

SYRTOS (KALAMATIANOS)

Greek

PRONUNCIATION: seer-TOHS (kah-lah-mah-tee-ah-NOHS)

TRANSLATION: Syrto means dragging dance; Kalamatianos means dance from Kalamata and is named for the song "San pas stin Kalamata."

SOURCE: Dick Oakes learned this dance in the Greek community of Los Angeles, California. It was first described by Mary Effie Shambaugh as a "Greek Circle Dance" in the booklet *Folk Festivals for Schools and Playgrounds*. Dave Rosenberg taught it at the 1960 Santa Barbara Folk Dance Conference. Sonny Newman taught a "Turning Syrto" at the 1962 Stockton Folk Dance Camp and Johnny Pappas taught the same venue in 1968 and the Folk Dance Symposium in 1976. The Folk Dance Federation of California published 'Syrto' in 1946 in their booklet *Dance Descriptions*, Vol. II. In 1967. It has been published in Volume II of *Folk Dances from Near and Far*, by the Folk Dance Federation of California, Inc., and *Folk Dance Progressions*, by Lidster and Tamburini (1965). Among other teachers who have taught the dance are Vyts Beliajus, Michel Cartier, John Filcich, Joe Graziosi, Athan Karras, Ted Petrides, Ted Sofios, Chris Tasulis, Mary Vouras.

BACKGROUND: Syrto comes from the verb syro (to move something from one place to another without lifting, or to pull, or to drag). It is a Panhellenic dance, one that is done all over Greece. Many Greeks call it their "national dance."

According to John Pappas, "Syrto . . . applies to dances with a smoother flowing movement. The Kalamatianos has the same basic step as the Syrto, but it is often bouncy and leaping in character. When a dance is leaping, it is called Pithichtos [Pidichtos], or leaping dance. The Syrto can also be a Pithichtos in styling. Thus, one can see that the nomenclature is somewhat confusing. There is one more criterion for describing the dances: the Syrto is in 2/4 time, the Kalamatianos is in 7/8 time. Actually, then, it is the music which decides what the dance is called. The music also tells the dancer how to dance: some music demands smooth, dragging steps; other music demands high, leaping steps."

Athan Karras states, "The Pidichtos, or leaping dances, are indicative of the rugged mountains of Greece. There, the life is bolder, and thus the very strain of mountain life is depicted in the movements, especially in the virile and stark movements of the men. The Syrto, or dragging dances, are usually seen in the lowlands, on the coastal regions, and on the islands. These dances tend to characterize the more peaceful landscape and lyrical moods of the seashores and the easy-going Aegean Sea. In areas where there are dramatic changes in the landscape, where both qualities of the valley and mountain are mixed, we see a peculiar mixture of both these types of dance movements."

Dick Crum says, "Syrto refers technically to a dance, where syrto (plural syrta) refers to music, but most natives use them interchangeably."

In ancient dance, men and women danced in separate lines. Today, however, men

and women dance together. A handkerchief, now as then, may be held between the lead and second dancer.

In case you were wondering, *Syrtos* is in the nominative case and *Syrto* is in the accusative case. *Syrtos* (plural *syrti* [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 *horos* (dance). It is used by most Greek dance specialists to refer to the dance as movement. *Syrto* (plural *syrta* [seer-TAH]) is widely used among musicians and musicologists when dealing with the music. Adhering strictly to this distinction, we can say that "a *syrtos* is what one dances when a *syrto* is played." The two words are, however, practically interchangeable in colloquial usage among native Greeks. American and Canadian folk dancers tend to use *syrto* for the singular and *syrtos* (seer-TOHS) as the "standardized" English plural (as in "How many *syrtos* do you know?").

MUSIC: Any of thousands of *Syrtos* or *Kalamatianos* recordings, such as:

Discophon (LP) LPM-5
Festival (45rpm) F-3511
Folkraft (LP) LP-8
Grecophon (LP) GRS 307
Grecophon (LP) GRS 327
NAMA (LP) 1002
Nina (LP) L-57
Nina (LP) L-80
Nonesuch (LP) H-2004
Olympic (LP) OL-24-13
Phillips International (LP) PI-LPS-33
Polydisc (LP) PLS-201
Tikva (LP) T 131
The Ethnic Connection: An Eclectic Collection (CD)

FORMATION: Open cir of mixed M and W with hands joined and held at shldr height in "W" pos. The hands should not be pushed fwd into the cir, but should be comfortably back near the shldr. The leader and end person may either extend free hand out to side (this is typical for the leader) or place hand on hip or in a fist on the small of the back.

METER/RHYTHM: 4/4 or 7/8, counted below in three dancers counts (slow-quick-quick) with the first being the longest (*Syrtos* is typically 2-1-1 or 4-2-2 and *Kalamatianos* 3-2-2).

STEPS/STYLE: The style depends upon the music to which the dance is being done, but is generally smooth. A small hop may appear between meas one and two at times.

MEAS

MOVEMENT DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION

Varies. No action.

BASIC STEP (12-step *Syrtos*)

- 1 Facing ctr, step R swd (ct 1); step L across in back of R (ct 2); step R to R, turning to face diag R in LOD (ct 3);
- 2 Moving in LOD, step L across in front of R (ct 1); step R (ct 2); step L (ct 3);
- 3 Turning to face ctr, step R twd ctr (ct 1); small step L fwd (ct 2); small step R bwd (ct 3);
- 4 Still facing ctr, step L bwd (ct 1); small step R bwd (ct 2); small step L fwd (ct 3).

Repeat entire dance from beg.

LEADER'S OPTIONS

The leader, should he feel like it, may improvise on the basic step by adding turns, spins, and other variations, such as:

A. DANCING BACKWARD

At any time, the leader may turn his back to LOD (by facing the second dancer in line) and do his steps moving bwd without releasing the handkerchief (or the second dancer's hand, if handkerchief is not being used).

B. TURNS

The leader may do one or two turns (CW or CCW), usually during the first one or two meas. These are generally traveling turns in LOD and the leader may or may not release the handkerchief (or the second dancer's hand, if a handkerchief is not being used).

C. THROUGH THE ARCH

The leader and the second dancer raise the handkerchief (or the second dancer's hand, if a handkerchief is not being used), forming an arch. The leader passes behind the second dancer. The second dancer turns slightly to his L and brings the arch fwd over his head as he ducks bwd under the arch. The leader and the second dancer then move in RLOD as the other dancers pass under the arch without releasing hands, turning and following the second dancer. When the last dancer has passed under the arch, the leader resumes the orig dir of the dance.

D. KNEE BENDS, LEAPS, SLAPS

The strenuous athletic tricks are rarely found in the Syrtos or Kalamatianos and are usually reserved for other dances, such as the Tsamikos. Even when they are found, it is usually the M who do them (although in recent years, W are also doing half-knee bends, low leaps, and light slaps). Slapping the shoe on the sole or side of the heel after a leap or deep knee-bend is typical and the cts on which the leader does these variations is up to him. Experienced dancers usually emerge from such variations exactly on the beat (or with a pause), so that the resumption of the general direction of the dance is smooth. It is advised that dancers practice at home, perfecting their leaps and slaps before attempting them as a leader on the dance floor.

HOLDING THE HANDKERCHIEF

The typical manner of holding the handkerchief by the second person in line is: Lay half of the handkerchief over the outstretched fingers of the R hand, thumb up. Reach around in back of the R with the L and, raising only the index finger of the R hand away from the others, thread the back half of the handkerchief through the gap formed from back to palm so that the halves hang down the palm and are looped over the index finger. Close the hand into a fist with the two ends of the handkerchief hanging out the bottom. Now, if weight is applied by the lead dancer, the handkerchief cannot be pulled through the fist. Experienced dancers manage to do this one-handed with a twist of the R wrist!

CHANGING LEADERS

The leader may relinquish the lead pos to a new leader of his choosing. Without releasing hands, he may head twd a dancer he wants to become the new leader and then, breaking into the line between the new leader and the next dancer behind him, takes the new leader's L hand with his R. The old leader switches the handkerchief so it is now between himself and the new leader. The cut-off portion of the line dances slower than before. The two portions of the line resume the hand-hold as the end of the new lead portion comes by the beg of the cut-off portion.

An alternative is for the old leader to simply release his hold on the hankerchief and walk to the opposite end of the line, leaving the second person as the new leader, who gives the handkerchief to the second in line.

Another alternative is for the old leader to ask someone to walk over and take the lead, transferring the handkerchief between himself and the new leader.
