

Shuffle

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- (1) A dance step of indefinite southern black-American origin, perhaps dating from the 18th century, in which the feet are moved rhythmically across the floor without being lifted.
- (2) A rhythm derived from the dance step. The term is onomatopoeic, “sh” describing its characteristic smoothness (and especially its sound when played on the snare drum). The alternation of long and short syllables (shuf-fle, shuf-fle, ...) evokes its distinguishing rhythm, a subdivision of the beat into uneven triplets which is more specific than the fundamental swing or boogie-woogie rhythm only in that it is usually played legato and at a relaxed tempo. The shuffle rhythm is generally confined to early styles of jazz, up to and including swing; however it is not unknown in later styles, and may be heard, for example, on a version of *Birdland* recorded in concert by Weather Report and included on the album *8:30* (c1079, Col. PC2-36030). Although the rhythm is most often executed on the snare drum using brushes, some drummers, notably Paul Barbarin, were adept at producing it with sticks.
- (3) A term used in the titles of jazz pieces, principally in the late 1920s and the 1930s; although the shuffle rhythm was widely used during this period, such pieces are not necessarily associated with the dance step or rhythm.

More on this topic

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