 turn to R
- 3 Throw knees fwd, remaining in position
- 4 As knees straighten man takes another 1/4 turn to L, girl takes another 1/4 turn to R

Partners are now back to back and keep up the canter movement, the upper back of the man resting on the girl's upper back. To finish step, repeat the first part of the step (Cts 1, 2, 3, 4) which will bring you face to face with your partner, or belly to belly. It is best to lead your partner into the turns by applying pressure to the left side of your back if you wish to turn left. Inexperienced dancers might prefer the clumsier method of leading the girl by the hands.

The direction of the turns may be reversed.



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CALYPSO

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THE STEP TOUCH

The step touch is a very important movement in ballroom calypso. Like the canter, it lends itself to a great many variations, but its basic movement remains the same. It is characterized by a sharp pulling of the hip on the up beat. While reminiscent of the rumba movement it is quite different in that it lacks the fluid action of the latter.

Practice this movement in place at first. Stand with the knees flexed and slightly apart.

Cts

- 1 Step on L foot
- 2 Touch floor with R toe as you pull R hip up sharply
- 3 Step on R foot
- 4 Touch floor with L toe as you pull L hip up sharply

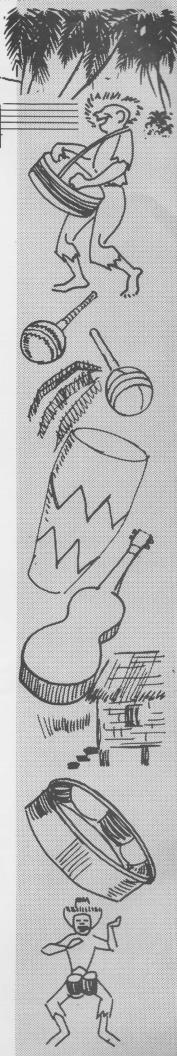
THE STEP TOUCH WALK

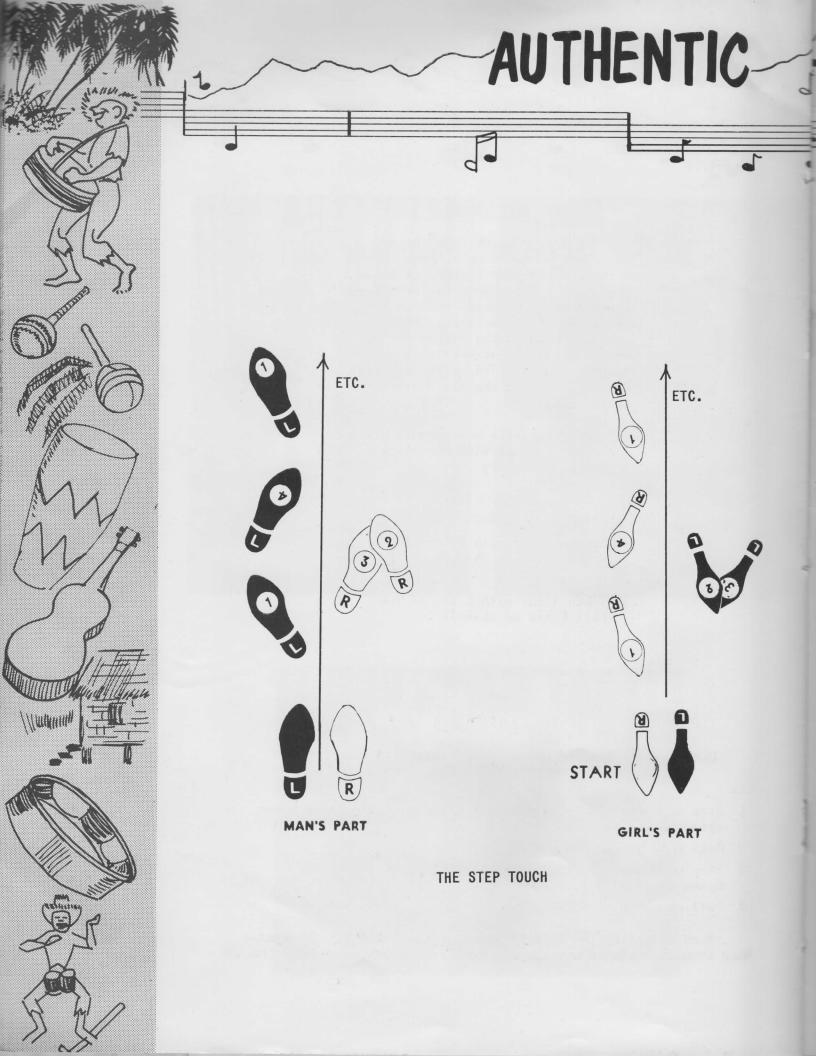
Use movement learned above, progressing fwd thus:

Cts

- 1 Step on L foot (turning very slightly to L) and bring R toe ahead of L foot
- 2 Pull up R hip in the manner above described
- 3 Step on R foot (turning very slightly to R) and bring L toe ahead of R foot
- 4 Pull up L hip

When reversing the walk technique remains exactly the same. When stepping back on L you reach back with R, etc.





CALYPSO





THE CHARLESTON STEP TOUCH

So called because of its resemblance with the old charleston pattern. The similarity, however, ends there. It is a combination of the fwd and bwd step touch walk.



MAN'S PART

Cts

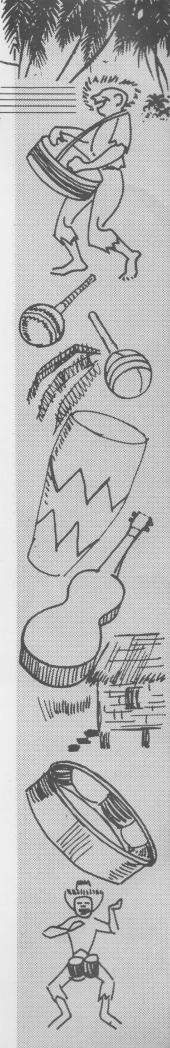
- 1 Step fwd on L
- .2 Touch fwd with R toe
- 3 Step bwd on R
- 4 Touch bwd with L toe

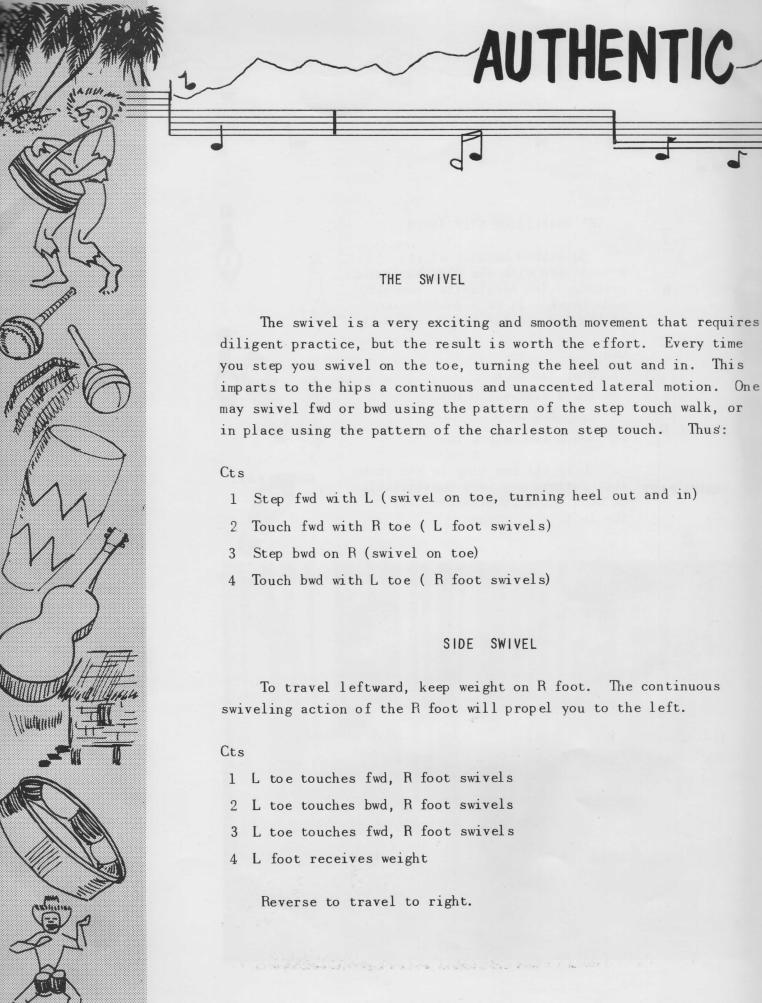
Like the box step in the rumba this pattern may very conveniently be used for a progressive turn to the left.













THE TURNS

The calypso turns are perhaps the most graceful steps of this graceful dance. They also require practice for proper timing and movement. Like most West Indian dances, calypso may be danced in an open or closed position. If dancing in a closed position, we shall use half turns; when dancing apart, full turns. For both turns the technique remains the same.

For a starting point we shall use our basic step touch in place, with the rise of the hip on Ct 2. Then':

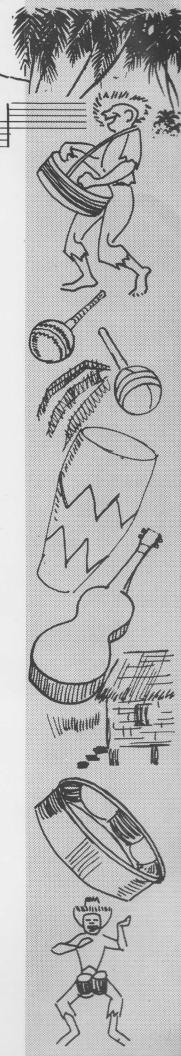
Cts

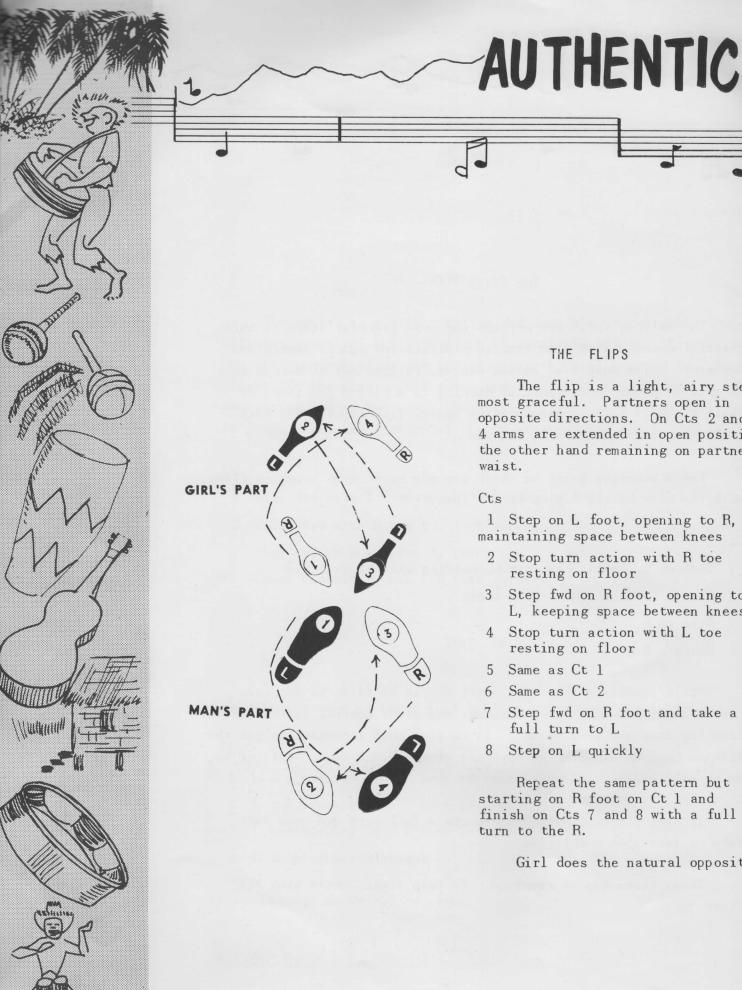
- 1 Step on L, begin slow turn L, holding girl around waist
- 2 Finish half turn and raise R hip
- 3 Step on R
- 4 Raise L hip

While executing the turns, care should be taken to maintain the space between the knees constant and under control so that the free leg does not flop around. It is also most important to get the lift on Ct 2 to achieve the rhythmic grace of the step. Failing to do so will cause great heaviness.

In open position partners execute a full turn and come back face to face upon completion.

These turns may be reversed. To turn right, start with the right foot.





The flip is a light, airy step; most graceful. Partners open in opposite directions. On Cts 2 and 4 arms are extended in open position, the other hand remaining on partner's

- 1 Step on L foot, opening to R, maintaining space between knees
- 2 Stop turn action with R toe
- 3 Step fwd on R foot, opening to L, keeping space between knees
- 4 Stop turn action with L toe
- 7 Step fwd on R foot and take a

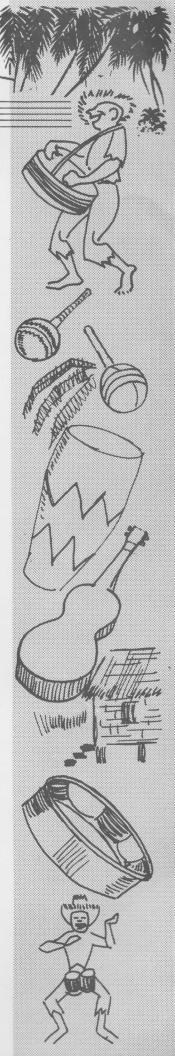
Repeat the same pattern but starting on R foot on Ct 1 and finish on Cts 7 and 8 with a full

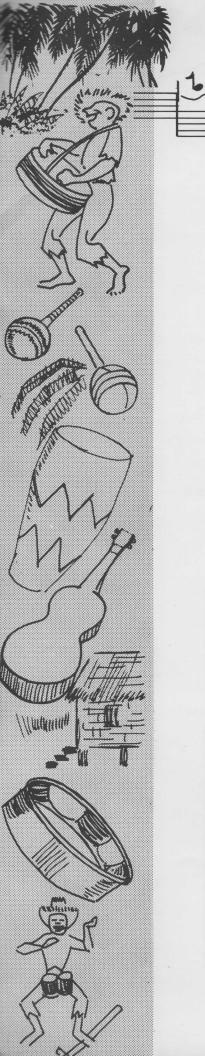
Girl does the natural opposite.

CALYPSO_









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THE MERINGUE STEP

Same as the basic step of the Dominican merengue, except that the side pull of the shoulder on the down beat is more pronounced. Use standard ballroom hold.

Cts

- 1 Step to L side on L, R hip out, L shoulder reaching sideways
- 2 Close with R, release hip
- 3 Same as Ct 1
- 4 Same as Ct 2



THE MERINGUE LIMP

Similar to basic meringue step but with a slight hop on the down beat and a side kick before closing.

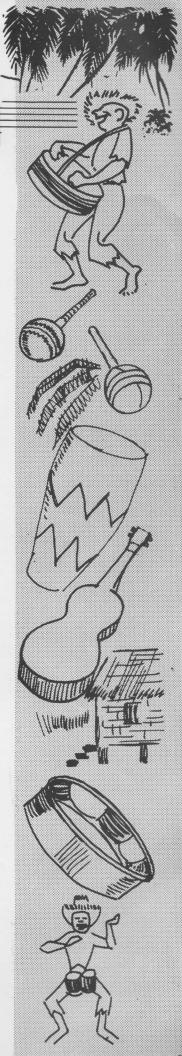
Cts

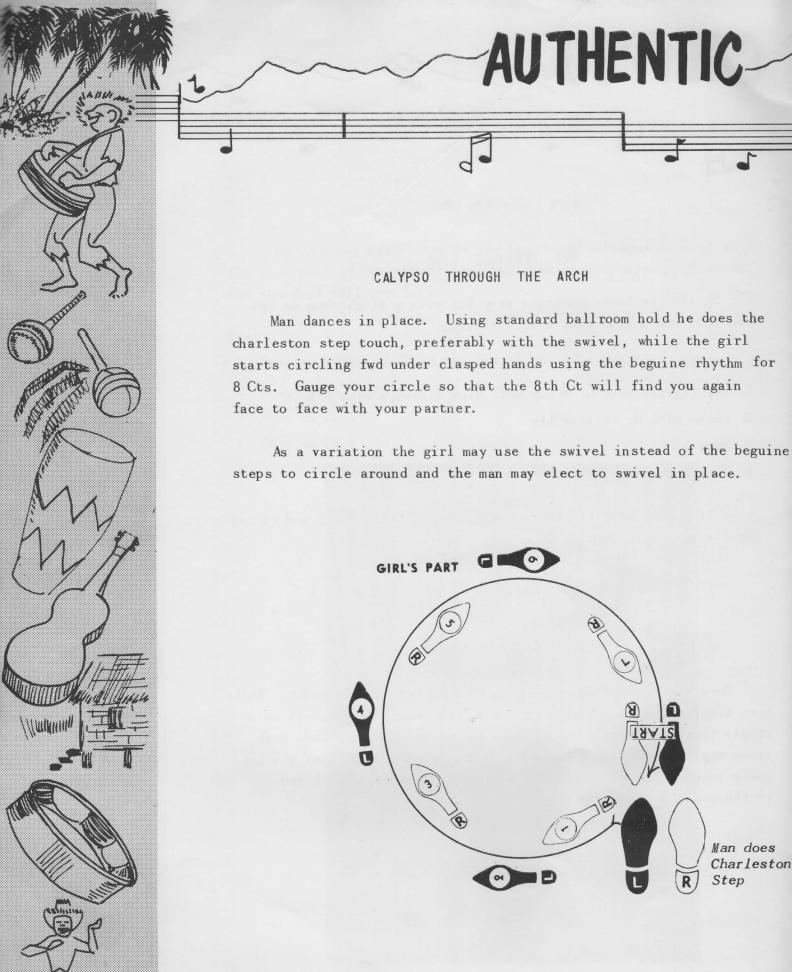
- 1 Hop lightly onto L, R hip out; kick sideways with R foot*
- 2 Close with R, release hip
- 3 Same as Ct 1
- 4 Same as Ct 2

*The kick actually takes place between Cts 1 and 2 and is not simultaneous with step on Ct 1.

THE BEGUINE MOVEMENT

More experienced dancers might like to try this movement. While very simple, its smooth execution requires long practice. It is a single time step with a double time hip movement. Walk fwd, feet close together, Cts 1, 2, 3, 4 (L, R, L, R). On each count the hip sways twice. The movement should be uninterrupted, smooth and continuous.





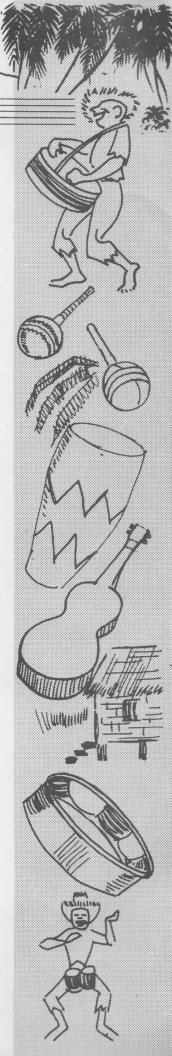


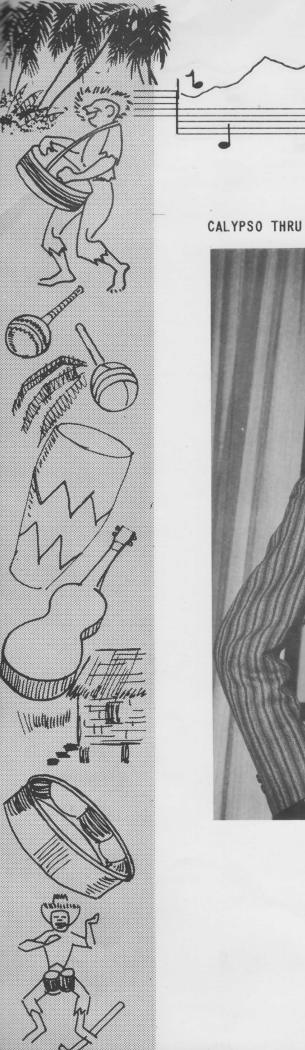
RECOMMENDED SEQUENCE

RIGHT TURN Circle to right in closed position using single time step hips swaying freely and evenly.

Cts

- 1 Step on L sideways and slightly fwd
- 2 Step on R closing to L
- 3 Same as Ct 1 L
- 4 Same as Ct 2 R
- 5 Same as Ct 1 L
- 6. Same as Ct 2 R
- 7 Step back on L
- 8 Transfer weight onto R foot and start the flips (see photo) first opening to R, then L.





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CALYPSO THRU THE ARCH



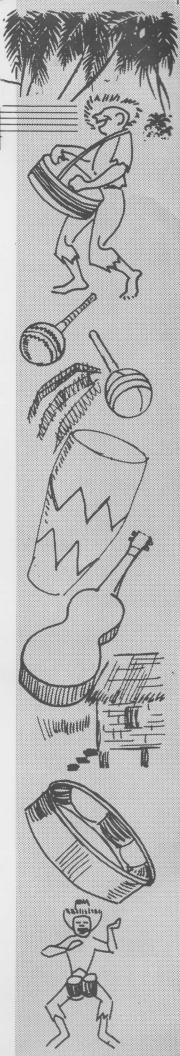
-CALYPSO____

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HERE FOLLOWS SOME EXAMPLES OF NATIVE MOVEMENTS

CALYPSO DOUBLE SWAY







CALYPSO

CALENDA



