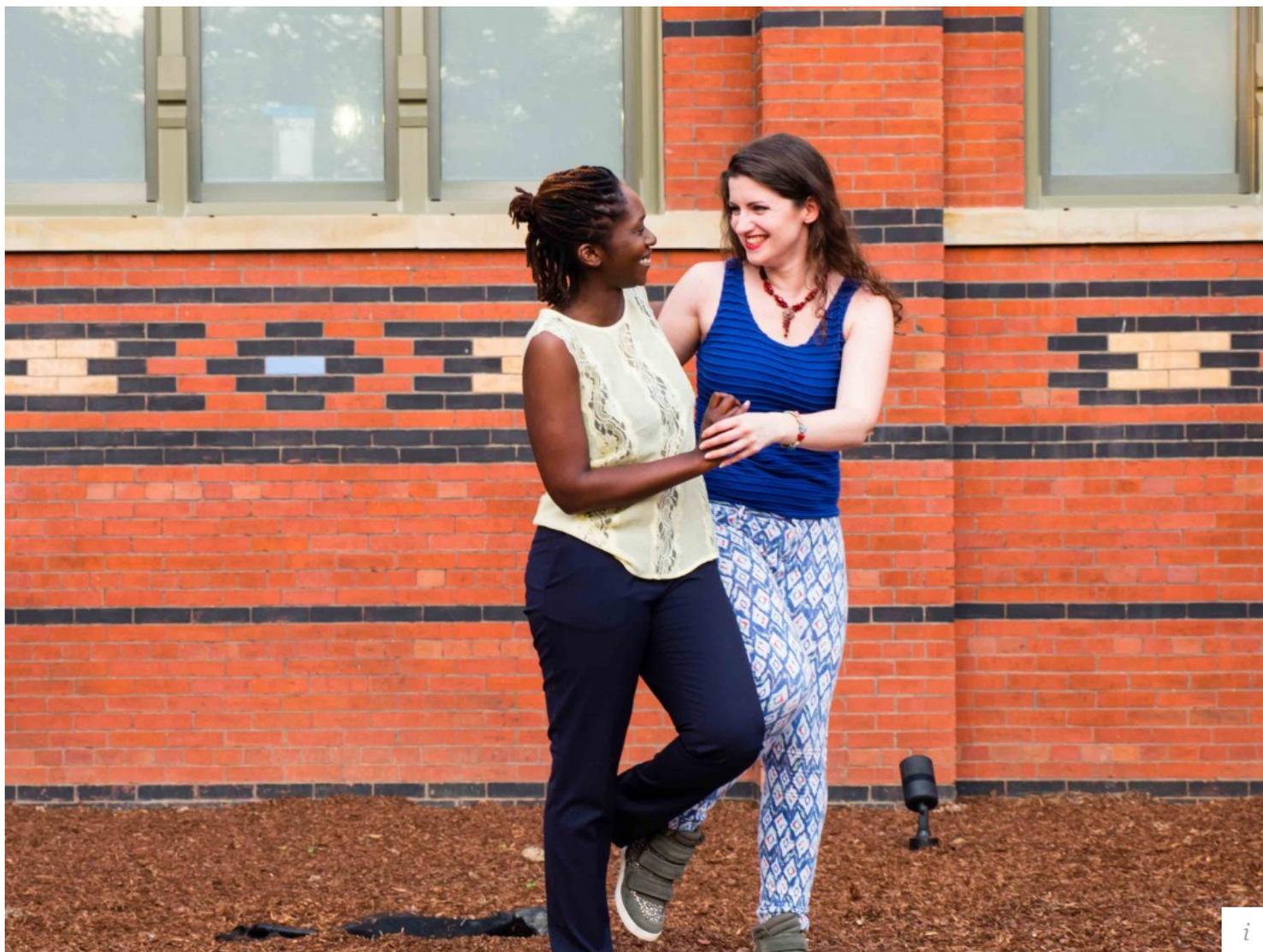


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9 REASONS YOU SHOULD BE DANCING SEMBA



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Semba is a dance that originated in Angola, born at the creative intersection of traditional African dance and colonial European influence. It is danced to the eponymous music form and remains an important part of Angolan heritage. Today, people are starting to discover semba as the international craze for kizomba continues to sweep the globe. Interest lags far behind the enthusiasm for kizomba,

however – something I find very difficult to understand! Allow me to champion semba for the space of this article with **9 reasons you should be dancing semba!**

1. Joyful Music

When I hear semba music, I can't help but smile. Even when vocalists sing about lack or strife, there is an uplifting feeling communicated.

Kianda(<http://www.kizombacommunity.com/interviews/ladies-and-leadership-interviews-kianda-t/>), an instructor in DC, told me, “**You can tell I'm dancing semba by the look on my face – pure joy.** Every time I dance semba I feel like I'm dancing on the beach, where I feel I am at home.” Instrumentation is varied, weaving a complex harmony that remains eminently hummable. Semba music has a delightful rhythm that drives you to move. Take a look at Paolo and Lanna smiling as they express that joyful feeling in motion:

2. Playful Connection

When you're already lifted up by the music, perhaps it's not surprising that you start to look for **ways to inspire your partner to smile wider.** My first community of social dancing was in the American vernacular tradition, and I adored the joking attitude of lindy hop. “Haha! Nice one, I see what you did there!” When I first saw semba danced outside a beginner class, I declared to several of my friends that I had found the “lindy hop of the kizomba world.”

Sonja(<http://www.kizombacommunity.com/interviews/ladies-leadership-interviews-sonja-kikizomba/>), of Kikizomba (<https://www.facebook.com/kizombadance>) says “In semba we have tricks and surprises...

there is room for teasing.”

Indeed, **opportunities for silliness abound**, and while that's plenty entertaining to a crowd of spectators, it's really about the fun you create with your partner! See how Tecas and Jo interact with grins and hilarity:

3. Accessibility for Beginners

In some ways, semba is about **as easy to get started in as merengue.** So much of semba is just walking with intention, circling one way and the other. Of course as dancers progress they delight in finding the many other ways to play with the music and with their partners, but **at its heart semba is a simple dance.** Change directions or open and close when the music changes, and you're on your way to an enjoyable, musical dance! Pay attention to how much basic stepping Mandela and Lisa do here:

4. Open Hold Possibility

One of the things I often hear from kizomba beginner students is how difficult it is for them to adapt to the embrace. Particularly in personal space cultures like those of the USA, UK, and Australia, it's a big adjustment to be in chest-to-chest contact

with another person. **Semba is totally suitable for people who prefer to have some space from their partners!** While it can be danced both with or without contact through the chest, the frame allows for an easy switch to providing that space. You might have noticed it in the clip from Texas and Jo, but here's another with Dilson and Bernadeth demonstrating a similarly open hold.

5. Dynamic Movement

I think what surprises me most is that we don't have salsa dancers coming to semba in droves. **Semba has the same dynamic quality of salsa, energetically moving from one position to the next.** Not only is it easier to get started in semba, the increasing complexity semba presents as one progresses is definitely comparable to salsa.

Sonja(<http://www.kizombacommunity.com/interviews/ladies-leadership-interviews-sonja-kikizomba/>), gives one good example: "The communication between dance partners is always unforeseeable and not following a fixed pattern." There are changing positions, dips, tricks, and lifts, not to mention pranks! **If you're a diehard salser@ looking for the next challenge, I am sure that semba will suit.**

See the layered complexity in this demo from Ricardo and Paula of AfroLatin Connection.

On top of that, a lot of semba music shows a Latin influence, thanks to the presence of Cubans in Angola. There are even some songs that alternate between semba and salsa rhythms, requiring mastery of both to properly appreciate dancing them!

6. Occasion for Leaders to Show Off

In the age of Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, it's rare to find someone who doesn't enjoy having the spotlight on their strong points. **Semba offers a fantastic platform for leaders to demonstrate their creativity**, from varying footwork to creating intricate patterns with their followers. Semba can also be a display of strength, with leaders entering difficult balance positions or even adding moves similar to break dancing! Dancing with his partner Anais, Morenasso clearly enjoys showing off not only for her but all the gathered onlookers.

7. Opportunity for Followers' Input

If you've been following my writing, you already know how much I value agency for followers(<http://www.kizombacommunity.com/rachels-blog/kizomba-styling-freedom-for-followers/>).

Like kizomba, **semba allows for quite a bit of flavor to be added from the followers** while respecting the framework required by the leader. Beyond that, I was thrilled when in classes with Jo and later with Adoree Johnson I was told that in semba, followers can go beyond that to actually affecting the leader's dance. Both explained that **followers can also opt to move into breakaway position, and may accept or**

refuse a leader's suggestion to move back into partnered hold! In breakaway, of course, there are far more possibilities for followers to engage in creative expression. It's not always easy to tell from the outside who is initiating a breakaway, but certainly in this video Lucia demonstrates a wealth of musicality apart from what Eddy proposes as the leader:

8. Aide in Understanding Kizomba's Roots

No other dance or music form had as much of an influence on kizomba as did semba. People often pay attention to the influence of Caribbean zouk music, since Kassav's performance in Angola is what sparked the creative fire that led to kizomba. However, the rhythm of kizomba owes as much to semba as it does to zouk, and the movement far more! [Jeffrey](http://www.jeffreykizomba.com/) (<http://www.jeffreykizomba.com/>), an instructor in NYC who has helped promote semba in North America, describes kizomba basics as "being a slowed down, more sensualized version of semba that adapted to the music. It makes learning semba the optimum tool to perfect one's kizomba." Check out a clip from a class of his in Montreal:

9. Cardio Fitness

Please don't think this was placed last because it's the most important! Let's face it though, we all need to think about getting enough activity in an increasingly sedentary society. I love kizomba, and I love the fact that I can dance it all through the night without difficulty. However, when people say, "Of course you're fit! You're a dancer!" I just laugh at that, because dancing kizomba is certainly not enough to balance the delicious bread and chocolate I consume. Good news! According to Miguel & Susana, **we can expect a significant hike in calories burned when enjoying some uptempo semba:**



(<http://socialdancecommunity.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/102215-fitness.jpg>)

I'm not entirely sure how they arrived at those figures, but if you're not convinced by quantitative figures, let me add my qualitative experience. I can remember dancing at a festival in London called Batuke where we had one very large room devoted to dancing traditional kizomba and semba. One of the DJs played a couple of the longest sets of semba I have ever experienced. We were all delighted at the music, and the energy in the room was incomparable, but it reached a point where people were not even making it off the floor before collapsing in exhausted heaps! Watching Miguel and Susana dance, it's not hard to imagine how they manage to keep so trim!

If you're not persuaded by now that you should be dancing semba, then you are clearly the kind of person who needs to experience the reality, not just some words and video. **Go give semba a try!**

Many thanks to Kaizomba in Sydney for helping me think through this article!
