

AI SYRTÓS (SYRTÓ)

Greece

The most popular folk-dance type among Greeks is the *syrtós* or *syrtó* (seer-TOHSS [-TOH])*. At any festive gathering on the mainland or the islands, the first dance tune the musicians strike up is likely to be that of the local *syrtós*, and everyone, including "those who don't know how to dance" (to quote one native), will join the chain.

The name *syrtós* derives from a verb whose meaning includes several ideas: (1) "to move something without lifting it", i.e., "to pull or drag", and (2) "to lead (a chain dance)". Hence, it denotes a kind of dance in which: movement is predominantly horizontal, the feet remain close to the ground, and there is a leader at one end. It implies a slow-to-moderate tempo (though some *syrtí* are fast), in contrast to what Greek dance specialists refer to as *pidhihtí horí* ("leaping dances"), which are generally faster, with more pronounced vertical movements. (These terms represent extremes, however, and few Greek dances fit them exactly.) There is some archeological evidence that the term *syrtós* once referred to any open-circle dance.

There are many *syrtí*, and their differences are based on regional origins, style, structure and rhythm. To distinguish one from another, appropriate modifiers are attached to the name, e.g., *syrtós haniótikos* ("*syrtós* from Haniá [city in Crete]"), *syrtós stó tría* ("*syrtós* in 3 steps"), *syrtós kunitós* ("rocking *syrtós*"), etc.

The *syrtós* described below, sometimes called the "12-step" *syrtós* or *kalamatianós* (kah-lah-mah-tyah-NOHSS, name derived from a famous *syrtó* whose first line mentions the town of Kalamata), is the best known of all Greek folk dances, and is the *syrtós* that U.S. and Canadian folk dancers are most likely to encounter in Greek communities in North America. It is taught in Greek schools, and many Greeks call it their "national dance".

The step pattern of the *syrtós-kalamatianós* is in a slow-quick-quick rhythm (3 dancer's beats per measure), and the length of the "slow" beat relative to the "quicks" varies according to the music. Greek musicians distinguish two main categories of *syrtós*: the first, called simply "*syrtó*", is conventionally notated in 4/4 or 2/4; the second, termed "*kalamatianó*", is usually notated in 7/8.

* *Syrtós* (plural *syrtí* [seer-TEE]) is the form given in Greek dictionaries; some language purists insist that it alone is "correct", being the adjectival form required with the noun *horí*: ("dance"). It is used by most Greek dance specialists in referring to the dance as movement. *Syrtó* (plural *syrtá* [seer-TAH]) is widely used among musicians and musicologists in contexts dealing with the music. Adhering strictly to this distinction, we might say that "a *syrtós* is what one dances when a *syrtó* is played." The two words are, however, practically interchangeable in colloquial usage among native Greeks. U.S. and Canadian folk dancers tend to use *syrtó* for the singular and *syrtós* (seer-TOH2) as the "standardized" English plural (as in "How many *syrtós* do you know?").

SYRTÓS (Continued)

The relation of the 3 dancer's beats to the two types of music is:

Dancer's beats (counts):	1	2	3
Rhythm:	S	Q	Q
4/4 notation ("syrtós"):	♩	♩	♩
7/8 notation ("kalamatiandó"):	♩.	♩	♩

The *syrtós* recorded here by NAMA is in relatively fast 4/4 time.

Formation: Open circle or chain, M and W; hands joined and held at shoulder height or down at sides or somewhere in between. The leader (R-end dancer) has free hand on hip or behind back, or raised out to side, sometimes snapping fingers in time with the music. If the leader especially enjoys doing individual variations (see below), he may link up with the person on his left by a doubled or twisted handkerchief for better support.

MEAS

PATTERN

Dance may begin with any measure of music; it need not coincide with the musical phrasing.

- 1 Facing ctr, step Rft sdwd R (some Greeks make this almost an audible stamp) (1); step Lft behind Rft (2); step Rft sdwd R, beginning to turn to face in LOD (3).
- 2 Facing R of ctr and moving fwd in LOD: step Lft fwd (many dancers precede this with a hitch-hop on Rft [uh-]) (1); step Rft fwd (2); step Lft fwd (3).
- 3 Turning to face ctr, step Rft sdwd R (1); rock fwd on Lft across in front of Rft (2); rock back onto Rft in its place (3).
- 4 Still facing ctr, step Lft sdwd L (1); rock bkwd [or fwd] onto Rft across behind [in front of] Lft (2); rock fwd [back] onto Lft in its place (3).

Note: In actual practice, the rocking steps in meas 3-4 are often done diagonally facing fwd/R of ctr. Numerous other personal variations are observed among Greek dancers.

LEADER'S VARIATIONS

When and if he feels like it, the leader improvises on the basic pattern described above, doing turns, spins, foot-slaps, deep knee-bends and even strenuous athletic tricks. Some typical leader's variations are:

- (1) Dancing backwards: At any time the leader may turn his back to LOD (face 2nd person in line) and do his steps moving bkwd in LOD without releasing 2nd person's hand or the handkerchief.
- (2) Turns: Either releasing hold of neighbor or not, leader may do one or two turns (CW or CCW, usually during the steps of meas 1 or 2 or both). These are generally "traveling" turns; the line continues to move in LOD.

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SYRTÓS (Continued)

- (3) "Through the arch": Leader and 2nd dancer raise joined hands (or handkerchief) high, forming an "arch"; leader passes behind 2nd dancer, who turns slightly L, bringing the arch fwd over his head (i.e., he ducks bkwd under arch); leader and 2nd dancer then move "against the traffic" as the other dancers pass under the arch without releasing any hands, turn, and follow after the 2nd dancer. When the last dancer has passed under the arch, the leader resumes the original direction of the dance.
- (4) Changing leaders: The leader may relinquish his position to a "new leader", in several ways:
 - (a) He may simply release hold and walk to the end of the line, leaving his former 2nd dancer as new leader.
 - (b) Without releasing hold, he may head toward a dancer he chooses to become the new leader, say, for example, the 4th dancer. He breaks in between the 4th and 5th dancer, taking 4th dancer's L hand with his R hand (or switching the handkerchief); 4th dancer releases his own R hand, allowing 2nd and 3rd to fall into line behind former leader; 3rd dancer joins hands with 5th (who is still 5th).
- (5) Knee-bends, slaps, etc.: Especially during meas 3-4, leader may do one or two deep knee-bends (down on ct 1 and up on ct 2, sometimes slapping foot with R hand as he rises, and perhaps adding a spin in place, etc.). The precise counts on which he does such mov'ts are purely up to him.

Note: If the leader performs his variations in place ("*stó tópo*"), temporarily halting the LOD-movement of the line, the other dancers simply mark time until he resumes the basic pattern. Experienced dancers usually emerge from such variations exactly on the beat, so that resumption of the general direction of the dance is smooth.

Variations are done by the leader only, who may be a M or W. A woman leader limits her variations to those described under (1), (2), (3) and (4) above; "tricks" such as squats, slaps and athletic stunts are done by men only.