

Bachata with confidence

Find the 1, understand the music, and dance to what you hear

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FOREWORD

Have you already read my previous book, *Never Dance Off Beat Again?* If so, some of the topics in this book may feel familiar.

That's intentional.

The fundamentals of musicality don't change. Skills such as recognizing the first beat, finding your place in the music again, and listening for key rhythmic cues are universal. They form the foundation of both salsa and bachata.

Because this book is also designed to stand on its own, I'll cover these fundamentals again. I don't assume that every reader has read my previous book.

What makes this book different is its focus on bachata.

You'll learn how bachata music is structured, which instruments shape the rhythm and melody, how to recognize the different sections of a song, and how to use that knowledge to dance more musically.

So rather than seeing this book as a repetition of *Never Dance Off Beat Again*, think of it as the next step: building on the same universal foundation while applying it to the unique characteristics of bachata.

Enjoy the book, the music, and the dancing!

INTRODUCTION

During class, you may have no trouble following the basic step and performing different combinations. But what happens when an unfamiliar song suddenly comes on at a social? You might start wondering where the first beat is, lose your timing, or feel unsure about how to respond to changes in the music.

Those moments of uncertainty usually have little to do with your sense of rhythm. More often, the reason is much simpler: when learning to dance, most of the attention goes to what you should do, and far less to what you should listen for.

You learn steps, turns, partnerwork, body movement, and new combinations. Of course, all of that is part of bachata. But when the music itself is rarely explained, it's easy to become dependent on your instructor counting the beats, your dance partner, or songs you already know to stay on time. As soon as the music does something unexpected, that sense of direction can disappear.

This book was written to fill that missing piece.

You don't need to be a musician, know how to read music, or understand complicated music theory. Instead, you'll learn to listen from a dancer's perspective. What musical cues can help you find the first beat? Which instruments can you hear? Why does the feel of a song change? And how can you eventually bring those changes into your dancing?

What you'll learn in this book

We'll start with the basics: understanding the count and finding the 1. From there, you'll discover which musical cues can help you stay on time or get back on time when you lose it.

Next, you'll get to know the most important instruments in bachata and learn how they work together to shape the rhythm, melody, and energy of the music. You'll discover how a bachata song develops, which changes you can learn to recognize, and how different styles of bachata each have their own distinct character.

But recognizing what you hear is only the beginning. As you progress, you'll start connecting what you hear more and more to what you do on the dance floor. The listening exercises will gradually give way to dance exercises that bring movement, music, and partnerwork together.

How to use this book

The chapters are arranged in this order for a reason. Each section builds on what came before and lays the foundation for what follows. That's why I recommend working through the book from beginning to end the first time.

Throughout the book, you'll find listening exercises, dance exercises, and specific song examples. Sometimes you'll simply listen, sometimes you'll practice the basic step, and later you'll practice with a partner. Take your time with these exercises. The goal isn't to memorize as much theory as possible, but to train your ears.

Some things will be easy to recognize, while others will take more repetition. By listening to the same song several times, each time with a different focus, you'll often start noticing details you completely missed the first time.

At the end of the book, you'll find the Bachata Musicality Training, a four-week program that guides you step by step through putting everything you've learned into practice.

The ultimate goal is simple: to become less dependent on counting while you dance and rely more on what you hear, so you not only know where you are in the music, but also begin to feel what you want to do with it.

PART 1: WHY YOU LOSE YOUR TIMING

Almost every bachata dancer loses their timing at some point.

Sometimes it happens during a slow song. Sometimes after an unexpected break. And sometimes it feels as though the music suddenly takes a different direction.

When that happens, many dancers start to think they simply don't have a good sense of rhythm.

But is that really the case?

In this first part, you'll discover why so many bachata dancers struggle with timing and musicality. You'll learn that the problem usually isn't your sense of rhythm, but the way you listen to the music.

Why you lose your timing (and how to prevent it)

If you've ever walked off the dance floor feeling frustrated because you lost your timing, there's one thing I want you to know right away: you're not the only one.

In fact, almost every bachata dancer experiences this. Beginners do, but so do dancers who have been taking classes for years.

In my classes, I regularly hear comments like:

- “I just don't have a sense of rhythm.”
- “I'm not musical enough.”
- “I don't hear the music the way other people do.”

But in most cases, the problem has very little to do with talent. What I've learned over the years is that many dancers have never really learned how to listen to bachata music. They learn the basic step, turns, body movement, and new combinations first, and only much later discover how the music itself is actually structured.

That may sound strange. You've probably heard hundreds of bachata songs. You've taken classes, gone to socials, and practiced the basic step more times than you can count. But hearing bachata music and understanding bachata music are two very different things.

Think of it like listening to a conversation in a language you don't speak. You hear the words and may even recognize a few of them, but you don't understand how the story is put together. You don't know where one thought begins or ends, and you certainly can't predict what's coming next.

For many dancers, bachata music feels exactly like that. They hear the music, but they don't yet understand its language.

As a result, many dancers start relying on other things without even realizing it: a familiar song, their dance partner, the instructor counting out loud, or simply counting in their head. As long as everything unfolds the way they expect, there doesn't seem to be a problem. But as soon as

a song is structured differently, contains an unexpected break, or suddenly changes in energy, doubt starts to creep in.

Maybe you miss a lead, get distracted by another couple on the dance floor, or become so focused on a new combination that you stop truly listening to the music. And usually, you don't lose your timing all at once. It often starts with something small: a step that comes slightly too early, a pause that you fill too quickly, or a musical accent that you miss.

On their own, these small differences may not seem important, but together they can gradually cause you to lose your connection with the music.

Many dancers try to solve this by focusing even more on their combinations. But the more they do that, the less they listen to the music.

They start asking themselves:

- “Am I still dancing on the right beat?”
- “Where is the first beat?”
- “Should I start counting again?”
- “Why does my partner seem to feel the music so easily?”

While you're searching for the answer, the music keeps going.

Experienced dancers approach this differently. That doesn't mean they never lose their timing. They miss accents too, and they can lose track of the count for a moment. The difference is that they know what to listen for to find their way back.

They don't focus only on the beat, but also on the instruments, recurring patterns, and the structure of the song. Because of that, they can often find their place again within just a few counts.

To learn how to do that yourself, we'll start with the basics: understanding how counting works in bachata. It gives you a sense of direction and helps you recognize where you are in the music. From there, we'll gradually add more musical cues, so that eventually you won't have to rely on counting alone.

Understanding the bachata count

One of the first things you learn in a bachata class is how to count.

Almost every instructor starts with:

1 - 2 - 3 - tap... 5 - 6 - 7 - tap

Some instructors count the tap as 4 and 8, while others say tap. Both ways are correct. The movement stays exactly the same; only the way you count it is different.

After a few classes, this starts to feel completely natural. You learn the basic step, and little by little, your feet and the music begin to work together. Yet for many dancers, there comes a point when that confidence suddenly disappears. Everything goes well in class. The instructor counts along, the music is familiar, and you know exactly when to step. But as soon as an unfamiliar song comes on at a social, the same doubt often appears.

“Where am I in the count?”

Many people think they are simply counting the musical measure. That is partly true, but the bachata count is more than just a sequence of numbers. Think of the count as a map.

When you visit an unfamiliar city, you can walk around for a while without a map. But after some time, you may lose your sense of direction. You no longer know where you are or which way to go. The map doesn't change the city. It simply helps you find your bearings.

The bachata count works in exactly the same way. The music keeps going, but the count helps you understand where you are within the song.

Many beginners also get confused because dancers and musicians think about rhythm differently. Musicians usually think in measures of four beats. Dancers often experience the music as a pattern of eight counts, with each step having its own place.

That's why in bachata you'll usually hear: