

Long Days in The Tepuyes

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This book is dedicated
to the people of Venezuela

I am indebted to Viviane Chonchol who helped to
establish Venezuela and the land of the Tepuyes as
the context for this narrative.

I am very grateful to Andrea Parry for her graceful
performance in the *Long Days* installation.



An old Pemón house in the Tepuyes

Within walking distance of my house there are huge valleys, teeming rivers and waterfalls cascading down the deepest ravines. There are also extraordinary plateaus that rise up above everything. These are called the Tepuyes.

The Tepuyes

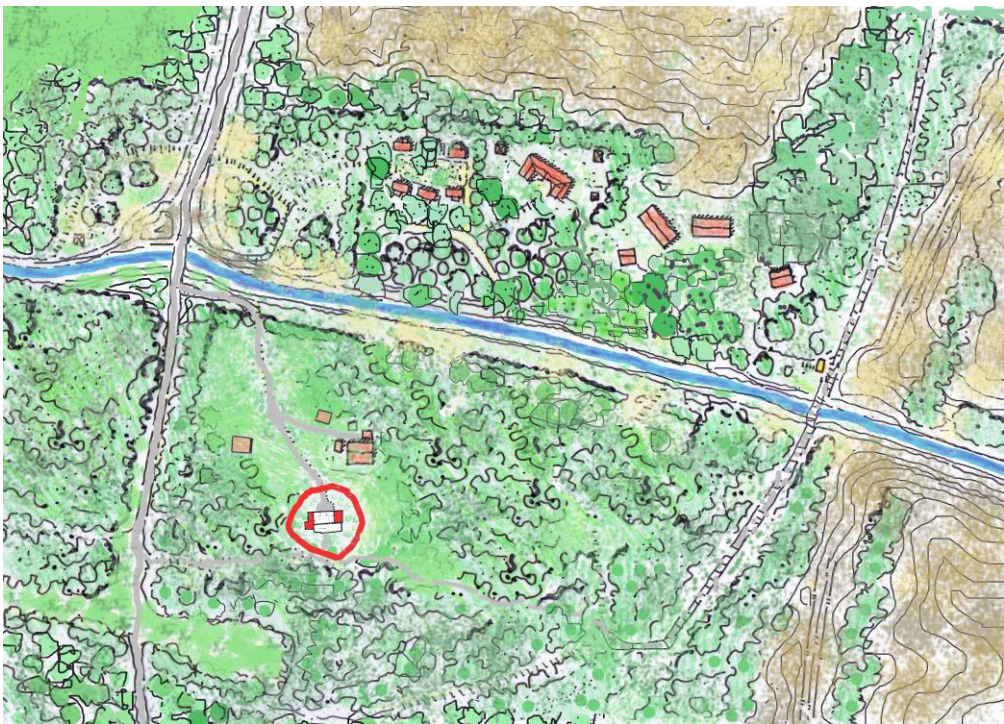
The inhabitants of this land are called the Pemón. I've come to live with these people to escape the misery of Caracas. I can't survive there, but survival here is also difficult. I am a dance instructor and I miss the luxury of dancing every day. I can dance, but I want Enrique here to dance with me. Much of my time is spent looking out along the track over the river hoping to see him returning.

We left Caracas and found this place together, but he had to return to Los Llanos, the central part of Venezuela, to attend to his mother's affairs. We love this landscape. It has dense, impenetrable jungles and open flat savannah lands, both packed with every kind of flora and fauna you could imagine.



I like to spend time with the Pemón women. When I told them that I teach dance they asked me to teach them my city dances. I agreed and, in return, I asked them to tell me about their myths and stories. Their ancestral spirits, the Mawari, live on the Tepuyes. They have a deep respect for the home of their ancestors. They do not like it if people climb up the plateau and walk on a Tepui.

They love my dance lessons, but they don't care to be precise about the moves. They laugh uproariously at each other's attempts to move together. Everything about these dances creates great mirth for them. Their laughter is the most beautiful expression I have ever seen.

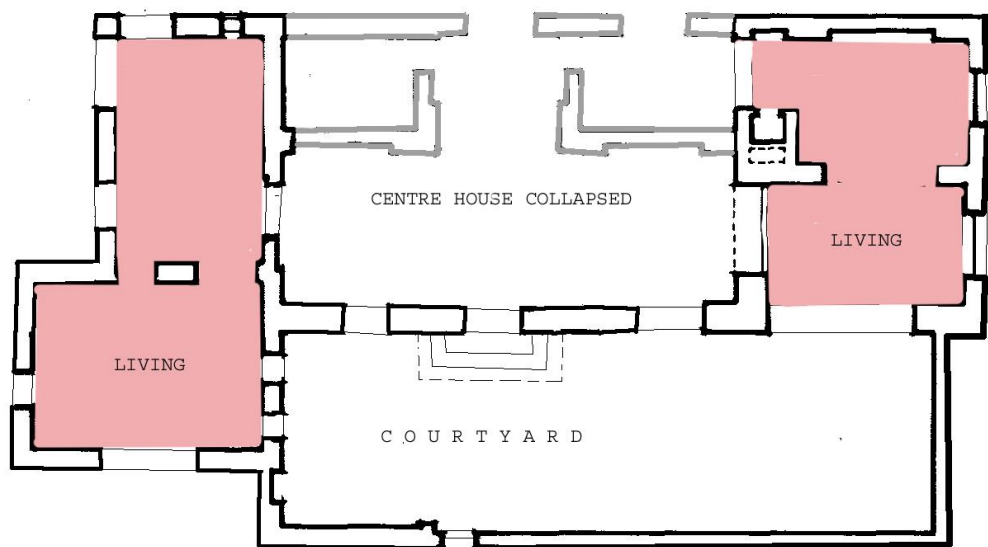


The House

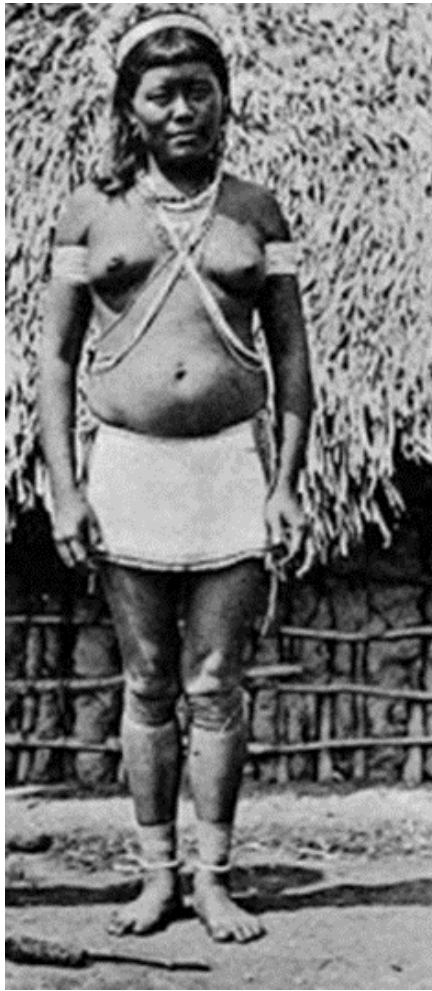
This is a strange little house. It was built for tourists, thirty years ago. Enrique and I will make something of it. It sits just south of the river that separates me from the Pemón village. The savannah lands are to the north-west and the Amazon Jungle is to the south-east. I am the only inhabitant in this group of houses. They are all dilapidated, but my house has two habitable wings either side of the central ruined part of the house. The roof and the walls collapsed. The south facing courtyard connects my two habitable wings, and from here I look into the back door of the main house. Here I have a view of the track leading to the bridge over the river. Enrique will come from this direction. I wait. What can I say? Every second I expect him, but this expectation sits over and masks all my fears. I invent every possible scenario to account for his absence – a condition that creates a strange stillness and silence in me. It's as if I am hovering above the ground.

I think of all my movements as a kind of dance. My happiest times are the hours I spend dancing in my courtyard with the Pemón women. We have no instruments here, so I sing the rhythms and this too makes them laugh. They call it my Spanish singing. Their rhythms and sounds are different to anything I have heard previously. I am equally inept at singing their songs.

This is my house. There are no good views to the north from the habitable parts, which is why I spend so much time in the courtyard. My kitchen is on the north eastern side and my bedroom is on the north western side.



There is something very significant about the courtyard; it is the place of my dreaming and gazing. I live here on the edge of Venezuela, which is a country torn apart in every direction. I live between the savannah and the forest, between flat lands and mountains, in an outer courtyard gazing into a house that is my only vista to the outside world.



A Pemón Woman



The forest vegetation is watered by the humid air, but forests are shady places and it's a wonder that vegetation can grow at such a rate when it is untouched by the rays of the sun. Gigantic trees, huge columns, rise forty metres into the air before they branch out.



The Legend of Makunaima

Long ago Wei, the Sun, was an Indian who spent all his time clearing and burning the trees to make a garden and plant tubers. His face shone brightly. One day, after work, he went to drink water and bathe himself in a stream. As he got closer, he noticed a ripple on the water as if somebody had submerged themselves. He wondered what it could be.

The lower trunks are supported by giant buttresses that flow out like skirts around them. Exotic growths or succulent creepers hide these mountains of wood from sight. The elaborate festoons spiral up from the ground and then hang down from overhead branches.



The Legend of Makunaima

The next day he returned to the pool, but more quietly this time, and saw a small woman with very long hair that reached down to her feet. She was bathing herself; playing and beating the water with her hair. When she noticed the Sun was coming, she went down into the depths of the pool. But the Sun managed to grab hold of her hair.



Many of the festoons end their journey by curling like colossal serpents over the ground that was their starting place. Millions of new growths of every shape and size sprout from these creepers and they in turn climb back up to the forest canopy.



The Legend of Makunaima

"Not me, not me" she shouted, "I am Tuenkaron, a water creature. I'll send you a woman to be your companion and wife."

So the Sun released her hair and let her go.

The next day, the Sun cleaned his tubers and gathered trees to set fire to them. Suddenly, a white woman appeared.

"Tuenkaron sent me. Have you cleared the garden yet?"

This is an alluring, awesome world. I walk and dream; amazed that the network of ropes and cables end their upward journey in a world far out of sight. I imagine them twisting round each other as they face the sky in a tightly packed canopy.



The Legend of Makunaima

"Not yet," the Sun replied, "I've only just cleared this bit. As you can see, I have made a few piles of wood. Pull out the tubers from the fire, so we can eat." The woman took the tubers from the embers and together they ate. Then the Sun said to the woman: "Set fire to the wood I gathered." She set fire to the piles with a split stick and dry shells. "Go and fetch water," the sun said.



Tiny patches of light, like faint glimmers of blue-sky, twinkle through the web of interlacing branches. Pin-striped shafts of light penetrate the canopy and before they are subdued and broken into a multitude of scattered fragmentary sparkles.



The Legend of Makunaima

The woman went to the stream with her gourd and bent down to collect water. While she was filling the gourd the ends of her fingers began to go soft and then her arms and then her whole body. She ended up in a heap, like a pile of clay, because the woman was made of white mud.

A few specks of light is all that remains of the intense tropical sun burning overhead. The gloom and solemn silence combine to make the experience overwhelming. All who travel through this vast overcrowded complexity are intruders.



The Legend of Makunaima

As the woman did not return, the Sun went to look for her and when he got to the stream, he found the water in the pool was the colour of mud. The Sun was upset and cursed Tuenkaron for sending him a woman who couldn't even collect water."



I like evenings in the savannah. When the sun dips to the horizon and loses its outline, a theatrical extravaganza begins to dominate the sky. The heavens, blurred by a thick golden light, take on the onset of darkness, not with sombre hues but with magnificent colours.



The Legend of Makunaima

Then he went upstream, drank some water that wasn't muddied and went to sleep in his house.

When he awoke the next day, the Sun went back to his tubers to continue clearing it. Suddenly, a white woman appeared.

“Tuenkaron sent me. Have you cleared the garden yet?”

A flamboyant backdrop artist would find it hard to paint the luminous sun as it touches the horizon and disappears. Wisps of floating cloud drift across the sky. I keep watch until the cosmic disc makes a final shiver and sinks below the mountains.



The Legend of Makunaima

"Yes and no", he answered, "I've only cleared this little bit. Go and fetch some water so we can eat together." The woman went to the stream, fetched water and they ate the tubers together. After eating the Sun went back to work and said to the woman:

"While I carry on clearing, you can set fire to the piles of wood.



The last rays of light are offered like alms from a heavenly host; a brilliant coloured dance of intense radiance and sombre light. A short-lived daydream. After a period of gloom the complete darkness of night takes over and a surprising hush reigns over the land.



The Legend of Makunaima

The woman took a split stick to start a fire. She knelt down with some embers and blew on them to start a flame but the fire heated up her face and from there she started melting: her arms and then her whole body, until she ended up in a heap like a pile of wild wax.

The night is peace and contentment. There are sparkling lights in the heavens. I can hear the music of the stars. Then I have cosmic ambitions rather than feeling the weight of daily survival. This is substantial stuff and it feeds me.



The Legend of Makunaima

The Sun couldn't see if she had started a fire and he never saw smoke rise from any of the piles, so he went to see what the woman was doing. When he got close and found the woman melted and turned into a pile of wax. So the Sun went to the stream and told Tuenkaron that he was going to dry her up and he was going to dry up all the water.



If dusk is a serenade, dawn is an explosive opera. The enchantment that is nature's refreshment at the beginning of each new day is a marvel. The mornings are a striking and rapid dance of changes, a homage to light and sound.



The Legend of Makunaima

"No don't do that, wait and I'll send you another woman," Tuenkaron pleaded. But that night the Sun's heart was not calm and he went to bed angry. The next day, the Sun woke up and went to work in his garden.

There, leaning over her work, was a woman with red skin. She had a cooking pot in her hand.

When the sun appears on the horizon, darkness becomes daylight and the chill of dawn disappears, giving birth to an invigorating warmth. The dew-laden foliage shows its appreciation by proudly displaying its glittering gems of water.



The Legend of Makunaima

"Tuenkaron sent me. Have you cleared the garden yet?"

The Sun didn't answer. He was on his guard after the last deceptions.

"Why don't you answer me?" the woman asked him.

"Because you're all fakes, you all dissolve or melt," the Sun said.

"If it's like that, I'm going back to Tuenkaron," said the woman.



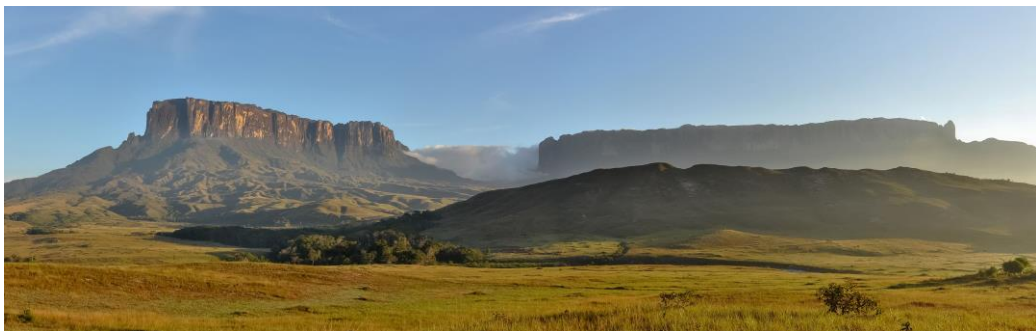
Gleams of golden light wake up nature. Leaves and buds unfold and exotic shoots of fresh vegetation visibly lengthen and expand. Life and action abound as the sounds of the animal kingdom announce the presence of a new day.



The Legend of Makunaima

"Well", said the Sun, "let me test you," and he sent her to start a fire, and she did, without melting. And he sent her to fetch water, and she fetched it without dissolving. Then he sent her to cook tubers in the pot and the Sun watched as she put it on some rocks and made the fire. The Sun watched carefully all her skills and customs.

This extraordinary operatic fanfare is played out against a glowing backdrop that is a vision of terrestrial beauty. Suddenly we are greeted to the sound of a million birds, all of them chirping, fluttering about and chiming together.



The Legend of Makunaima

When it started to get dark the woman told the Sun she wanted to return home and the Sun said she could go back if she first cooked the dinner. When she had finished making the dinner the woman promised to come back early the next day. The Sun agreed and the next day the Sun went to work earlier than usual. The woman also came early.



There's a wealth of screaming parrots, chattering monkeys and humming bees. There's the melancholy goatsuckers, the mournful croaks of frogs and the plaintive whistles of mountain thrushes. It is not possible to differentiate between species.



The Legend of Makunaima

Again the Sun put the woman to the test: he sent her to fetch water, he sent her to make fire, he sent her to cook food. And seeing that she did not go soft, or melt, or crack he started to like her and he fell in love with her.

The day is miraculously alive with a great panoply of forest players performing their morning extravaganza. If I think about the alluring growth of equatorial mornings during the night, the anticipation permits me very little sleep.



The Legend of Makunaima

In the afternoon they went to bathe together in the stream and the Sun gazed at her reddish hue; like the bits of fiery stone that are found in the riverbeds. She was not white and she was not black. "Let's go to my house," the Sun said.



I once saw a butterfly on my windowsill, its fully expanded wings enjoying the warm invigorating rays of the sun. I froze and held it in my gaze. It was little more than gossamer-like material, perpetually at risk from being blown about.



The Legend of Makunaima

"I cannot," the woman said, "I have yet informed Tuenkaron."

"So what," answered the Sun.

"There is no way I can do that," said the woman.

"Well, come very early to prepare my food," said the Sun.

I wonder if I'm at risk from being blown about. It is a profound recognition and it leads me to the conclusion that I have no idea who I am. It is at times like this that I go to the Pemón women and ask them to tell me some of their stories.



The Legend of Makunaima

She promised to do this and promised to ask Tuenkaron if she could stay with him. The next day the woman came very early. She cooked the food, roasted the tubers, dug up cassava roots and grated them to make cassava bread. She stayed the night and slept with the Sun. Since then they have always lived together.



I see that cracks are appearing in the newly rendered walls. Cracks are life. I've learned to see images in the cracks and know how to read stories in the shadows. They change meaning with the light.





There is a complete world in these shadows and lessons to be learned. Hours go by very slowly. There's hardly an idle moment. I often see a face in a crack and I often read a story in the shadow.





I join stories and multiply them. New meanings always arise. I love gleaning stories in shadows. This is all there is. Silent games, silent stories. I don't write anything down; it's all here in my head.





Some days I practice narrating my stories. I never waste a thing. No matter how sparse it is, a story can be the start of great riches. I trust shadows and cracks more than I trust the wily politicians.





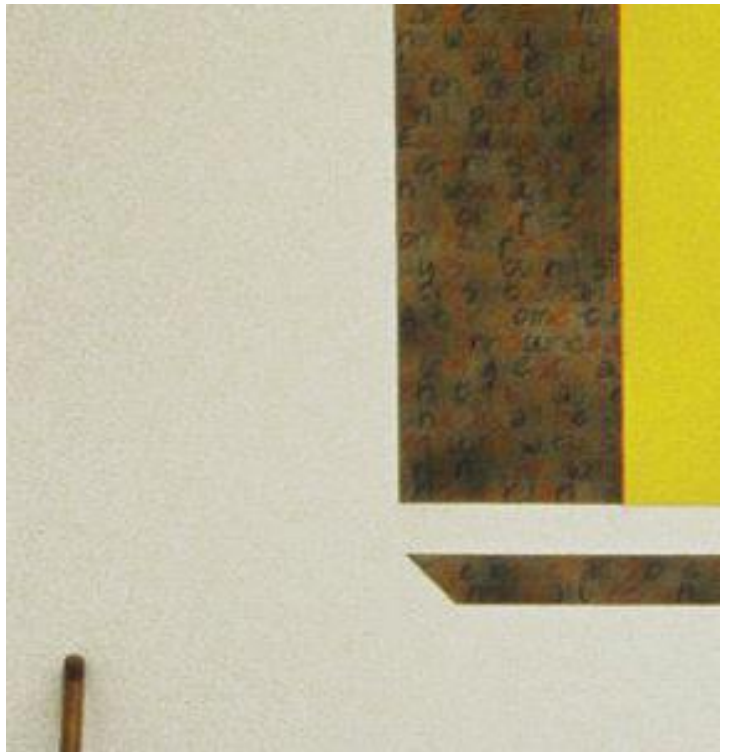
Legislators never help us learn; we must teach them. I have a fight on my hands just learning how to survive. I test all that I have discovered so far. I'm putting my worldly education it to good use.





Keeping busy with small things close by is my daily life. My world is 'up close' and my eye is on the future. I have learned how to sing and to dance. I have rhymes in my head and rhythms in my body.



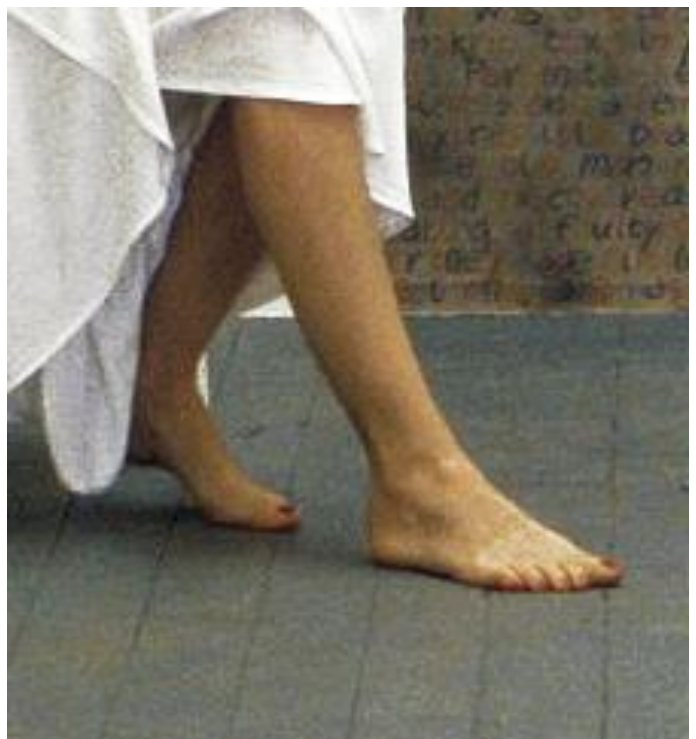


I still know the melodies my mother taught me. Life here is a series of repetitive games, additive games, subtractive games. Rhythms are played out with inconsistency and with continuous continuity





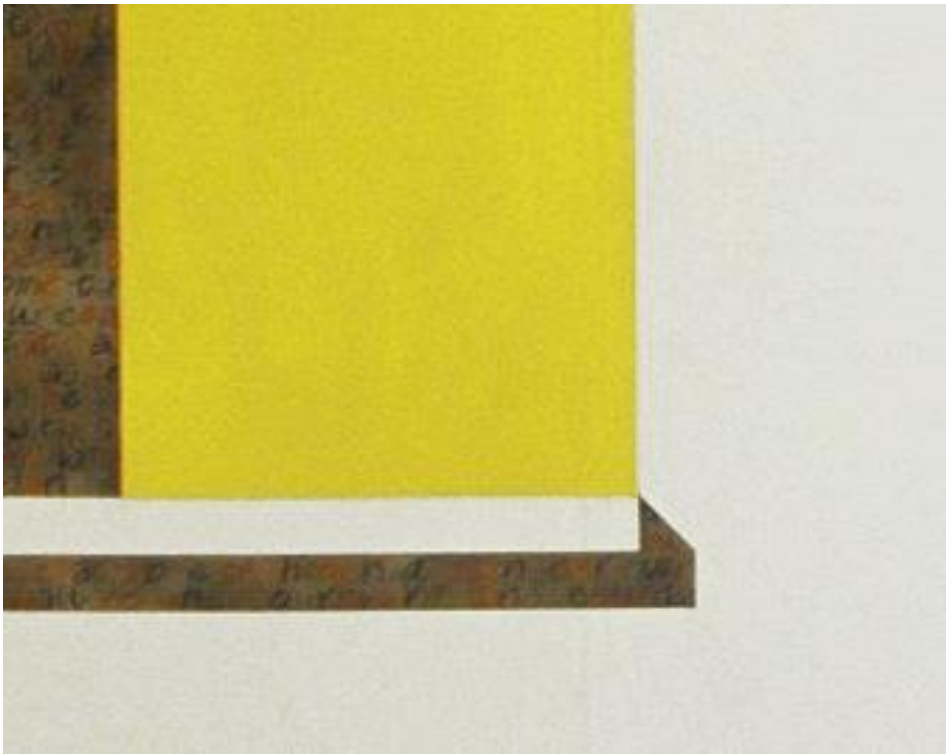
At times I lose the subject of the stories in the shadows, or they change their meaning as the light changes. In this courtyard I feel as though I'm in an arid desert, because stimulation is so minimal.





I appreciate the sounds of life coming from outside. I hate hearing a background radio sound. I'm overloaded and confused with too much information. This journey is between me and the universe.





I allow myself to think that the connections I make are with the invisible energies that resonate through time and space. I am allowed to feel close to the innocent months I spent in the womb.





I hear an urgent call that tells me to move forwards, to move out into life, to escape the claustrophobia of this courtyard. I alter my strategies frequently to keep them fresh and live without theories.





I have learnt how I can best take up the challenge to live life to the full, but still I wait patiently for Enrique to arrive. In this state of limbo, I cannot dwell on my fears or bring them out into the open.





My mental agility survives and I revel in hearing a tree taking in water through its roots, sensing how mechanisms operate during osmosis. I'm just smart enough to find the line of least resistance.





This wall has imagination. The inside surface communicates with the outside surface. Sometimes inside and outside change place. I can look inside to look outside. I survive by adapting my thinking.





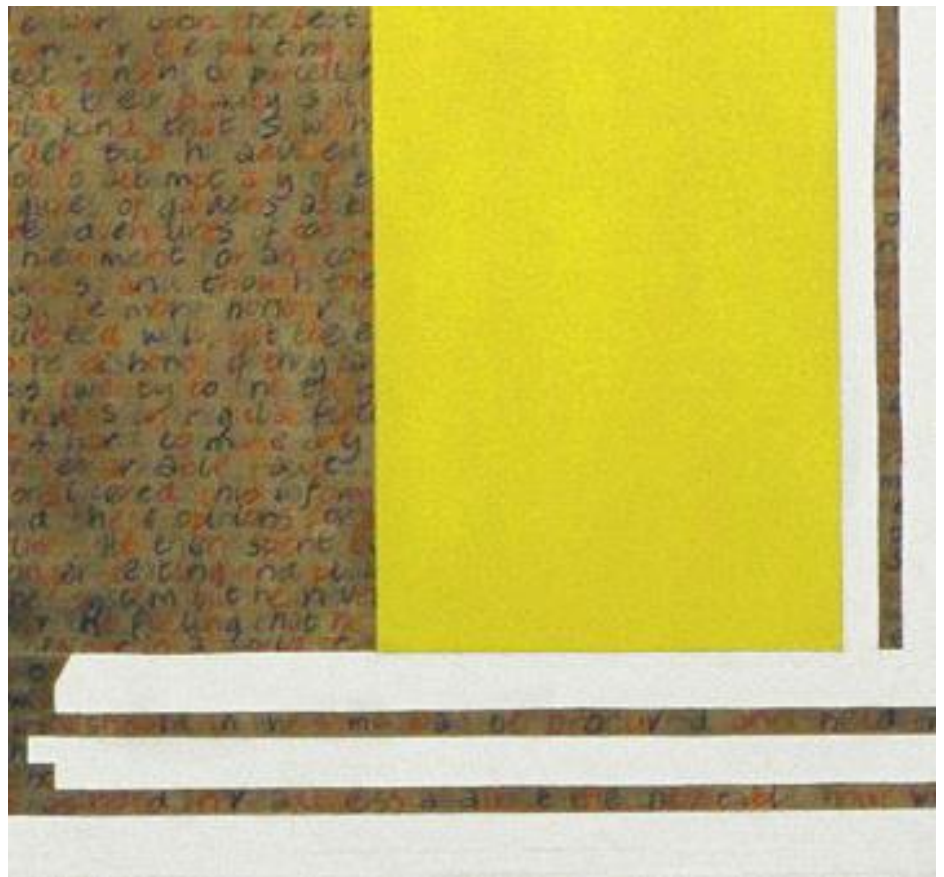
This is a time of reflection and reconsideration, a place where chance balances inside and outside. Day and night, I meditate on this place of silence. This is slow life, but it brings me satisfaction.





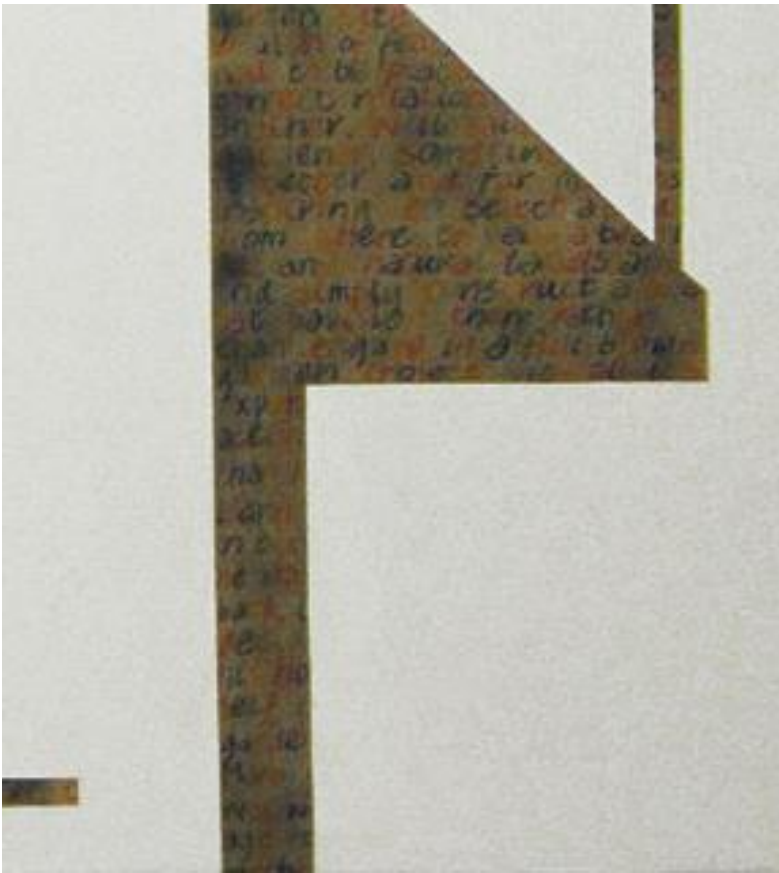
When my fingers move, they dance. I go over old ground to marvel again at the beauty of the simple old magic. I try to keep the truly creative moves intact. In this courtyard, it seems, it's all there is.





I learn what is required of my tongue and larynx in order to make sounds, what is required of my body to activate my limbs. What my arms and hands do when holding and lifting up small objects.





Silent games and silent stories work here; it's what they were built for. Maybe I have always worked like this and only now give voice to it. I assumed that everyone works in this or in a similar manner.





The Tree of Life

Many moons ago, the great Caroni valley was called the land of the mountains. The vast plains were watered by the rivers that arose in the mountains. Wei, the Sun, would hide himself behind the motionless spirits of the plains every night. It is from here that the breezes came which rustled the Moriche palms that dotted the savannah. At the edge of the valley was the jungle, closed off by gigantic trees covered with lianas and reverberating with animal sounds.





The Tree of Life

The jungle was far away, but the brown immensity of the plains made it appear closer. Now, in the land of mountains lived five brothers: Makunaima, who was big and bad, Zigué, which means a mite, barely visible to the naked eye; Wacalambé, a whirlwind; Anzikilán, a partridge; and Ma'nápe, which means melon seed. In that far off time there were no gardens because people did not know how to grow things and had not learnt to hunt or fish.





The Tree of Life

The five brothers were always hungry and could find no way to satisfy their hunger. Close to where they lived, resided a man called Akuli, who later became a rodent. Back then Akuli was very light and ran everywhere, sometimes passing through the thick vegetation bordering the savannah to enter the jungle. One day, when Akuli had ventured far into the jungle , he saw a huge tree he had never noticed before.

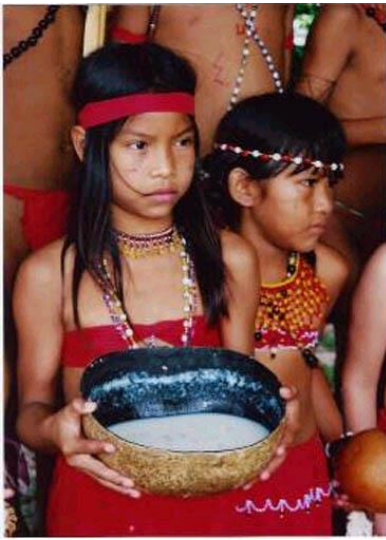




The Tree of Life

It was the marvellous Wazacá tree, which produces several kinds of plantains as well as papaya, cashew, maize and many other fruits and vegetables. Akuli was filled with awe looking at that tree. It was so big he couldn't see all of its trunk in one look. He had a taste of all the delicious fruits and vegetables and, in a very happy mood, he marked the place where it grew so he could always find it when he wanted to.

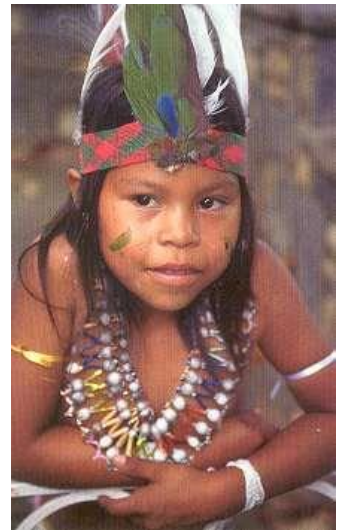




The Tree of Life

Every day, as the valleys of the Aichá and the Kuaná were lit up by the sun, Akuli went off into the jungle, found his marvellous tree and ate the fruit until he could eat no more. He went home, telling nobody about the tree he found, but Makunaima was suspicious. He noticed how well Akuli looked and suspected that something had to be making him so fat, so he waited until night-time, when Akuli returned from one of his forays.





The Tree of Life

“Why don't we turn in, brother-in-law? he said slyly, “we should do it now as the wind is bringing the breeze from the Moriche palms.” Akuli thought it was a good idea and fell straight into a deep sleep. Makunaima carefully opened his mouth, so as not to wake him, and saw that he had delicious and magnificent pieces of Wazacá plantain stuck between his teeth. Akuli was so fast asleep he didn't notice anything.





The Tree of Life

At the end of the night as Wei rose again over the mountains, Makunaima called Kali, a squirrel, who was also a man at that time, and told him to follow Akuli. He was not to let him out of his sight until he discovered where Akuli was getting the fruit. So Kali went with Akuli into the heart of the forest, pretending not to spy on him, and every now and then he asked him to name the various trees.





The Tree of Life

Akuli didn't answer him, and even when they passed in front of the tree with all the fruits, which many parrots and macaws were feasting on, he did not stop as usual. Kali didn't learn where the food tree was. Makunaima was furious when he learned of Kali's failure and decided to send his brother Ma'nápe, believing that he was smarter and would discover Akuli's secret. Ma'nápe agreed to accompany the other two and together they entered the jungle.





The Tree of Life

They travelled far, passing many bushes and trees, but Akuli did not stop at any of them. At last they stopped in front of the Zaú tree, whose fruit has a very nasty taste, and to play a trick on Ma'nápe, Akuli said to him:

“You can stay here and collect the fruit from this tree. We are going to continue on to see if we can find another one.”

Ma'nápe stayed where Akuli told him to and Akuli, with his companion, carried on walking.





The Tree of Life

Eventually they arrived at the place where the Wazacá tree stood. Akuli stopped there and said:

“This is the tree that has all the different fruits. Look how many there are on the floor. Why don't you eat them?”

But Kali said: “It looks to me like the ones up there are better. I'm going to go up and get some.

“There are also lots of wasps up there and they will sting you,” said Akuli, “better not to climb up.”





The Tree of Life

But Kali was very stubborn and he climbed as best he could up the enormous trunk until he reached the first branches. They bent under the weight of the fruit, which cast shadows on the ground like giant condors with hundreds of heads. Just as Kali reached out for a large plantain, one of the best fruits, he felt a terrible buzzing around him as a cloud of bees swarmed all over him and stung him on the eyelids.





The Tree of Life

Kali fell to the ground dazed and in pain. He said to Akuli:
“Oh, friend, that stuff about the bees was right, and for not listening to you look what's happened to me!” That is why Kali, the squirrel, has had swollen eyelids ever since. When Makunaima saw Kali with his eyes all swollen he knew something odd must have happened. He was also angry with Ma'nápe for stupidly staying where they had told him and for not discovering anything.





The Tree of Life

Then Makunaima said: “Tomorrow, after sunrise, you will go with them; but when they get ahead of you hide yourself on the side of the trail and find out where they are hiding the plantains. Then you can eat them anytime you want.” Ma'nápe did as his brother told him and protected by the branches of a macanillo tree, waited for the other two to return. But Akuli suspected something was up that day and hid the fruits further away, in a more isolated spot.





The Tree of Life

When they approached the place where Ma'nápe was lying in wait for them, they were not carrying any fruit in their baskets or their hands, and there was no sign they had eaten anything - not even in their mouths. Several times Ma'nápe tried the same ruse, but he was always outsmarted by Akuli and Kali, and many suns passed without him finding anything. Then Makunaima said to him:





The Tree of Life

“Don't hang back on the path. You have to follow them wherever they go. That's the only way you can catch them out.” Ma'nápe agreed and when they next got to the spot where they used to leave him, he said to Akuli:

“This time I shall come with you further.”

Akuli tried all his tricks to shake off Ma'nápe, but seeing that he couldn't do it, he led him to the tree and showed him all the fruits.





The Tree of Life

There it was. The world tree. Thicker and taller than any other tree, it was like a great mountain in the middle of the jungle. The knots in its bark were like rocky gorges embedded in the trunk. So lush was its vegetation that the sunlight stopped when Wei passed over the top of its high canopy. Its branches were filled with bees, parrots, macaws and many other birds fighting over the delicious fruits. The fragrant aroma filled Ma'nápe with awe and he turned to the others and said angrily:





The Tree of Life

“How could you come here every day and fill your bellies without telling anybody?”

“Don't be angry,” said Akuli apologetically, “we only wanted to play a trick on you.”

But Ma'nápe wasn't listening. He was too busy nibbling at the fruits that were on the floor and the ones he could reach from the lowest branches. When he was full, he made a basket of palm fibres so he could take some to his brother.





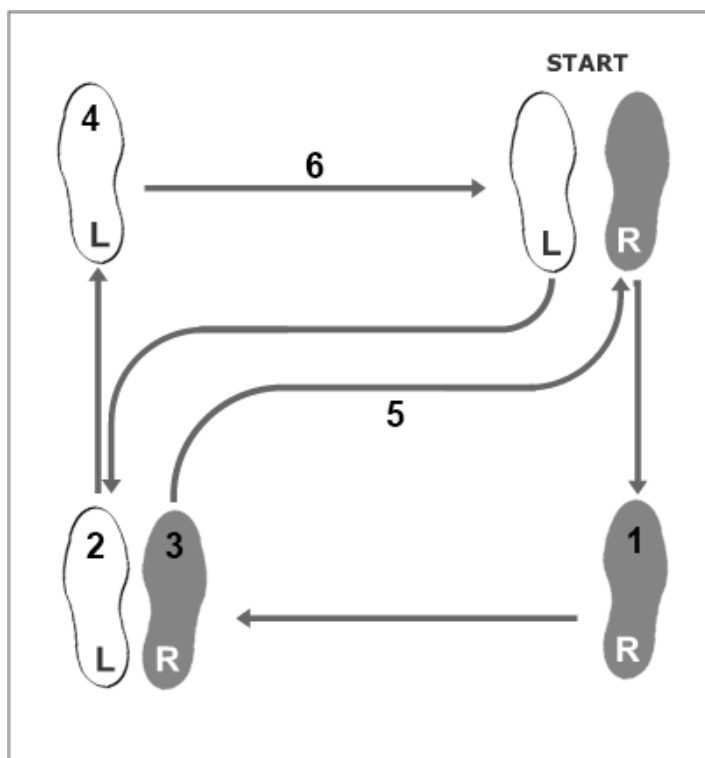
The Tree of Life

“Mind the bees,” Akuli warned, seeing him climb up the tree. But Ma'nápe said that they would not sting him, and so it was. The bees let him pick the fruit without attacking him. When the basket was full, Ma'nápe marched happily back to the valley and told Makunaima everything that had happened and all about the strange tree that produced every kind of fruit. And Makunaima was happy and the brothers ate and ate until they were full.



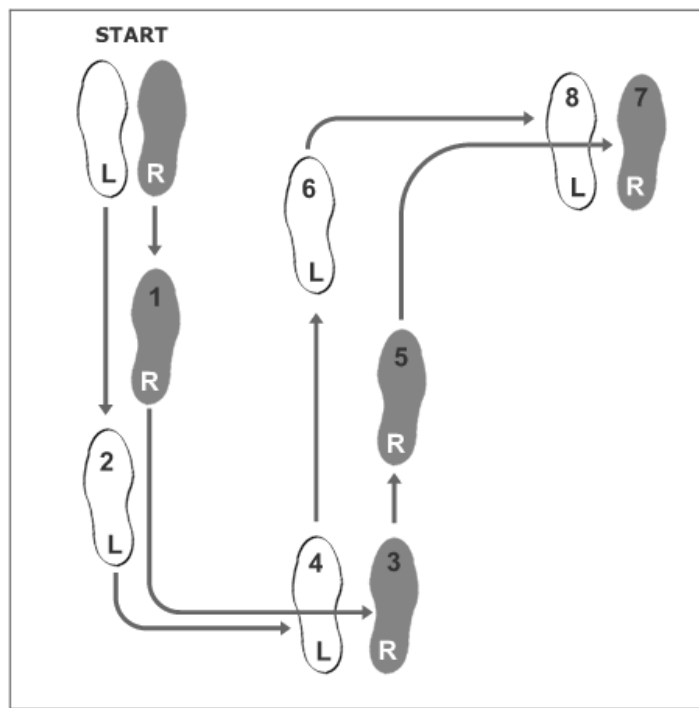
Waltz is an elegant dance. The basic series is a box step named after the pattern it creates on the floor. It can be divided into two parts - a forward half box and a backward half box. Each half box has three steps - a step forward or backward, a step to the side, and a step to close the feet together. The leader starts with the left foot and executes a forward half box, followed by a backward half box. The follower performs the opposite – she starts with the right foot – she starts with the right foot and executes a backward half box, followed by a forward half box. The steps use three counts - slow, quick, quick, which is repeated twice. Timing is 1,2,3,1,2,3. When dancing *waltz* someone has to lead and someone has to follow.





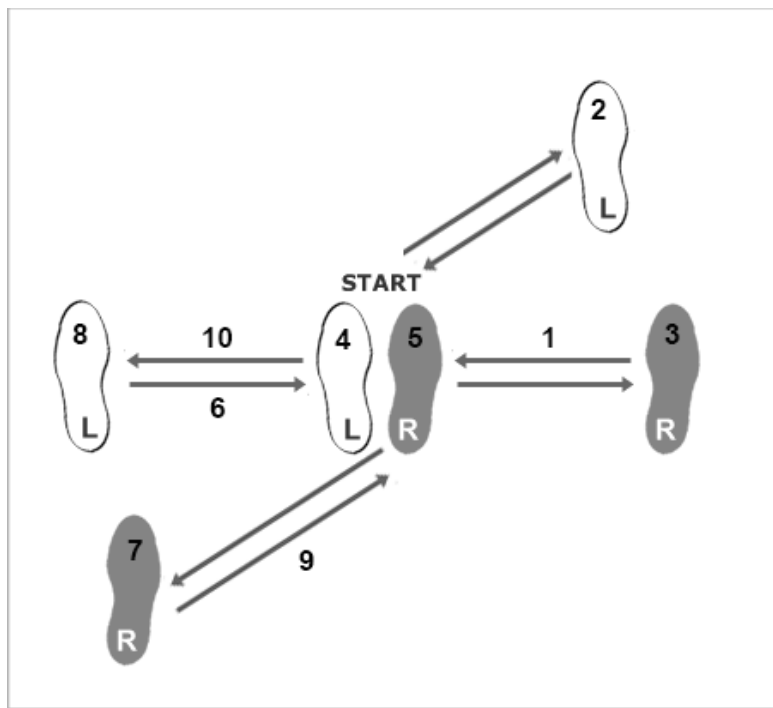
Foxtrot is a smooth, elegant dance, characterized by long, flowing movements. It is based on walking steps and side steps. The long walking movements also involve a subtle rise & fall action. It is similar to a *waltz* but the timing is 4/4. The basic rhythm is slow, slow, quick, quick. The slow steps use 2 beats of music and the quick steps use one. The slow steps are long and elegant, and the quick steps are short and energetic. It is danced by holding your partner close. Stand upright with your feet together. Face each other, lady puts her right hand in his left. His right hand is on her left shoulder blade, her left hand is on his right arm.





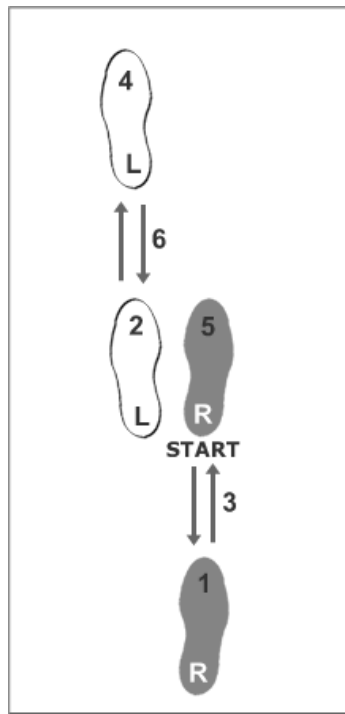
Cha cha is a flirtatious dance with playful energy. It's a blend of *mambo* and *rumba*. The difference between *cha cha* and *mambo/rumba* is a triple step (cha cha cha) that replaces the slow step. *Cha cha* music is composed in 4/4 time (four beats to a bar of music). For each bar of music there are 2 slow and 3 quick steps, counted as— one, two, cha, cha, cha. Five steps are taken to four beats of music. The footwork is simple and focuses on shifting weight from one foot to another. The movements should be flirtatious. This is definitely a party dance! Partners face each other. Gentleman starts with the left foot; lady starts with the right foot. Basic ballroom hold.





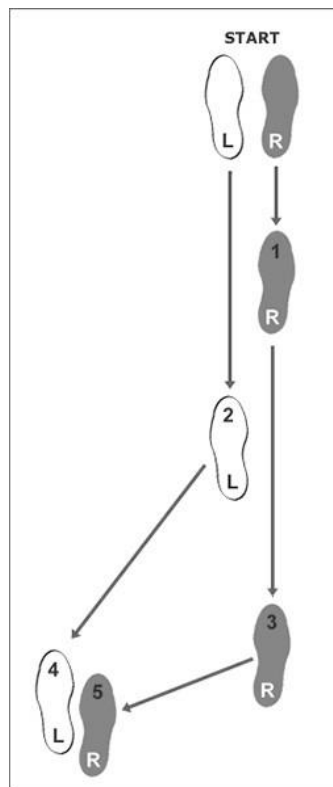
The word 'salsa' means 'sauce', usually hot and spicy, and the *salsa* is a zesty, energetic, passionate and sexy dance. Three steps are made for every four beats with one step to each beat and one beat being skipped. The steps can be from side to side or forward and back and in circles. Keep a straight upper body posture and move your hips as much as possible. *Salsa* can be danced in closed or open position and the steps are small. The faster the music, the smaller the steps. Because Salsa allows for a lot of creative improvisation, many different styles have developed over time, but the steps are essentially the same. As a beginner, you should always start with the basic steps.





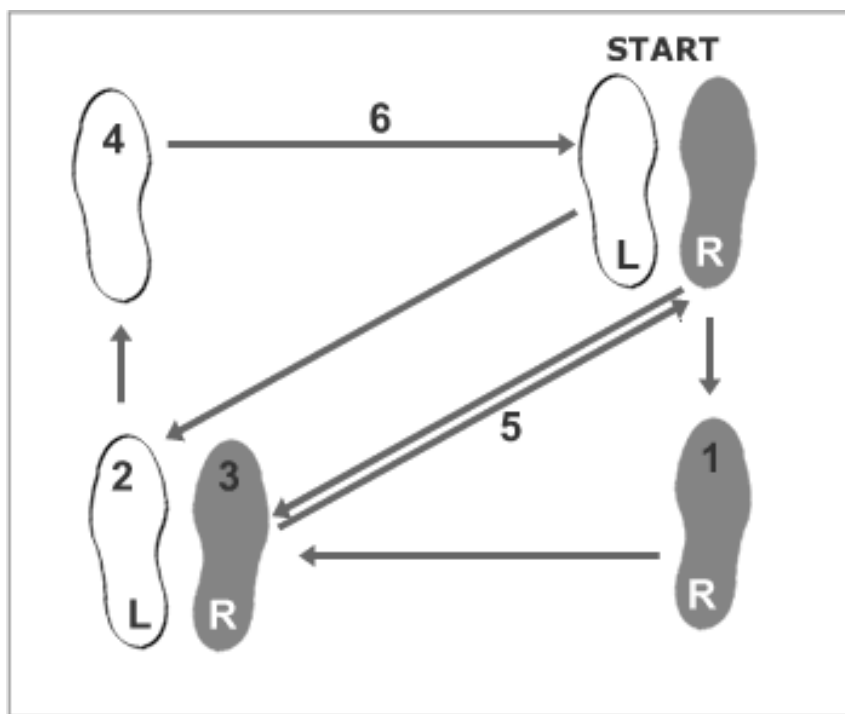
Tango, the “Dance of Love,” is a passionate and dramatic dance. It's a dialogue between partners, an expressive form of communication through movements. All the steps are based on walking. Tango Basic is made of five steps taken to 8 counts of music. The rhythm is slow, slow, quick, quick, slow. The slow steps consume two beats of music and the quick steps one. *Tango* is danced in a closed position, closer than in other dances. The man's left hand is holding the lady's right hand. His right hand is placed on her back. The lady's left hand is placed on his right shoulder. Knees are kept bent. The lead and follow mirror each other's steps.





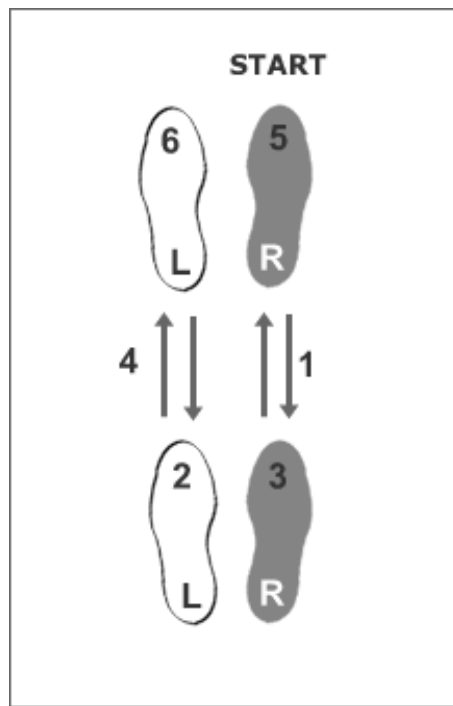
Rumba is a slow and flirtatious dance, the soul of Latin America. It is danced to music written in 4/4 time, with four beats to each measure. The basic step is a very simple box step. It consist of three basic steps - two quick side steps and a slow forward or backward step. The rhythm of the steps is slow, quick, quick. A slow step is danced over two counts of music, while a quick step is danced over one count. *Rumba* is a spot dance, so the couple stay in one place. The music has slow tempo and emphasizes hip movements. The stance is in a closed dance position. The man's left hand is holding the lady's right hand with the elbows almost touching.





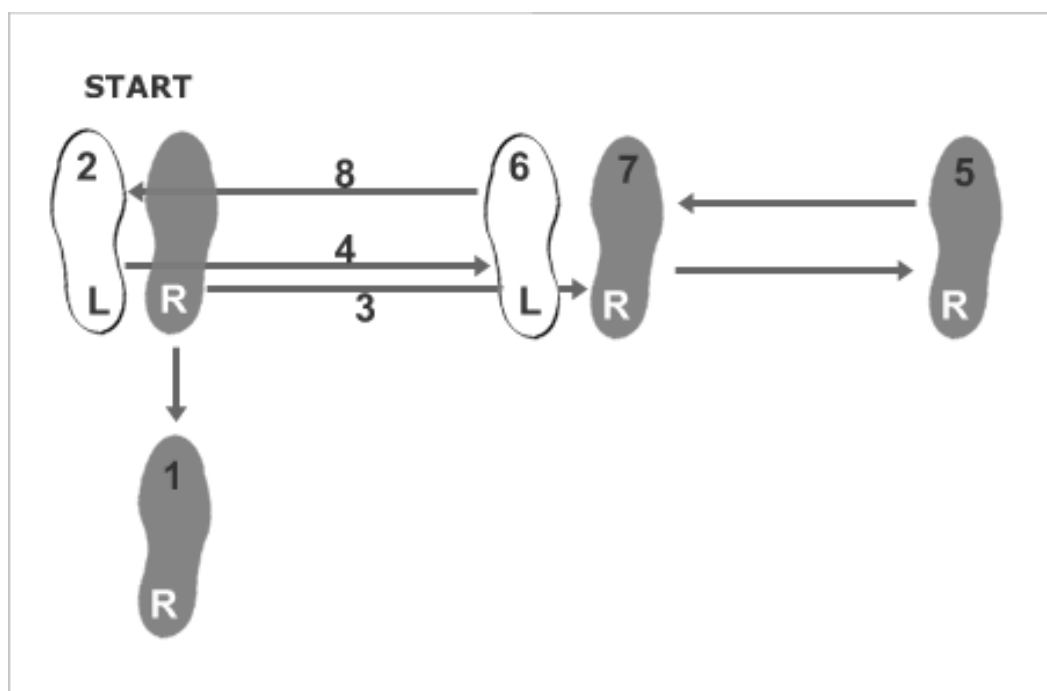
Samba is a lively Brazilian dance that uses simple forward and backward steps and rhythmic hip movements. *Ballroom samba* is danced to music written in 2/4 time – giving two beats in each measure. Three steps are performed in two beats of music. The basic rhythm is 1 & 2, 3 & 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8. It is characterised by the *samba bounce*; a rhythmic bending and straightening of the knees. It is danced in a closed position, with partners slightly apart. The lady's right hand and the man's left hand are held about the lady's eye level. The man's right hand is placed on the lady's shoulder blade. The lady's left hand is placed flat on the man's back.





Jive is a playful dance. The basic steps are based on a simple six beat sequence: 1-2-3-a-4-5-a-6. The count begins with the Rock Step; the left foot stepping back, right foot in place, followed by a chasse; two triple steps to the side, counted: 3-a-4, 5-a-6. In the Rock Step you change weight from one foot to the other, taking a little step back. *Jive* is danced to music with four beats to the bar. The basic step (for men) starts with a rock step (changing weight from one foot to the other) followed by triple step to the left (left, right, left) and a triple step to the right (right, left, right). The lady mirrors the man. Remember, the timing is - 1, 2, 3 & 4, 5 & 6.

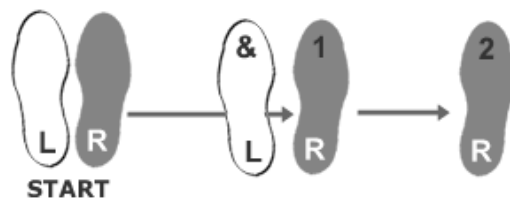




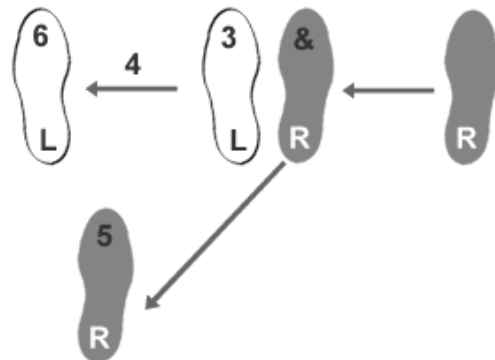
Swing is a lively, single spot dance. Beginners start with *East Coast Swing*, because it is the easiest style. There is a basic 6 count step for East Coast Swing, so the basic rhythm count is 1&2, 3&4, 5,6. It's known as a triple step swing. The basic pattern is triple step, triple step, and a rock step. When you're starting out you can replace the triple step with a single step. In that case the pattern would be step, step, rock step or rock step, step, step, depending on how you start counting. The overall progression is, of course, the same. The triple step is really not that difficult to master, it is performed in a chasse-like manner - sidestep, together, sidestep.



Triple step to the right (1&2):



Triple step to the left (3&4), rock step (5,6):





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

Not many moons had passed since Makunaima and his brothers had first eaten the fruit from the magic tree Wazacá when Ma'nápe came up with the idea of cutting it down. When he told the others, Akuli, who was very intelligent, told him:





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

“How can you think such a thing? The Wazacá provides us with its fruits and all of us can eat from it. If you chop it down not only will we all lose out, but it will create a huge flood as well.”





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

Ma'nápe listened to everything, thinking he would ignore it, because he was very stubborn. Then he went to the corner where he kept his enormous axe, lifted it on to his shoulder and walked across the valley and into the jungle towards the tree of life.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

Akuli followed behind to see if he could avert the flood. Walking one behind the other, they soon arrived at that far place, draped in shadows and heavy with perfume, where the Wazacá tree raised its leafy bulk over the roof of the forest.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

Ma'nápe approached the tree with determination and tested his axe against its impenetrable bark. The axe bounced off the wood without leaving the tiniest sign it had even grazed it. Then Ma'nápe had another go at the Wazacá but this time he intoned in a powerful voice that reverberated through the whole forest:





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

“Mazapa-yeg, élupa-yeg, makupa-yeg.” With this spell he invoked the mazapa, mamao and cariacá trees, which have very soft wood, to see if the wood of the Wazacá would soften. No sooner had he said the magic words when the wood of the Wazacá tree became soft and Ma'nápe's axe bit deep into the trunk





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

While he was cutting deeper, Akuli, became very afraid and begged Ma'nápe again not to cut the tree down. Ma'nápe did not listen to him, so he began frantically collecting bees wax and fruit husks to try and fill the gashes opening up in the tree trunk. He would do anything to avert the flood.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

But Ma'nápe continued even faster in his destruction of the tree of life, with his invocations of soft-wood trees. He named them all - one by one - and then finally he said: “Palulu-yeg.” These words invoke the wood of the papaya tree.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

This tree is extremely soft, and the trunk of the Wazacá tree also went soft. The axe went so far into the Wazacá tree that it opened an enormous gash that left it held together only by a sliver at one end.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

Meanwhile, all the brothers had arrived at the spot where Ma'nápe and Akuli were fighting. Just at the moment when it looked like Ma'nápe was going to get his wish, there was a furious shout that was heard above all the sounds of the jungle:





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

“Waina-yeg!” It was Anzikilán, who had run all the way to save the tree of life. With his spell, the Wazacá tree suddenly became very hard again because Anzikilán had invoked the wood of the Waina tree, which grows in the highest mountains and whose trunk is as hard as the rocks that form the Euteurimá Waterfall.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

The axe was stopped, it could not advance further, but Ma'nápe, blinded by his obsession and without giving up, shouted out again with all his strength: "Elupa-yeg, palulu-yeg!" With this, the tree of life, which had its trunk opened up like a huge, deep cavern, was rapidly torn asunder and crashed to the earth.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

Its wide branches were thrown to the winds, its high crown, laden with fruit, were shaking and its powerful roots were creaking. In its fall, the Wazacá tree threw up stones, mud, plants, bushes and lianas, and pushed over the trees, Élu'yeg and Yaluwazáluima'yeg. The mountains still have these names today.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

From the immense trunk, roots and branches of the Wazacá tree, was formed the great mountain Roraima, which rises like a giant from the savannah and silently watches as time, suns, moons and people pass by. The crown of the Wazacá tree, heavy with its fruits, rolled down to the northern side of the mountain.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

This is why there are so many plantain trees there that nobody planted. They are eaten by the evil Mawari spirits, who have their houses on Mount Roraima and other mountains close by. If the crown of the tree had fallen towards the south, it would be the Arekuna, the Pemón tribe who could enjoy its fruits.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

The noise of the Wazacá tree's fall, which reached the furthest corner of the forest and the savannah like a great sigh, had not yet subsided when a huge spout of water shot out of the trunk and began to flood everything.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

It rapidly swept past Makunaima and his brothers and battered them with bright drops of water as sharp as arrows. The foaming water carried with it thousands of fish and the brothers tried to catch them but the current was too strong.





The Great Flood and Creation of Roraima

The largest fish disappeared from view, leaving only the small ones lagging behind. Neither Makunaima nor the others could catch the ones they most wanted. And as Akuli predicted, the Earth and men experienced the great flood in those far off times.



CREDITS

The myths of the Pemón Tribe are published on
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The text is taken from "Tauron Panton" a book of myths collected by Father Cesareo de Armellada and published in 1989. The photographs are taken from the 1917 edition of German ethnologist Theodor Koch-Grunberg's book "Vom Roroima Zum Orinoco."

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The dance moves and diagrams are published on
<https://www.dancing4beginners.com>

