

El Baile Del Palo

El Baile Del Palo translated literally means the "dance stick." *El Baile Del Palo*, or the Stick Dance, as it is commonly referred to since its introduction in this country, is done by two dancers. Each dancer holds two sticks, one in each hand, and, in a rhythmic staccato of sharp striking sounds, they dance about each other alternately striking the ground, their own sticks, and those of their partner. As the dance progresses, the dancers assume more-difficult and unique positions around which they rhythmically demonstrate their nimbleness and great sense of timing to produce an exciting and beautifully coordinated series of figures. The significance and meaning of the dance has been lost over the long period of time consumed by passing it from one generation to another.

The dance was brought to this country and introduced on the campus of Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, by Juan C. Guerrero, a student from Barrigada Village. The dance was learned by Mr. Guerrero from members of his family. Mr. Guerrero, with the assistance of Anne Pittman of the women's physical education department, arranged the dance notations.

In Barrigada Village, the dance is equally shared and enjoyed by women as well as men dancers, although the striking action and direction of the sticks make it more readily appropriate for men dancers. Couples may be comprised of two men, a man and lady, or two ladies. The modern Barrigada woman simply slips on a pair of slacks and joins in the fun. The wearing of slacks or shorts is advisable or the whole action of the dance will lose its effectiveness.

Music: The rhythmic sound of the striking of the sticks provides the music for *El Baile Del Palo*. The soft strumming of a guitar often accompanies the dance but is background music in reality. Mr. Guerrero says the tune sometimes used sounds very much like our Varsouvienne, or "Put Your Little Foot." The striking of sticks is very effective alone. The count is an even 4/4 meter rhythm. It is quite possible to perform the sequence of figures in 3/4 time by double striking sticks each time the directions call for the dancer to **cross strike own sticks**.

Sticks: The sticks should be 30 inches long. Longer sticks may be used, depending on the height of the dancer. Sticks should be at least ½-inch thick and preferably round and smooth. Dowel rods, readily available at hardware and lumber supply stores, make excellent sticks for this dance. Dowel rods come in various widths and generally one piece 4 feet long cut in half makes a very suitable and inexpensive pair of sticks. From a safety point of view, the ½-inch thick dowel rod is much more sturdy and will break less frequently under constant use. In addition to the safety factor, it also produces a sharper and more audible sound, thus giving the dance its basic charm and effectiveness.

Position: Couples stand side by side, facing forward. The dancer on the left is the **lead** dancer. The **lead** dancer is responsible for cueing and counting repeats in each figure as well as throughout the dance. The **lead dancer** is referred to as *A* and the partner as *B*.

Special Notes on Performance

1. At all times, the sticks must be struck together sharply! Each dancer must **swing**, not **hold**, the stick so that each count or beat makes a sound. Make free use of wrist action in operating the sticks.
2. Body weight should shift naturally and easily with the action of the sticks. There is no set foot pattern to follow when dancers move around each other with walking steps; they simply move naturally and smoothly with the rhythm and action of the dance. Jerky motions and undue emphasis on **getting in position on the turns** tends to distract attention from the very intricate and effective action made by the sticks.
3. Distance between dancers at all times should be sufficient to allow for easy striking. Undue

reaching causes the dancers to look stiff and off balance. The distance between the dancers is the length of stick between outside of feet.

4. The **dance sequence is continuous from one figure to the other**; therefore it is best to practice and learn a figure for at least two counts beyond the end of that particular figure in order to get the transition from one figure to the next. Perfect this much before adding another figure. In this way the dance becomes progressively easier to do.
5. *A's* stick is swung parallel with tip slightly up. *B's* stick is held at an angle and is swung so that it makes an arc downward.
6. In general, the right-hand stick should cross over the left-hand stick except where the crossing seems awkward or unnatural.
7. Dancers strike the ground with ends of sticks. When striking ground, sticks are parallel to each other and at 45° angle with striking surface.
8. If one wishes to shorten the dance, omit K through N in Figure V.

Figure I. Strike Ground, Cross Strike Sticks



Dancers strike the ground with ends of sticks. When striking ground, sticks are parallel to each other and at 45° angle with striking surface. Dancers then **cross and strike their own sticks**. The sticks are clearly off the ground for cross strike own sticks. The body is slightly bent forward during the routine. **Do not stand up to cross strike own sticks**. Sticks barely leave the floor to cross. The action is similar to "cross sticks" in hockey. Action as follows:

- | | |
|---------|--------------------------|
| Count 1 | Strike ground. |
| Count 2 | Cross strike own sticks. |
| Count 3 | Strike ground. |
| Count 4 | Cross strike own sticks. |
| Count 5 | Strike ground. |
| Count 6 | Cross strike own sticks. |
| Count 7 | Strike ground. |
| Count 8 | Cross strike own sticks. |

Figure II. Leg Swing, Cross Strike

Dancers swing right leg forward and cross strike sticks under right leg. Stand erect and cross strike sticks in front of body below waistline. Swing left leg forward and cross strike sticks under left leg. Action as follows:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Count 1 | Swing right leg forward, cross strike sticks under right leg. |
| Count 2 | Stand erect, cross strike sticks in front of body below waistline. |
| Count 3 | Swing left leg forward, cross strike sticks under left leg. |
| Count 4 | Stand erect, cross strike sticks in front of body below waistline. |
| Count 5 | Stand erect, swing sticks behind hips and cross strike. |
| Count 6 | Stand erect, swing sticks in front of body and cross strike. |
| Count 7 | Strike near stick of partner. As strike is made, <i>A</i> makes half-turn clockwise to face opposite direction. Dancers are now standing side by side with left shoulders almost touching. <i>A</i> holds stick parallel to surface as <i>B</i> holds stick up at slight angle. |
| Count 8 | Cross strike own sticks. |

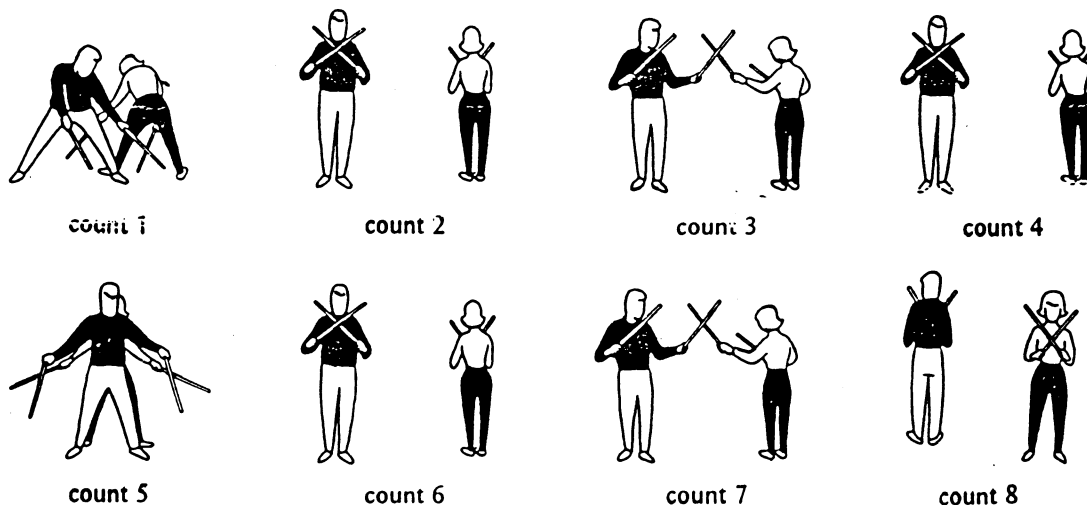
Figure III. Alternate Left and Right Shoulder In Opposition

Dancers step sideways, overlapping back of inside legs, and strike partner's stick as it swings through between their own legs. Step back into position and cross strike own sticks. Strike

partner's near stick, then cross strike own sticks. Dancers step sideways again into a back-to-back position, swinging their sticks down and out to their right and left sides respectively to contact partner's stick. Again, they step back into position and cross strike their own sticks. Strike partner's near stick as both dancers turn to face in opposite direction, ending Figure III, part A, with right shoulders in opposition ready to repeat action as described in Figure III, part B. Illustrations below are for Figure III, part A, showing the turn on count 8 to begin part B.

A. Partners stand side by side, left shoulders in opposition.

- Count 1 Step to own left into stride position, strike sticks between knees. Swing right-hand stick between own knees; swing left-hand stick through partner's knees from behind.
- Count 2 Step to own right, cross strike own sticks.
- Count 3 Strike near stick of partner. *A* holds stick parallel to surface as *B* holds stick up at slight angle.
- Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.
- Count 5 Step to own left, stand erect in a back-to-back position. Swing sticks down and to the right and left sides of body to contact partner's sticks below waist level.
- Count 6 Step to own right into position, cross strike own sticks.
- Count 7 Strike near stick of partner. As this strike is made, both dancers make half-turn counterclockwise, ending right shoulders in opposition.
- Count 8 Cross strike own sticks.



B. Partners stand side by side, right shoulders in opposition.

- Count 1 Step to own right into stride position, strike sticks between knees. Swing left-hand stick between own knees; swing right-hand stick through partner's knees from behind.
- Count 2 Step to own left, cross strike own sticks.
- Count 3 Strike near stick of partner. *A* holds stick parallel to surface as *B* holds stick up at slight angle.
- Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.
- Count 5 Step to own right, stand erect in a back-to-back position. Swing sticks down and to right and left sides of body to contact partner's sticks below waist level.
- Count 6 Step left into position, cross strike own sticks.
- Count 7 Strike near stick of partner. As strike is made both dancers make half-turn clockwise, ending left shoulders in opposition.
- Count 8 Cross strike own sticks.

- C. Partners stand side by side, left shoulders in opposition.
Counts 1–8 Repeat action as described in part A of this figure.

- D. Partners stand side by side, right shoulders in opposition.

Figure IV. Walk, Strike, Circle Counterclockwise

Dancers circle counterclockwise around each other and back to original positions by walking in semicrouched position as they take measured catlike steps. They strike sticks to ground, cross strike own sticks, and hit partner's near stick as they circle each other. The walk should be smooth and even as the dancers follow the natural rhythm and action of the beats. **Three repeats of action of counts 1–4 will place dancers back in original positions.** Action as follows:

- Count 1 Strike end of sticks to ground.
Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
Count 3 Strike near stick of partner.
Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.
Repeat action of counts 1–4 twice.

Beginning the third repeat, the action is as follows:

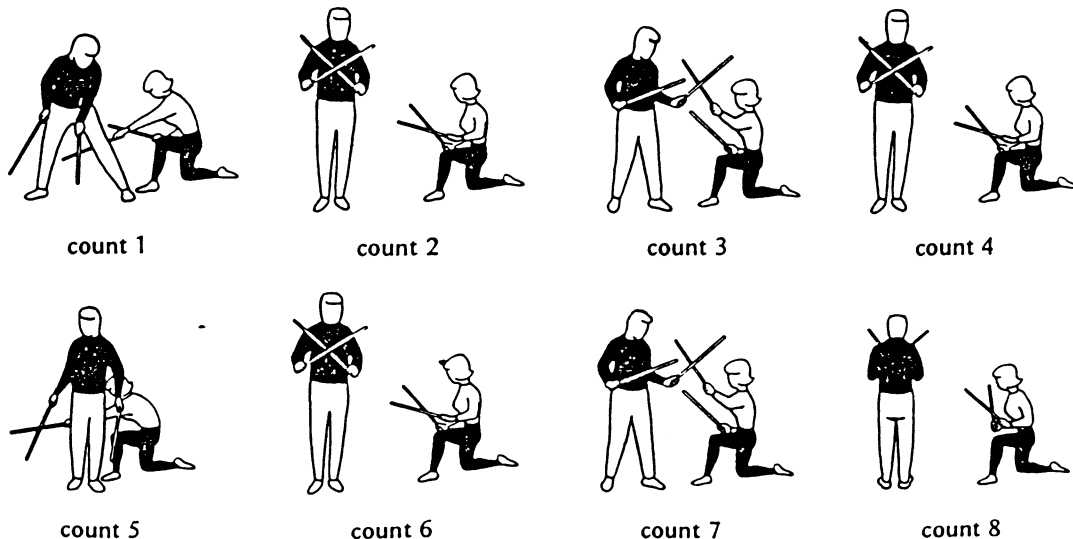
- Count 1 Couples side by side, left shoulders in opposition. *A* kneels on right knee as sticks strike ground. *B* remains standing as sticks strike ground.
Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
Count 3 Strike near stick of partner. *A* holds sticks up at slight angle as *B* swings stick parallel to surface for strike.
Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.

Figure V. Kneel, Strike, Turn, Strike

Couples maintain position, *A* kneeling on right knee, *B* standing erect with left side toward *A*. *A* should kneel facing toward *B*'s left side for best results in executing action required. Action as follows:

- A. *A* kneels and faces *B*'s left side.

- Count 1 *A* swings left stick parallel and across in back of *B*'s legs, as *B* steps slightly sideways left into stride position and swings right-hand stick down between knees to contact *A*'s stick.
Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.



- Count 3 Strike near stick of partner.
 Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 5 *A* swings left stick parallel across in back of and to outside of *B*'s legs, as *B* steps slightly sideways left and swings right stick down to right of body to contact *A*'s stick. This contact is made outside and slightly back of *B*'s right knee.
 Count 6 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 7 Strike near stick of partner. As strike is made *B* makes half-turn counterclockwise to face opposite direction. *A* remains in kneeling position but may shift slightly to left for greater comfort.
 Count 8 Cross strike own sticks.

B. *A* kneels and faces *B*'s right side.

- Count 1 *A* swings right stick parallel and across in back of *B*'s legs, as *B* steps slightly sideways right into strike position and swings left-hand stick down and between knees to contact *A*'s stick.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 3 Strike near stick of partner.
 Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 5 *A* swings right stick parallel across in back of and to outside of *B*'s legs, as *B* steps slightly sideways right and swings left stick down to right of body to contact *A*'s stick. This contact is made to outside and slightly back of *B*'s left knee.
 Count 6 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 7 Strike near stick of partner. As this strike is made, *B* makes half-turn clockwise to face opposite direction. *A* remains in kneeling position but may shift slightly to right for greater comfort.
 Count 8 Cross strike own sticks.

- C. *A* kneels and faces *B*'s left side. Repeat action as described in part A of this figure.
 D. *A* kneels and faces *B*'s right side. Repeat action as described in part B of this figure.
 E. Dancers stand and face each other. Repeat action of Figure IV. On fourth repeat of Figure IV, *B* kneels and *A* remains standing for action.
 F. *B* kneels and faces *A*'s left side.

- Count 1 *B* swings left stick parallel and across in back of *A*'s legs, as *A* steps slightly sideways left into strike position and swings right stick down and between knees to contact *B*'s stick.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 3 Strike near stick of partner.
 Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 5 *B* swings left stick parallel across in back of and to outside of *A*'s legs, as *A* steps slightly sideways left and swings right stick down to right of body to contact *B*'s stick. This contact is made on outside and slightly back of *A*'s right knee.
 Count 6 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 7 Strike near stick of partner. As strike is made, *A* makes half-turn counterclockwise to face opposite direction. *B* remains in kneeling position but may shift slightly to left for greater comfort.
 Count 8 Cross strike own sticks.

G. *B* kneels and faces *A*'s right side.

- Count 1 *B* swings right stick parallel and across in back of *A*'s legs, as *A* steps slightly sideways right into position and swings left stick down between knees to contact *B*'s stick.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.

- Count 3 Strike near stick of partner.
 Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 5 *B* swings right stick parallel across in back of and to outside of *A*'s legs, as *A* steps sideways right and swings left stick down to right of body to contact *B*'s stick. This contact is made outside and slightly back of *A*'s left knee.
 Count 6 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 7 Strike near stick of partner. As strike is made, *A* makes half-turn clockwise to face opposite direction. *B* remains in kneeling position but may shift slightly to right for greater comfort.
 Count 8 Cross strike own sticks.

- H. *B* kneels and faces *A*'s left side. Repeat action as described in part F of this figure.
 I. *B* kneels and faces *A*'s right side. Repeat action as described in part G of this figure.
 J. **Dancers stand and face each other.** Repeat action of Figure IV.
 K. *A* kneels and faces *B*'s left side. Repeat action as described in parts A, B, C, and D of this figure.
 L. **Dancers stand and face each other.** Repeat action of Figure IV. On fourth repeat of Figure IV, *B* kneels and *A* remains standing for action.
 M. *B* kneels and faces *A*'s left side. Repeat action as described in parts F, G, H, and I of this figure.
 N. **Dancers stand and face each other.** Repeat action of Figure IV, except this time they face each other standing erect as dancers complete the fourth repeat.

Figure VI. Dancers Face, Twist and Strike, Left and Right

Dancers stand facing each other a comfortable distance apart. Without stepping to face right or left, they twist at the waist and strike sticks to floor to right or left side, as directions indicate, cross strike own sticks, then strike partner's near stick as they twist to repeat action on other side.

- Count 1 Twisting to own left, strike sticks to ground. Sticks are parallel to each other.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 3 Twisting to right, strike near stick of partner.
 Count 4 Cross strike own stick to right side of body.
 Count 1 Strike ground on right side.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 3 Twisting to left, strike near stick of partner.
 Count 4 Cross strike own stick to left side of body.
 Count 1 Strike sticks to ground on left side.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 3 Twisting to right, strike near stick of partner.
 Count 4 Cross strike own stick to right side of body.
 Count 1 Strike ground on right side.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 3 *A* twisting left to face audience, *B* taking a quarter turn clockwise to face audience, strike near stick of partner. Dancer moves, as action goes on to face audience.
 Count 4 Cross strike own sticks. *A* crosses own sticks to right side of body while *B* crosses own sticks in front of body below waistline.

Figure VII. Ending

- Count 1 Strike sticks to ground. Sticks are parallel to each other.
 Count 2 Cross strike own sticks.
 Count 3 Strike near stick of partner. *A* holds stick parallel with surface as *B* holds stick up at slight angle.
 Count 4 Cross strike own sticks.

Repeat action of counts 1–4 twice.

Repeat action of counts 1–3.

On count 4, cross sticks, without making sound, in front of chest.