

# KRITIKOS SYRTOS

DANCES OF CRETE, GREECE

1

MARY COROS

## SYRTOS

It is generally accepted that the dance *syrtós* from Crete is known as *Haniótikos* because it was once danced mostly in the provinces and districts of the *nomós* (county) of Hania where it has been said to have been "perfected." Today it is pan-Cretan and natives refer to it simply as *syrtós*, whereas most other Greeks use the adjective *Kritikós* (Cretan) or *Haniótikos*. American folk dancers tend to use *Kritikós* or *Cretan* and rarely use the term *Haniótikos*.

Cretans, when placing a request for a specific *syrtós*, seldom mention the word; they usually ask the *lyráris* (lyra player) or the *laoutiérís* (lute player) for the title of a *syrtós*, i.e. a *Rodhinou* (a composition by the famous *lyráris* Rodhinos) or the *prótos* ("first," "original"--a specific old melody well known to all Cretans and considered to be the old "original" *syrtós*) or a *Seliniótikos* (a composition by someone in or from the town of Selinos), etc.

Since childhood I have observed the three variants discussed here, in the Cretan communities of the United States and in Crete itself. Variant III, which my father taught me, is rarely seen any more and is danced only by the older generation in both Crete and the U.S. Variant II has been the dominant form in Crete and in America. It is the version known among American folk dancers and is the basis for the *Misirliou*. Variant I, once a local form, is now becoming widespread in Crete and seems to be as prevalent as Variant II. Variant II is seen in America today only when performed by recent Cretan immigrants.

No one is excluded from doing the *syrtós*. However, in Crete a strict protocol is followed. Only the leader and the second person in the line dance; the others simply walk along. After an appropriate length of time, the second person relinquishes his position to the third person and goes to the end of the line. Thus, the lead dancer personally "dances" with everyone in line while the second dancer's obligation is to maintain the dance pattern. In the U.S. this is rarely seen, occurring only at purely Cretan events and mostly with an all male line. Sometimes the composition of the line varies: 1) a mixed group with a male leader or 2) a line of women with a male leader. Very, very rare is a woman leader who "dances" others.

At weddings, especially in the U.S., the *syrtós* is used as the "bridal" dance. Everyone, from closest family members to those outside the extended family, take their turn "dancing" the bride.

Occasionally at a *panegyris* or *tavérma* musicians will play for general dancing. Ordinarily the dancing floor is reserved for individual *parées* ("parties" or "tables" of friends) who request and pay for a particular dance and oftentimes a specific piece of music. Any one party can dance for any length of time, usually determined by the number of people in the party. One *syrtós* can last longer than thirty minutes.

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## SYRTOS (cont'd)

By far, the most frequently performed dance during any Cretan festivity is the *syrtós*; it is done at least twice as often as the sum total of the other Cretan dances--*pentsális*, *sousta*, and *kastrinós/malevisiōtikos/pidhihtós*, ("leaping" dances)--and at least twice as long, mainly because the latter are too exerting and cannot be sustained for long. Usually every *paréa* will begin dancing with a *syrtós*. One of the three "leaping" dances will follow a *syrtós* but rarely will one "leaping" dance follow another. When this does happen the second "leaping" dance will probably be the less strenuous couple dance *sousta*.

In Crete it seems that a new crop of musicians appears every few years, which makes dancing to live music customary and expected. In Irakleion one can dance any night of the week at a *tavérna*; in Hania, several nights a week. The villager who today has good mobility, can, on the average, attend a dance event once a week either at the nearby city or town as well as at the rural *panegýris*, which, for instance in *no-mós* Hania, occurs with great frequency during summer and fall. In the U.S. we are not so fortunate; we can dance to live Cretan music only once a year at the annual Cretan affair.

**Formation:** A line or open circle; dancers are connected by a "W" hand hold; the first and second dancers hold a white handkerchief.

**Meter:** 2/4

**Dance Phrase:** Q Q S | Q Q S | Q Q S | S S .  


**Recordings:** There are several good recordings available in the U.S. that include most of the Cretan dances:

Fidelity 6484207 - Athanásios Skordhalós  
 PA 5106 - Thanásis Skordhalós-Forty (40) Years  
 PS Margo 8060 - Kóstas Moundákis in His New Songs  
 Melophone SMEL 27- Traghouðhia Ghiá Tin Kriti - Nikos Xylouris  
 EMI 2J062-70158 - Song of Crete - Nikos Xylouris  
 EMI XREG 2015 - Kritika Traghouðhia - Nikos Xylouris  
 Music Box 33MB308- Crete and Her Traditional Folk Songs  
 EMIAL 25048-70375- Folk Dances and Songs from Crete - George Avissinos  
 PILPS 10240 - Levedhiēs tīs Kritīs - Evángheios Markogiannákis  
 NINA 66 - Aegean Echoes

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SYRTOS (cont'd)				EMBELLISHMENT 1		EMBELLISHMENT 2
VARIANT I						
MEASURE	COUNT	BODY ANGLE	DIRECTION			
1	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q 8 ♪ S 2 8	↑	→	(step-together-step) ♪ Lft steps bkwd ♪ Rft steps bkwd ♪ Lft steps bkwd --	} ♪ Rft lifts in place bring- ing R heel bkwd to front of Lft	
2	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q 8 ♪ S 2 8	↑	↑	(step-together-step) ♪ Rft steps fwd ♪ Lft steps fwd ♪ Rft steps fwd --	} ♪ Lft lifts in place	
3	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q 8 ♪ S 2 8	↑	→	(step-together-step) ♪ Lft steps bkwd ♪ Rft steps bkwd ♪ Lft steps bkwd --	} ♪ Rft lifts in place bring- ing R heel bkwd to front of Lft	
4	♪ S 1 8 ♪ S 2 8	↑	↑	♪ Rft steps in place beside Lft -- ♪ Lft touches fwd --	♪ Rft hovers/touches fwd ♪ Rft steps/leaps in place beside Lft ♪ Lft touches/brushes fwd --	

continued...

SYRTOS Variant I (cont'd)

MEASURE	COUNT	BODY ANGLE	DIRECTION	VARIATION A	VARIATION B	VARIATION C
1	♩ Q 1 ♩ Q & ♩ S 2 &			Scissors-Lft back, R heel twizzles L Scissors-Rft back, L heel twizzles R Scissors-Lft back, R heel twizzles L (E.1 can be done here)		
2	♩ Q 1 ♩ Q & ♩ S 2 &					
3	♩ Q 1 ♩ Q & ♩ S 2 &	V.B&C ↑	V.O →	♩ Lft steps bkwd ♩ Rft steps to the R ♩ Lft touches in front of Rft ♩ Lft steps in place beside Rft	♩ Lft steps back behind Rft ♩ Rft (ball) steps to R ♩ Lft slides R, R heel twizzles L ♩ Rft (ball) steps to R	
4	♩ Q 1 ♩ Q & ♩ S 2 &	↑	→	♩ Rft touches in front of Lft ♩ Rft steps/leaps in place beside Lft ♩ Lft touches fwd & holds	♩ Lft slides R as R heel twizzles L ♩ Rft steps/leaps to R ♩ Lft touches fwd & holds	
				<p>This variation can also be be done in place instead of moving R.</p> <p>(V.B can be done with E.1 and V.A)</p> <p>(V.C can be done with E.1 and V.A)</p>		

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<u>SYRTOS (cont'd)</u>				<u>EMBELLISHMENTS 1 &amp; 2</u>		<u>VARIATION B</u>
<u>VARIANT II</u>						
MEASURE	COUNT	BODY ANGLE	DIRECTION			
1	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q & ♪ S 2 & --	↑ ↗ ↗	↓ ↓ ↓	(step-together-step) ♪ Lft steps bkwd ♪ Rft steps bkwd ♪ Lft steps fwd --	} ♪ Lft hovers/touches fwd ♪ Lft steps beside Rft	
2	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q & ♪ S 2 & --	↗ ↗ ↗	↖ ↖ ↖	(step-together-step) ♪ Rft steps diag L in front of Lft ♪ Lft closes to Rft ♪ Rft steps fwd (cont diag) --	} ♪ Lft lifts in place	
3	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q & ♪ S 2 & --	↗ ↑ ↑	↖ ↗ ↗	(step-together-step) ♪ Lft steps diag back R ♪ Rft steps R ♪ Lft steps diag R in front of Rft --	} ♪ Lft touches in front of Rft ♪ Lft steps in place beside Rft	
4	♪ S 1 & ♪ S 2 & --	↑ & &	↑ & &	♪ Rft steps in place beside Lft -- ♪ Lft touches/brushes fwd --	♪ Rft touches in front of Lft ♪ Rft steps/leaps in place beside Lft ♪ Lft touches fwd & holds --	

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## SYRTOS Variant II (cont'd)

MEASURE	COUNT	BODY ANGLE	DIRECTION	VARIATION C	VARIATION D	VARIATION E
1	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q 6 ♪ S 2 6	↑ ↗ ↗ 6	V.E			(step-together-step) ♪ Lft steps fwd towards center ♪ Rft closes Lft ♪ Lft steps fwd towards center --
2	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q 6 ♪ S 2 6					
3	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q 6 ♪ S 2 6	↗ ↗ ↗ 6	V.D	♪ Lft steps back behind Rft ♪ Rft (ball) steps to R ♪ Lft slides R, stops behind Rft, R heel twizzles L ♪ Rft (ball) steps to R	(step-together-step) (retrace meas 2's steps) ♪ Lft steps diag back R ♪ Rft closes Lft ♪ Lft steps diag back R --	
4	♪ Q 1 ♪ Q 6 ♪ S 2 6	↑ ↗ ↗ 6		♪ Lft slides R as R heel twizzles L ♪ Rft steps/leaps to R ♪ Lft touches fwd & holds --		This variation can be done in place.

Continued...

MEASURE	COUNT	BODY ANGLE	DIRECTION	SYRTOS (cont'd)	EMBELLISHMENTS 1 & 2
1	Q 1	↑	↑	(step-together-step)	} Lft hovers/touches fwd Lft steps in place beside Rft
	Q 6	↑	↓	Lft steps bkwd	
	S 2	↗	↗	Rft steps bkwd	
	6			Lft steps diag R in front of Rft	
2	Q 1	↗	↗	(step-together-step)	} Bend knees
	Q 6	↗	↗	Rft steps fwd in LOD	
	S 2	↗	↗	Lft closes to Rft	
	6			Rft steps fwd in LOD	
3	Q 1	↗	↗	(step-together-step)	} Bend knees
	Q 6	↗	↗	Lft steps fwd in LOD	
	S 2	↗	↗	Rft closes to Lft	
	6	↗	↗	Lft steps fwd in LOD	
4	S 1	↑	↑	Rft steps in place beside Lft	} Rft steps/leaps in place beside Lft
	6				
	S 2	↑	↑	Lft touches/brushes fwd	
	6				