

## SYRTAKI

Greek

PRONUNCIATION: seer-TAH-kee

TRANSLATION: Little dragging dance

SOURCE: Dick Oakes learned this dance in the Greek community of Los Angeles. Athan Karras, a prominent Greek dance researcher, also has taught Syrtaki to folk dancers in the United States, as have many other teachers of Greek dance.

BACKGROUND: The Syrtaki, or Sirtaki, was the name given to the combination of various Hasapika (or Hassapika) dances, both in style and the variation of tempo, after its popularization in the motion picture *Alexis Zorbas* (titled *Zorba the Greek* in America). The Syrtaki is danced mainly in the taverns of Greece with dances such as the Zeybekiko (Zeimbekiko), the Tsiftetelli, and the Karsilamas. It is a combination of either a slow hasapiko and fast hasapiko, or a slow hasapiko, hasaposerviko, and fast hasapiko. It is typical for the musicians to "wake things up" after a slow or heavy (vari or argo) hasapiko with a medium and / or fast Hasapiko.

The name "Syrtaki" is a misnomer in that it is derived from the most common Greek dance "Syrtos" and this name is a recent invention. These "butcher dances" spread throughout the Balkans and the Near East and all across the Aegean islands, and entertained a great popularity. The origins of the dance are traced to Byzantium, but the Argo Hasapiko is an evolved idiom by Aegean fisherman and their languid lifestyle. The name "Syrtaki" is now embedded as a dance form (meaning "little Syrtos," though it is totally unlike any Syrtos dance), but its international fame has made it a hallmark of Greek dancing.

MUSIC: Festival (45rpm) F-3501 B;  
Festival (45rpm) F-3503 A;  
Festival (45rpm) F-3504 B;  
Festival (45rpm) F-3509 A;  
Festival (45rpm) F-3513 B;  
Festival (45rpm) F-3514 B;  
Kola (45rpm) K-401-B;  
National (45rpm) N-4537-B;  
Roper (45rpm) 175-B;  
Worldtone (45rpm) WT 10008;  
Nina PolyDisc (LP) PLS-201, side 1, band 1;  
Phillips International (P.I.) Records (LP) PI-LPS-33, side 1, band 6;  
or any of hundreds of Syrtaki selections.

FORMATION: Lines of mixed M and W with hands holding neighbors' shldr in "T" pos. Originally, the Hasapiko was danced by M only, but women now dance it both in America and Greece. The leader and the end dancer hold their free hands out to the side approximately at shldr level.

METER/RHYTHM: 4/4. The tempo increases to 2/4.

STEPS/STYLE: HOP: This is actually a low hop (or "lift") where the ball of the ft does not leave the floor.

The dance begins with a slower, heavier action and graduates to a faster, lighter action. Recent observations of researchers have shown that the style, as danced in America, is the same as the style danced in Greece. Only the basic steps are described below. Each leader prefers his or her own variations, which other dancers in the line are to follow.

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MEAS

MOVEMENT DESCRIPTION

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INTRODUCTION

None or at the discretion of the leader.

I. VARI HASAPIKO (Slow Hasapiko) BASIC STEP (4/4)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Lunge fwd L, bending fwd (ct 1); tap R toe near L heel or hold it slightly off floor (ct 2); raise R leg fwd with bent knee as body straightens (ct 3); lower R leg as R knee straightens (ct 4); |
| 2 | Step bwd R, raising L leg fwd with bent knee (ct 1); lower L leg as L knee straightens (ct 2); step bwd L (ct 3); touch R across in front of L using outside edge, toe, or ball of R ft (ct 4);   |
| 3 | Step diag fwd R (ct 1); step L across in front of R, bending L knee (ct 2); step R back to place, turning to face ctr (ct 3); raise L in front with bent knee (ct 4);                             |
| 4 | 1/2 MEAS: Touch L next to outside of R toe, using L heel or toe (ct 1); pause, or slightly raise L knee (ct 2).   |

Repeat at leader's discretion when music increases in tempo.

NOTE: While the first lunge is fairly definite, the other counts may be almost "slid through" without stops or jerky motions. This portion of the dance, like the Zeybekiko, is one of the few Greek dances in which the dancers look down at the floor and at their feet. The styling can be crisp, clean, precise, tight, deliberate, and with active concentration, yet retain a certain subtlety, fluidity, and sinewy cat-like motion. The above description also should not be considered absolutely definitive as there are as many variations of the basic step as there probably are Greeks! The "correct" way to do the basic step is as the leader is doing it.

II. HASAPOSERVIKO (Serbian hasapiko) BASIC STEP (2/4)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Step R swd (ct 1); step L across in back of R (ct 2); |
| 2 | Step R swd (ct 1); close L to R without wt (ct 2);    |
| 3 | Step L swd (ct 1); close R to L without wt (ct 2).    |

Repeat at leader's discretion when music increases in tempo.

III. FAST HASAPIKO (Hasapiko) BASIC STEP (fast 2/4)

- 1 Low leap R swd (ct 1); low leap L across in back of R (ct 2);
- 2 Low leap R swd (ct 1); low hop R, swinging L across in front of R (ct 2);
- 3 Low leap L swd (ct 1); low hop L, swinging R across in front of L (ct 2).

Repeat to end of music.