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WINTER 2009

The Salsa Room
Then and Now

Stuck on Salsa
GoGo Earl

La Epoca:
The Palladium Era

Also:
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Editor's Note:

The Washington D.C. metro area has a unique and vibrant salsa scene. My intent with The Scene magazine is to capture all aspects of this diverse community and present it here for all to share. The Scene will inform, entertain, educate and connect.



We will connect history with the present by paying tribute to the roots of the music and the people behind it in a regular section called "Salsa Legends." We will connect different parts of our community by featuring diverse styles of dancing – On 1 and On 2, rueda, mambo and ballroom. We will cover events, feature venues and highlight relevant issues. We will spotlight local individuals and groups to include artists, dancers, organizers, DJs and musicians. We are all part of the same community and the same addiction – the same Scene.

This publication is a product of Synergy Syndicate Entertainment, which specializes in musical entertainment at social and professional events. The individuals involved in putting together The Scene are all members of the D.C. salsa community. Welcome aboard.

LoRENZO Haire
LoRENZO Haire

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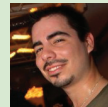
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Stuck On Salsa

*and the
man behind
the name*

By Kate Willson



Amid the firm, flashy bodies spinning across the slick surface of the Clave Kazi studio in Northeast Washington D.C., Earl Rush looks out of place on a recent Saturday night. At 53, his hair is graying and thinned. The laces on his worn white tennis shoes are constantly untied. Years of sleep deprivation have etched dark circles beneath his eyes.

He rarely moves onto the dance floor - where hip-hugger clad women and muscled men move with quick steps in their \$100-salsa shoes. Instead he works the edges of the room, snapping pictures of the crowd.

But it doesn't take long for even the newest salseros to learn about "Go-Go" Earl Rush. His smooth and immodest lead based on four decades of dance are surpassed in popularity only by his website, stuckonsalsa.com.

Launched in 2003, [stuckonsalsa](http://stuckonsalsa.com) has become the one-stop site for Latin dancers in the DC metro area. Rush, who began dancing salsa 14 years ago said coming up with the name was easy.

"I was addicted. I had a real problem," he said. "I was stuck on salsa."

Rush began dancing at age nine, moving through African, jazz, ballet, go-go and hip hop. Then one night at a hip hop club, as he was bumping and grinding with two women young enough to be his daughters, he realized he had to stop.

"I didn't want to be the old guy in the clubs. And I already was," he said. Shortly afterwards, he

walked past Lucky Bar (then Planet Fred) in downtown D.C., and spotted a sign for salsa lessons. Perhaps it would prove a more respectable dance for a middle-aged bachelor.

"The rest is history," he said. "I never danced anything else again."

For years, Rush would work long hours as a due diligence officer, then hop on a train to Philly to pass the night in salsa clubs. He'd return home long enough to shower and change, then repeat the process again. He took classes in New York every weekend, eking out sleep from his seat on the train.

**"I was addicted.
I had a real problem,
I was stuck on salsa."**

It took a few years for Rush to get tired enough to launch a series of salsa events closer to home. In 2003 he ordered a web design program and launched his site as a way to promote his salsa events. Those events attracted a crowd, but Rush had a problem - salseros don't drink. It was difficult keeping a venue going when the bar didn't make a

Continued on page 6.

profit. So Rush, along with business partner Kelvin Harris, shifted focus.

"We had the website, so I thought, 'let's let the world know what others are doing,'" Rush said. "So we started posting events, pictures, articles. And people came."

A few of Earl's favorite things:

- + Favorite band: Spanish Harlem
- + Favorite teacher: Eddie Torres
- + Favorite Shoes: my Capezio tap shoes
- + Favorite salsa attire: black slacks and a black t-shirt
- + Favorite venue: The Salsa Room
- + Favorite salsa congress: New York

Pearls of wisdom for newcomers:

- + Don't be intimidated to dance with those who are better than you. It's the only way you'll learn.
- + Don't be self-conscious that people are watching you. They're not looking at you. They're thinking about what the next move is going to be.

The site went from 30 hits a day to 3,000.

Stuckonsalsa.com is cluttered but complete. Rush makes daily webcam postings, blogs (and vents) about the local salsa scene, and updates weekly and special events calendars. Most regulars come for the calendars, and event photos and videos, he said.

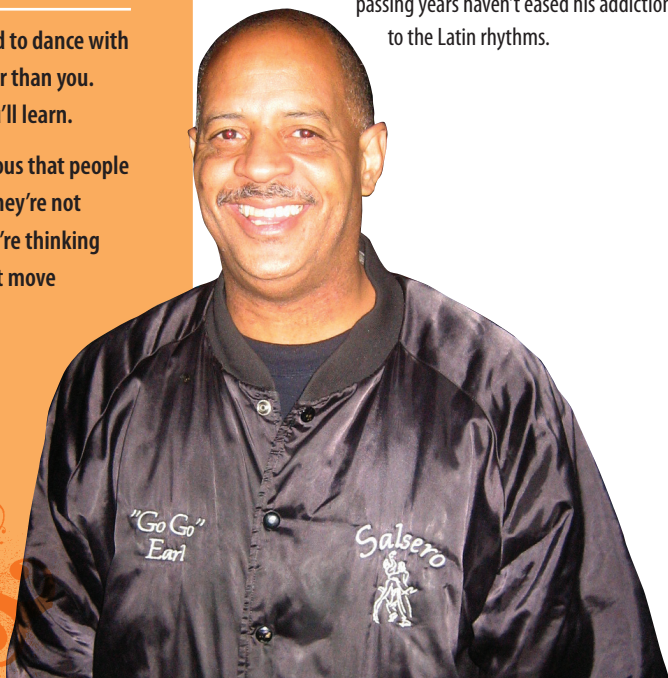
But his site also includes a guide to salsa rueda, world congresses and dancing in other East Coast cities, as well as annual stuckonsalsa events. Rush and his events attract talented dancers with a Mambo preference, although most will kindly offer to stay "On 1."



Kelvin Harris

Rush promotes an All Black party each year, as well as an All White anniversary affair at The Salsa Room. Other annual events include a salsa cruise and post-New Year's bash. "The website is like a little city," he said. "There's so much going on."

After 14 years devoted solely to salsa, Rush dances less now at weekly events, preferring to shoot photos for his site. He teaches at area bars, and continues to take classes, workshops and attend congresses. He said the passing years haven't eased his addiction to the Latin rhythms.



dancer spotlight



Place of birth: Alexandria, VA
Day job: President, UrbanTurf.com
Representing: Washington, D.C.
Dancing salsa: Four years
Likely to be found: Habana Village



Place of birth: Coquimbo, Chile
Day job: Elementary school teacher
Representing: Arlington, VA
Dancing salsa: Two years
Likely to be found: The Salsa Room

On1 or On2?

"On 1."

Dance Shoes or regular shoes?

"Regular."

Where did you discover salsa?

"Café Cocomo in San Francisco."

What makes a good dance?

"Chemistry with your partner. Compatibility."

What makes a bad dance?

"When my partner is completely off-beat, and stays off-beat no matter how firmly I lead."

A favorite song to dance to?

"Una mulata en La Habana by Adalberto Alvarez."

Are you addicted?

"Yeah. I've had other hobbies that have come and gone, but I've been dancing for years and haven't grown tired of it."

What do you drink when you dance?

"Presidente beer or mojitos, with the occasional shot of Patrón."

On1 or On2?

"On 2."

Dance Shoes or regular shoes?

"Dance shoes."

Where did you discover salsa?

"Puerto Rican Salsa Congress."

What makes a good dance?

"Dancing on the same level. If a guy is better than me, I want him to dance so that I'm having fun too, and maybe challenge me a little."

What makes a bad dance?

"Dancing off-beat, definitely. And when I feel like the guy is going to yank my shoulder out. That's just dangerous."

A favorite song to dance to?

"Siempre Adelante by Ray Barretto."

Are you addicted?

"No. But I do have a salsa budget. And when I think about moving somewhere, the salsa scene there is a pretty big factor to consider."

What do you drink when you dance?

"Bacardi and Diet Coke."



THE DJ'S Corner



Featuring
DJ Bruno "El Unico"



interviewed by Hector "Toti" Chavez

Q: How long have you been DJing?

A: I've been DJing a total of 17 years.

Q: 17 years is a long time... what has it been like?

A: It's been a process for me. I had to study not just the music and artists but the tempo of the songs; slow, medium and fast. I get into it so much that sometimes I find myself asleep with my headphones on... I do my homework, so I'm able to give the dancers something new each time - no radio stuff.

Q: How did salsa/mambo get into your life?

A: Growing up, salsa was always played in my house. My brother was a musician and my mom and dad were Palladium dancers.

Back then, you didn't have dancing shoes... your dancing shoes were what you had on. I also experienced the Fania era live.

Q: Who inspired you as a DJ?

A: Henry Knowles. I even had him play at my wedding! Henry had this thing called "Every person has a song." When a person Henry knows would come in, he would play that person's favorite song. I also do that, that's where I got it from.

"If you have an open mind, it will enrich the way you play."

Q: What would you say to aspiring DJs?

A: Listen to all types of music. Know your music. If you have an open mind, it will enrich the way you play. Some DJs only know about the two popular songs on a CD without listening to the rest. I ask them "Well, what about the other eight songs?"

Q: Do you have anything you would like to tell the dancers?

A: It's just as important for a dancer to know and listen to the music. I love watching dancers who emphasize the breaks in a song; it just brings out the music even more. Completely different than when there are breaks but the couple is still doing turns or spins. It becomes an art form when you listen to the music.

Screening
at TSR

LA EPOCA:

THE PALLADIUM ERA

By Kira Zalan

JOSUE JOSEPH, 30, HAS MEMORIES OF HANGING OUT WITH TITO PUENTE, BEING BACKSTAGE AT A CELIA CRUZ CONCERT AND ANSWERING THE HOUSE PHONE WHEN ISRAEL “CACHAO” LÓPEZ WOULD CALL. HIS FATHER, ALFONSO “EL PANAMEÑO” JOSEPH, WAS PLAYING BASS WITH THE BEST AT A TIME WHEN MAMBO WAS BORN.

Following Puente’s death in May 2000, Joseph thought there was a need to preserve the musical impact of his father’s generation.

He embarked on a project that took him eight years to complete – producing a documentary film featuring musicians and dancers from the Palladium called “La Epoca – The Palladium Era” (epoch or era).

The Palladium Ballroom was a dance hall, or rather a Latin music Mecca, in midtown New York City for two decades. It reached legendary status during the mambo craze of the 1950s and remained the pinnacle of the Latin music scene until closing its doors in 1966.

Live entertainment featured the likes of Machito, Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, Benny Moré and Ismael Rivera while the dance floor was a stage for the best dancers in New York City.

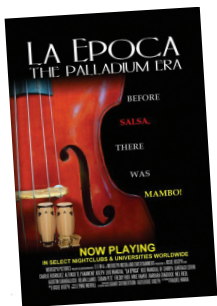
This was an era before Fania Records and before salsa, said Joseph.

The subtitle to the film, *Before Salsa, There Was Mambo*, summarizes the goal of the film – to honor rhythms that preceded the concept of salsa, particularly mambo. The message is “stay true to tradition,” Joseph said.

A rift formed when “so-called” salsa was created, with “*mamberos*” on one side and “*salseros*” on the other, he explained. The *mamberos* are traditionalists, while *salseros* accept evolution as natural, even if it strays from the source.

Joseph sees the latter as a result of commercialization, he said, which followed the popularity of the Fania All-Stars starting in 1967, also coinciding with the closing of the Palladium Ballroom. Latin music became a product known as salsa, he said, blending all the rhythms together.

“This united the Latin cultures, but it also made it impossible to distinguish between the

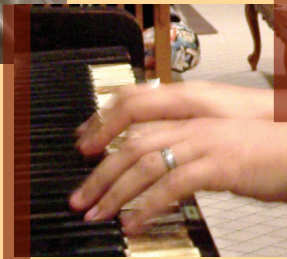




La Epoca Producer Josue Joseph and Alfonso "El Panameño" Joseph, Bassist.



Palladium dancer
Frank Regan



traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms," Joseph said of the phenomenon.

The consequences were negative, he said, because they diluted tradition.

"In contemporary Latin music, they use the same few rhythms and only change the key, melody and lyrics. It's a pixilated carbon copy of the tradition."

Those featured in the documentary agreed.

"Much of today's youth does not know how to distinguish between the origins of the rhythms. Today, they call all those rhythms by one name — salsa," said Charlie Rodriguez, who played and worked with Johnny Pacheco and Larry Harlow.

According to the film and the producer, the change in music brought with it a change in dancing. Traditional Afro-Cuban instruments, like the *claves*, were removed in salsa, said Joseph, and the bass pattern was also changed from striking on the up beats to instead striking on the down beats. As a result most Latin music today emphasizes the down beats, or first beat, instead of the second. This is why most dancers no longer dance "within" the music, or on the second beat, the film explained.

"There was a relationship going on between the dancers and the musicians," said Alfonso "El Panameño," about the era.

**LATIN MUSIC BECAME
A PRODUCT KNOWN
AS SALSA, HE SAID,
BLENDING ALL THE
RHYTHMS TOGETHER.**

Frank Regan, a former Palladium dancer, agreed that the dance has changed. In an interview, he explained that mambo had a more rotary dynamic and was danced in a shine position, with partners facing each other, and with only a flexible hold. It was also "50-

50," the man did not dominate the whole dance, he said. Regan attributed the changes to the times rather than the music.

Salsa was a new word, and dance teachers in New York naturally fell back on what they knew, which were mambo patterns, he said.

"Also, they knew it was easier to break on one than on two, so the technique was easier to share with the wider public," Regan said.

But instructors were desperate to come up with something beyond the mambo steps in order to promote. Taking from disco, Latin hustle and West Coast swing, they incorporated "pretzel-type" arm movements into salsa, he said.

"It's not authentic," said Regan, "but it's now becoming authentic, like anything else."

The movie is also filled with fascinating anecdotes about the origins of mambo from people who "were there."

Mambo is typically attributed to Pérez Prado, who is known as the "King of Mambo" or Cachao, the legendary bassist. But the musicians in the film told

stories of a man named Arsenio Rodriguez, the blind musical genius from Cuba.

Rodriguez is widely credited with adding the conga drum, trumpets and the piano to the traditional band format, and for composing many of the rhythms that today make up salsa. He also created the mambo rhythm, the musicians in the film said.

Chiripa and Alfonso "El Panameño" explained that it was Rodriguez who dropped the last 40 seconds of the music section in a traditional *danzón*, bringing in trumpets and picking up the rhythm. Cachao, they said, later extended this innovation into a full song, and Pérez Prado popularized the mambo around the world. Cachao passed away before he could appear in the documentary to tell his own story.

Also attributed to Rodriguez is the actual word "mambo." During that 40 second change in music and rhythm, he allegedly yelled out "Diablo!" According to

the story-tellers, priests protested his ode to the devil, so Rodriguez began to substitute "Diablo!" with the word "Mambo!" He was also the first to come up with the exclamation "Azucar!" which is often associated with the late "Queen of Salsa," Celia Cruz.

Besides special screenings like the one organized by Stuck on Salsa for the D.C. audience, the film is now available on DVD. Extensive interview clips have also been posted on the website www.laepocafilmm.com

Joseph is now working on a sequel titled "La Epoca International – The Lost Rhythms in Salsa." He plans to visit several countries, including Cuba, in order to identify the origins of Afro-Cuban rhythms and teach dancers how to execute the "proper dance" to each rhythm.

The film will be both historical and educational, he said.

Salsa horoscopes

By: Renzo the Salsa Swami



aries March 21 - April 19

Just because Eileen Torres couldn't name your uncle's old garage salsa band does not mean that you know more than her. Stop bragging to your friends.

taurus April 20 - May 20

Having your car towed at The Salsa Room doesn't give you the right to spray-paint the bathroom with obscenities.

gemini May 21 - June 21

The counts are 1.2.3 and 5.6.7. Stop stepping on 4 and 8. They're silent! When you count them aloud, we hear you... and when you step on them... we see you.

cancer June 22 - July 22

Cancer leads, stop using your follows as a battering ram to clear people out of the way so you can showboat in four slots this month.

leo July 23 - Aug. 22

Yes, the Leo is the big, bad lion and growls to prove it. But please take a Tic Tac before asking a girl to dance so as not to singe her eyebrows this time.

virgo Aug 23 - Sept. 22

Virgos, when you keep interrupting Go-Go Earl's class and he calls you a 'Bama he is not referring to you being from Alabama.

libra Sept. 23 - Oct. 23

When you ask Susan Leiter to dance and she rolls her eyes, it probably has something to do with that bounced check for your class dues last month.

scorpio Sept. 23 - Oct. 23

Scorpio, this is your month. That appeal you made to the County Board of Supervisors was ratified. Although you are 42, you can now finally join the local YMCA Youth Salsa Team. Way to go!

sagittarius Nov. 22 - Dec. 21

This will be the last month you can disguise that Band-Aid on your toe as an injury. Your friends will discover you are poor and that it is actually holding your salsa shoe together.

capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 19

You will be allowed to return to the D.C. Salsa Congress this year. Shaka has finally forgiven you for that little "gerbil incident" two years ago.

aquarius Jan. 20 - Feb. 18

This is your month. Your ankle Low Jack will finally come off and you can wear skirts again. Although very breathable, those hip-hop pants probably cramped your style.

pisces Feb. 19 - Mar. 20

Look, if you sweat like a stuck pig, please do not slide the girl's hand down your back, neck, chest, or any other part of your body. And bring at least four shirts, for crying out loud. That goes for you female Pisces too. Don't act like you don't sweat.



The Salsa Room

By Lorenzo Haire and Kira Zalan

If you're a salsa addict, or even a fan, you've probably hit the dance floor at The Salsa Room more than once. If you're an old-timer, you've probably also noticed many changes, especially the name. The Scene brings you the story behind this family business and what else you can expect.

In 1984, Mr. Villarreal was a student and working for the Bolivian embassy in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Villarreal, finding that there were no Bolivian restaurants in the area, followed her dream of opening one. She named it after St. Cecilia Day festival, where she had met her husband. Coincidentally, Cecilia is also the patron saint of musicians.

The original Cecilia's restaurant was located in Falls Church, VA., and catered to the Bolivian diaspora. In 1991, when the family moved to Arlington, VA., the restaurant relocated to its current address on Columbia Pike.

With a larger venue, the restaurant began to expand its clientele base to the wider Latin community. The menu specialized in Bolivian and Peruvian cuisines and became so well known that Giant Foods wanted to buy Mrs. Villarreal's *salteña* recipe. Customers began to call Mrs. Villarreal "Cecilia," though her real name is Gude.

"People still call her that," said son and co-owner Franco Villarreal. "She likes it."

Franco and Victor Villarreal grew up around the family business, and when Mr. and Mrs. Villarreal wanted to sell Cecilia's in 2004, the brothers kept it in the family

by taking over. Franco was majoring in Business Management at West Virginia University at the time, and Victor was flying planes as a private pilot.

"We both knew we didn't want to work for others," Franco said, "so we established a family corporation."

Since then, Mr. and Mrs. Villarreal have technically retired, but are involved in the family's second restaurant in Old Town Alexandria, called The Burrito Grill.

Franco and Victor worked on expanding the night club portion of Cecilia's. Over the years, Cecilia's had hosted a variety of internationally recognized Latin music artists such as Marc Anthony (three times), La India, Oscar D'Leon, Frankie Ruiz, and Victor Manuelle. The



Mr. and Mrs. Villarreal



Victor, Franco and Mitch

venue also regularly features local bands.

With thoughts of attracting new clientele, Franco Villarreal pushed for a name change.

"Yes, my parents were very emotionally attached to the name Cecilia's," he said, "but the crowd that's been coming to the restaurant forever will continue to come. I wanted a name that was easier to understand and advertise."

Cecilia's already had a core base of salsa fans and Villarreal had this idea for a slogan, 'Salseros, this is your room.' The direction of the venue was clear, he said, and by family vote, a new name was selected - The Salsa Room, or TSR. The runners up were "Mojito Lounge" and "The Room."

To enhance the image of a club dedicated to salsa, the Villarreals increased the floor space by moving the stage, installed better lighting and new wood floors. With hundreds of people dancing, the room would heat up quickly. After numerous complaints, Villarreal installed a new air conditioning system and fans, which ran close to \$100,000 in cost.

The Villarreals also took a new approach to advertising and started a TSR Meetup group to build a community. Within six months, the Meetup had over one thousand "Roomies," as the members are called. The organizers use the meetup message board to post events and get feedback from customers. In one recent posting titled "Your opinion matters," an organizer wrote "I'd like to always keep this discussion open. This can be a place where you can give us your thoughts on anything about the club. From how you think we can improve the club to just telling us you had an amazing night here." The responses from the Roomies overwhelmingly praised

the venue and offered suggestions like choice of DJs, a non-alcoholic drink menu, and dance etiquette instruction for dancers.

On other message boards, TSR has received a bit more criticism, particularly about the cover price.

"Look, I have the top bands, instructors, DJs and the biggest dance floor. It all costs money," said Villarreal in response.

You get what you pay for, he explained, and the TSR Meetup V.I.P. card will save you some money on designated nights.

Another notable change at TSR was the dress code for bartenders. Villarreal said he wanted to create a tropical Latin look and make the venue feel like Miami. The uniforms, often displaying the TSR logo on undersized shirts, are creative and revealing. Villarreal picks the outfits, he said, or otherwise comments on what he likes and doesn't like.

"I'm also a photographer," Villarreal explained. "So I know what is flattering."

The changes have translated into results, said Villarreal. Foot traffic, with mainly new clientele, has gone up 35-40 percent, he estimated.

In order to expand clientele further, TSR will host gay and lesbian night every Thursday, with Orlando Machuca teaching salsa classes. The Meetup, under the name 712 SALSA, is already up and running.

"I don't know how people will react to this," said Villarreal, "but we're excited about trying something new."

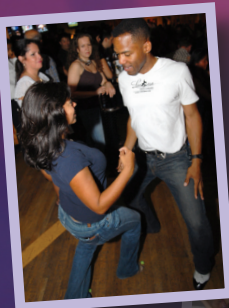
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clarendon grill

Zan.Zibar



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VA BEACH



Cubariqua Dance Co.

Cubariqua Dance Co. was formed in October 2006 by David Prado & Clara Toro, previously known as Salsa Con Sabor On 1.

The dance company consists of David, Maria, little David and Jay.

Together they teach salsa dancing New York Style on 1.

As a team they teach throughout the surrounding areas of Richmond. They also dance other Latin dances such as bachata, merengue & cha cha.

cubariqua.com

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BALTIMORE

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dancingwithgrace.com

Let's Meet!

by Kira Zalan

Meet the DCSM Organizers

Mario Castillo, 32, liked the idea of Meetup.com, an online service launched in 2000 to connect people locally, via the Internet. Self-run social groups mushroomed around the country, with a current 4.7 million members in 3,601 cities. People connected with others who shared their interests, which varied from foreign languages to favorite dog breeds to political candidates.

At the end of 2005, Castillo made a New Year's resolution to create a social Meetup group of his own. Though he played drums since the sixth grade and grew up in a salsa-listening Puerto Rican family, he never learned how to dance. By creating a Meetup for salsa beginners, he would find people, particularly girls, to learn with.

The inaugural D.C. Salsa Meetup took place at Lucky Bar on January 13th, 2006. "Free Salsa Lessons," was the pitch, and thirteen people showed up.

A month later, the group had 100 members. The common interest was learning to dance salsa, but people came mainly to socialize.

"The idea behind Meetup is to meet people," said Castillo. "I still go for the socializing."

Having a hundred

They organize events, greet you at the door, and snap photos. You know their names and faces. But few of the four thousand D.C. Salsa Meetup members know what goes into organizing the largest salsa Meetup in the world, or how it all began.



online members didn't translate into successful events. Still, Castillo had a vision of creating something big, "I remember I called a venue and told them that I was bringing thirty people." At first, they laughed. But the group was growing fast, and soon Castillo needed help.

Cathy Freeman, 33, was a military brat. She lived on bases around the world and attended high school in Mannheim,

Germany. Many of her classmates were from Puerto Rican families, and through them this blonde Texan first discovered Latin music in Germany. "Still, I didn't know the difference between salsa and merengue," she said with a laugh.

After relocating to Washington, D.C., Freeman found serious salsa at Clarendon Grill. That night, she saw LeeAnn O'Neill and Orlando Machuca dance.

"I was completely hooked and intimidated," said Freeman.

Wanting to learn, she found Castillo's newly formed D.C. Salsa Meetup, and joined as the group's 13th member. She attended her first D.C. Salsa Meetup event at E-Citie in Tysons Corner, VA. There were twelve people at a table, with "painfully shy" Castillo at the end.



Mario and his kids



"I thought, 'how is this guy, who barely looks at you when you talk, going to be the catalyst to attract new members?'"

she said. Freeman, a former cheerleader and high school class representative, thought she was just the person for the task.

"Cathy was energetic and outspoken," Castillo said.

It was only a matter of time until she'd lead the group that Castillo envisioned.

By June 2007, the D.C. Salsa Meetup was 1,500 members strong. Freeman sent out a message, "We are at a point where we are growing like wildfire and are on the prowl for a new assistant organizer." The requirements asked for a friendly, energetic salsa-holic, and Liz Strom responded.

"The idea behind Meetup is to meet people," said Castillo. "I still go for the socializing."

Strom, 29, had been dancing salsa in the D.C. area for eight years then. Having been diagnosed with type-1 diabetes twenty years earlier, she was always looking for ways to stay active, she said.

"I've always loved Latin music and culture," said Strom, who also enjoys Bollywood films and has studied Spanish, Vietnamese, Hindi, Arabic, Farsi and Japanese languages.

She had been an organizer for George Mason University's salsa dance group Azucar, and helped grow the group from 10 to 200 members in one semester.



Experienced in organizing events and working with promoters, Strom joined the exclusive list of D.C. Salsa Meetup Organizers in July 2007.

But the membership kept growing and three months later, Liz Cruz was asked to join the team. Cruz, 30, was a regular at events since becoming "hooked" in March 2006. Even before being picked as an Assistant Organizer, Cruz would welcome new members at events and introduce them to everyone.

"I'm the Dr. Phil... or the bartender of the Meetup," she said. "People come to me with their problems."

In addition to the dozens of routine questions the organizers reply to daily (i.e. "Can you remove me from your mailing list?" Answer: no or "Can you ban my ex from going to events?" Answer: no), the organizers spend time corresponding with members about their personal lives.

"If I don't see someone out as much as I used to, I'll email or call and make sure they're OK," Cruz said.

In one specific instant, a member admitted to having been suicidal after a bad break-up. He said he found the social interaction and support he was missing in his life in the D.C. Salsa Meetup. People often seek out the group because of a break-up or a divorce, looking to make new friends and have fun, but not in a self-help or singles atmosphere. That's why the organizers really focus on welcoming the new members, they say.

"I always knew I wanted to help others, I just never knew it would take this form," said Freeman.



Cathy and daughter Briana



Last year, D.C. Salsa Meetup members wrote a speech to thank Freeman and Castillo for their work, "Many of us would never actually admit it, but the D.C. Salsa Meetup is our social life, our gym membership, our neighborhood bar, our support group, our online chat group, our VIP pass, our ME-time, our anti-depressant pill, our social skills class, and best of all our dance academy."

The organizers see the Meetup as a social networking group, attracting people with varying levels of interest in salsa, not just salsaaholics.

"I'm ok with being labeled that," said Freeman. "People come for various reasons. There's something for everyone."

Freeman noted that salsa professionals also benefit from D.C. Salsa Meetup focusing on beginners. The group provides a fresh crop of potential customers to turn into salsaaholics. New people who love the music but can't dance are the perfect target for professionals to recruit students, she said.

But despite working regularly with promoters and instructors, D.C. Salsa Meetup is strict on ethics.

"We've had instructors offer us money to bring the D.C. Salsa Meetup to their venues," said Freeman. "We never accept money."

They stay away from fundraisers also to keep the atmosphere politically neutral.

"There is always someone who will question one cause over another," Freeman said.



Liz S.

And then there are personal feuds, in which the organizers are asked to intervene. "We get emails saying 'my ex is keeping track of where I go,'" said Cruz. "We never take sides."

On a few occasions, members were kicked out for sending emails with racial slurs and threats of bodily harm.

"We know that some people create fake profiles in the Meetup," said Freeman, "but we leave them alone unless they start causing trouble."

Strom calls Freeman the "circus ring-leader," because of her role in keeping peace between the four thousand plus members, and playing diplomat with promoters and venue owners.

Bringing non-stop salsa to the D.C. metro area takes time, say the organizers. The four meet once a month, usually over margaritas, to plan events (and gossip). They each host at least one event and spend an estimated fifteen hours of personal time a week organizing. They are all parents with full-time jobs, too.

"Of course we burn out, especially when promoters begin to expect you to put in even more time and attend every event" said Cruz. "All of a sudden, you're not enjoying dancing anymore."

That's why they agreed to take the month of July off from organizing. But the work and the challenges are worth it, they say.

"We are all volunteers," said Freeman. "We couldn't do this if we didn't love it."



Liz C.



Liz S. and daughter Tiana Marie



Liz C. and daughter Trinity



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Ismael Rivera

EL SONERO
MAYOR
"MAELO"

He was born and died in the same poor suburb east of San Juan, Puerto Rico. In the 55 years between, Maelo, as he was called by friends and fans alike, made an indelible impression on the world of Afro-Caribbean music as a composer and singer.

Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico on October 5, 1931, the eldest of five children, Ismael Rivera worked as a carpenter but had music in his soul since he was a child. As a teenager, he began singing on street corners with his best friend, Rafael Cortijo. At seventeen, he and Cortijo joined a band called El Conjunto Monterrey as percussionists.

Through Cortijo's recommendation, Rivera became the lead singer of Orquesta Panamericana at 21 years old, achieving his first notable recording with "El Charlatan." But it wasn't until Rivera brought his voice to Cortijo y su Combo, a few years later, that he became a force in Latin music. Combining Cuban montunos and Puerto Rican bomba and plena rhythms with American jazz, the band produced a series of popular songs that propelled the group to the top of the Latin music scene from New York to Venezuela.

Aurora Flores, in her moving memoir of Rivera, noted that this was a time of big change for Puerto Rico's black population. Baseball players Roberto Clemente and Peruchin Cepeda had just "made the big leagues,

representing Puerto Ricans, particularly black Puerto Ricans, with honor," she wrote, "The feeling among the Island's blacks was one of elation, as if a liberating explosion had hit the island. By the late '50s, Cortijo y Su Combo con Ismael Rivera became the first all-black band to be featured regularly on television and radio..."

In 1958, the legendary Cuban singer Benny Moré christened 27-year-old Rivera "El Sonero Mayor" (loosely translated as the "Master Singer"), cementing his place in Latin music history.

In 1962, however, Rivera was arrested at the San Juan airport and took responsibility for all of the drugs in the band's possession. This resulted in a conviction for drug trafficking and a four year prison term in Kentucky. A trio of albums with Cortijo beginning in 1966 failed to recapture either's previous success. But Rivera's formation of Ismael Rivera y sus Cachimbos in 1968 brought a new string of albums that spawned both hits and critical acclaim.

In the seventies, in tandem with unparalleled personal fame, Rivera embraced his spirituality, undertaking an annual 17km pilgrimage by foot in Panama to honor the Black Christ of Portobelo. This spirituality seeped into his music at the time, including the famous composition "El Nazareno," a reference to Black Christ. But years of performance had begun to take their toll, and late in the decade, Rivera began to develop vocal cord polyps.

Fact

According to Fundacion Ismael Rivera, Maelo recorded one disk with Orquesta Panamericana, one with Francisco Bastar (Kako) y su Conjunto, 13 with Rafael Cortijo and 12 with his own group Los Cachimbos.

Songs you know:

El Negro Bombon
Bilongo/Negra Tomasa
Dime ¿Por Qué?
El Nazareno
Las Caras Lindas

El Cumbanhero
Borinquenando
Mi Jaragual
Mi Negrita Me Espera
Cucala, Cucala

If the degradation of his ability was painful, his childhood friend Cortijo's death from cancer in 1982 was a personal catastrophe. Flores wrote that Rivera "returned to New York destroyed, his spirit broken. He abandoned the words of El Nazareno and began to dance with Satan once more."

"Satan" is a reference to heroin, an addiction Rivera battled with in the ghettos of Puerto Rico and then onstage at the famous Palladium Ballroom in New York City.

"At the Palladium it was a test of musical prowess," Flores wrote. "'A macho trap'. . . 'How bad could you be under the influence and still perform. That was the measure of manhood, of musicianship,'" she quoted Rivera as saying.

But during his spiritual period, she noted, he stayed clean.

After Cortijo's death, Rivera spent two inconsolable years in New York before the intervention of friends brought him back to his spirituality and home to his mother in Puerto Rico. He would seek treatment for his throat and attempt to record further, but on May 13, 1987 he was stricken with a heart attack and died in his mother's arms - a sorrowful ending to the storied career of the legendary El Sonero Mayor.

Attribution:

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Fundacion Ismael Rivera

<http://www.answers.com/topic/ismael-rivera>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismael_Rivera

Aurora Flores - "Ecuá Jell Ismael Rivera, El Sonero Mayor (A Personal Recollection)" - CENTRO Journal, Volume XVI, Number 2, Fall 2004. Accessed at <http://www.centropr.org/documents/journals/AFloresp62-77>.pdf; retrieved 12/09/2008





Interview with Edwin Ortiz of ORQUESTA La ROMANA



interviewed by Lorenzo Haire

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS YOUR BAND FORMED?

A: I took over the band in 1983. At that time we played everything you can imagine, including polka. I changed it to salsa.

Q: WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF YOUR BAND'S NAME?

A: We started as "La Rumba." I would go to club owners and they'd ask, "What do you play?" I'd tell them salsa, and no one would give us a gig. Merengue was taking over everything. If you didn't play merengue, you weren't working. I asked a Dominican friend for some name of a nice place in the Dominican Republic, and he told me "La Romana." We became "Orquesta La Romana" and no one would ask anymore

what we played. They just assumed. A couple of times, we almost got kicked out for playing salsa when they expected merengue.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST GIG?

A: One of our first gigs was opening up for the Coco Band, a merengue band, at Julisa's in Langley Park, Md. The venue owner was pissed when we did our salsa repertoire and said "I'm not paying you for a second set." But people were dancing and one of the members from the Coco Band really liked us and said, "If he doesn't pay, I'll pay for you to play a second set." From then on, we had a regular gig there. It was a renovated theater, and bigger than TSR.

Q: HOW WOULD YOU BRAND YOUR STYLE OF MUSIC?

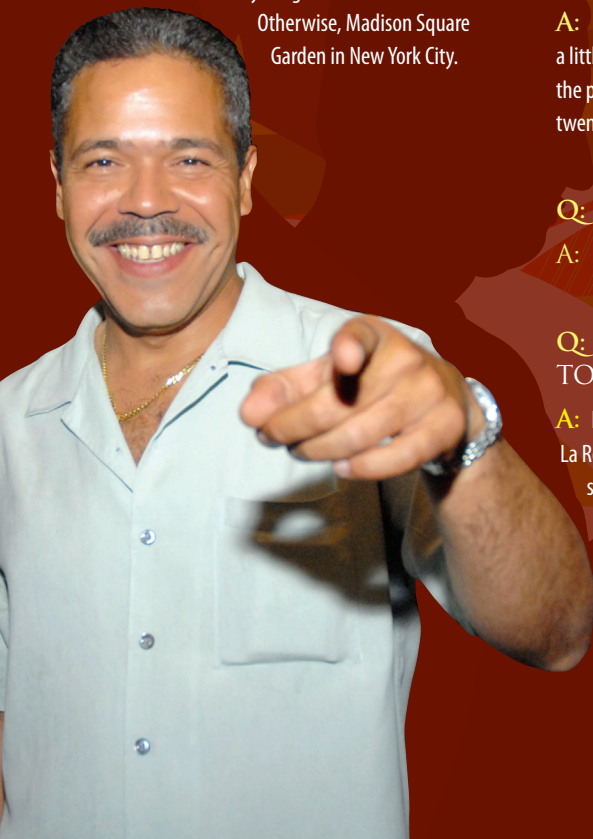
A: New York style salsa. It's edgier, more on the percussive end and less melodic, fewer horns than Puerto Rican salsa.

Q: WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT PLAYING SALSA HERE IN THE WASHINGTON METRO AREA?

A: You always see a lot of different faces here. It's a very transient town. The people are very personable and along with Latinos there seems to be a large non-Latino crowd that is very receptive and appreciative of salsa music.

Q: WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE FOR YOUR BAND TO PLAY?

A: Something comparable to the old Palladium Club, if anything like that still existed. Otherwise, Madison Square Garden in New York City.



Q: WHO IS YOUR IDOL AND WHY?

A: Willie Colon because of his bad boy image and his hard New York sound and the heavy trombone. I really like Larry Harlow as well and how he modernized Cuban music. He added the salsa edge I mentioned earlier to Cuban son and son montuno.

Q: WHAT IS YOUR PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT?

A: We've played many times at the Kennedy Center. We even filmed a news report on salsa for Fox 5 News there. We also got to play with Larry Harlow at the University of District of Columbia. It was amazing. We became good friends after that.

Q: SO, WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON FOR ORQUESTA LA ROMANA?

A: In all honesty I am just ready to relax and enjoy life a little more. I am seriously considering retiring from the performing business in November 2009. Over twenty years in the business is a long time.

Q: WHAT WILL YOU DO?

A: Listen to music as opposed to playing it.

Q: WHO WOULD YOU LISTEN TO AROUND HERE?

A: I want to figure out someone to take over Orquesta La Romana. I have someone in mind. He used to be a singer, but moved away. If he agrees to come back and take over, I would listen to them.

WHEN ART

meets

salsa

by Kira Zalan

With a wooden muddler, Rafael Almonte expertly grinds mint leaves and limes for yet another mojito; he estimates that he makes at least 150 on a Saturday night. Mixing drinks is the art form for which he's known by the crowd at Habana Village in Adams Morgan. Few people know when they walk in that they are surrounded by his work.

The club's signature sign – two stick figures dancing in neon above the dimly-lit bar – is an Almonte original. The white stucco walls are covered with his black-and-white portraits of salsa legends. Even his T-shirt is his own design – Eddie Palmieri at the piano – in an expression of Almonte's twin passions: art and salsa. For Almonte, they've become inseparable.

"Art to me is like a journal," he said. "You can see what I was feeling every time you look at a piece."

Almonte's earliest memory growing up in the Dominican Republic is about the time of day the sun would fade away and his grandmother would finish cooking the evening meal. When the fire died down, he would snatch a lump of charcoal from the embers and lie on his belly on the sidewalk in front of his house, drawing everything he saw around him into sweeping murals.

Years passed and Almonte moved away, making a life in the United States, but he never gave up art. He still paints what he sees, he says. But today, it's mainly



people's attitudes towards each other, and it's often political. He once painted Florida depicted in US dollars and Cuba made out of barbed wire, urging viewers to ask themselves who was keeping Cubans in their dire predicament. That piece sold for \$1100.

Almonte's painting funds his other passion – salsa. His collection of vinyl records, which has exceeded 1,000, delineates his life.

"You know how some people say that there is or should be a soundtrack to their lives?" Almonte said with a smile. "I actually have mine."

Frankie Ruiz was his childhood. Almonte was 7 when he first heard the New Jersey native singing salsa over the radio in front of a local store.

"That was it," Almonte said. "I was hooked. The more I listened to salsa, the more I wanted to know. I learned everything, any way I could."

While Ruiz was the first voice he heard, Ruben Blades "Buscando America" was the first album he bought.

Almonte merged his twin passions for the first time at Habana Village, painting a 10 ft by 8 ft black-and-white portrait of Celia Cruz on the club's second floor wall. Dozens of smaller portraits followed up the stairs to the club's third story.

Recently, Almonte has moved on to t-shirts featuring salsa legends, combining an urban and vintage look. He has yet to put his business online.

"It brings together the past and present," he said. "And it's something we can call our own."



You Mean You Weren't Born a Salsero?

By Cathy Freeman

How many times have you found yourself in a club or dance social where the music becomes hypnotizing with the sound of the claves, cowbells, and timbales? There, before your eyes, are the best salseros in their white shoes or heels, a towel tucked into their back pocket, doing dips, tricks and amazing turns that are sure to intimidate any untrained dancer. You think to yourself, "Wow, they must have been dancing salsa their whole lives!" Not exactly. Below, some local professionals tell The Scene how salsa came into their lives:



Robert Legaspi's love for dance started at age 14 when he learned the hustle, tango and swing. Eight years ago, he started professional ballroom dancing and that is when he found his passion for salsa, which he taught himself. What got him interested in salsa in the first place? "The ladies, of course," he laughed. "What really inspired me was the social aspect of salsa and how creative you can get with it." He now teaches and performs.



Edgar Recinos was working as an electrician when he decided to pursue salsa professionally, three and a half years ago. He heard his first salsa song on the radio at 7 years old in El Salvador, he said. It was Eddie Santiago. After moving to D.C. in 1993, he took classes "here and there," but didn't take it seriously until his grandmother passed away. "I didn't want to waste time anymore. If I was going to do something, I would do it 100 percent," he said. Three years later, Recinos performs, competes, teaches and promotes full time.



Grace Badillo was a singing medical transcriptionist when she discovered her love for salsa 11 years ago. She was performing with La Predilecta band at the time. "When I was on stage singing, I would look down and see the crowd dancing and I just couldn't wait to take a break so I could dance too," she said. Turning down a singing contract that meant a life on the road, she decided to explore salsa dancing more. She and her then boyfriend/now husband decided to start a business focusing on teaching beginner level salsa. Ten years later, she teaches all levels and loves what she does.



Michelle Reyes began dancing tap and ballet when she was 6 years old. She was on dance teams in high school and in college before going on to dance professionally for a minor league basketball team. During try-outs for the Orlando Magic Dance Team she saw Latin dancing in a ballroom competition on TV. "I thought it was the coolest thing," she said. "The way they moved, looked, and danced was so amazing to me." She began teaching ballroom at a local dance studio. But it was on her frequent trips to Chicago that she discovered social salsa dancing and caught The Bug. She transitioned away from ballroom and now teaches and performs mainly salsa.



These professionals do have a word of advice for you – practice makes perfect... You have to start somewhere, so see you out there on the dance floor!

CUBAN FLAVOR IN DC

by Kira Zalan

Tennis shoes squeak on a wooden floor designed for aerobics and the pulsating sounds of Cuban timba music blast through the Washington Sports Club gym in the Glover Park neighborhood of northwest Washington, D.C. Six couples are dancing in a circle formation, while Artistic Director, Amanda Gill, shouts instructions over the music.

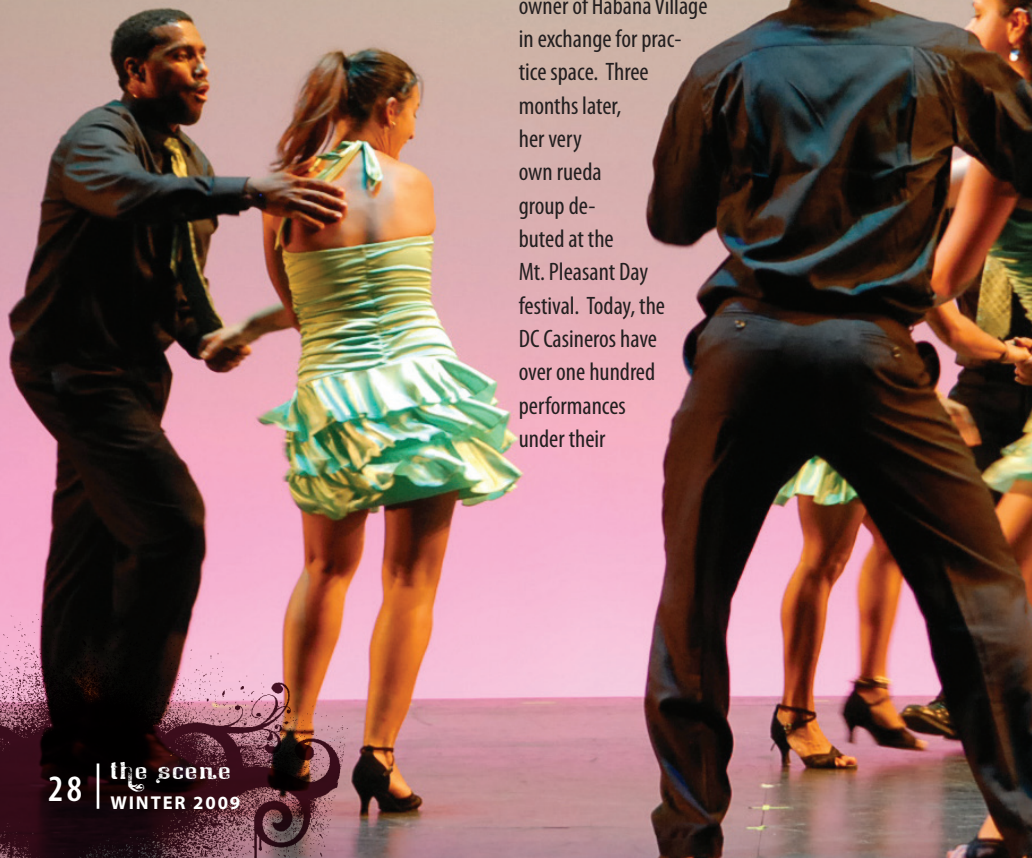
Gill's thin frame and reserved demeanor is much less commanding off the dance floor. With strawberry blonde hair and freckles, her Cuban dancing and fluent Spanish is initially startling.

She explained that four years ago, while studying dance and Spanish at George Mason University, she was sent to Havana, Cuba for five months as a "guinea pig" for a new exchange program. There she joined her first rueda group, and then "made history."

Every neighborhood in Havana has its own representative group that tries out for a 9-month competition on Cuban TV, Amanda explained. It's like a Cuban salsa version of *So You Think You Can Dance*.

"We were the first foreigners to be accepted into that competition," she said. And in Cuba, that's a pretty big deal.

Back in Washington, D.C., Gill, then 22, started giving dance lessons to the owner of Habana Village in exchange for practice space. Three months later, her very own rueda group debuted at the Mt. Pleasant Day festival. Today, the DC Casineros have over one hundred performances under their





belt, including the prestigious Kennedy Center National Symphony Orchestra fundraiser, which charged \$115 per ticket from attendees like Salma Hayek.

Rueda de Casino is not as popular in the D.C. metro as it is in large Cuban diasporas, like Miami. There is, however, a loyal following with local performance groups such as the DC Casineros, Dance in Time, Saoco DC, and SonMas.

“Each rueda group brings its own flavor and style,” says Adrian Valdivia, who has been dancing with the DC Casineros since the start. “For example, we like the hard-core timba, the heavy drums, because we incorporate a lot of rumba moves into our dancing.”

Cuban rumba involves more traditional moves different from Miami or Havana style rueda, he explained.

The styles may differ, but the basis of the dance is the same, with at least two pairs of dancers following moves called out by a designated leader in a circle formation. The dance can be choreographed or, more often, spontaneous and competitive, with dancers listening to steps called out by the leader, who is responsible for observing the timing and keeping the group cohesive.

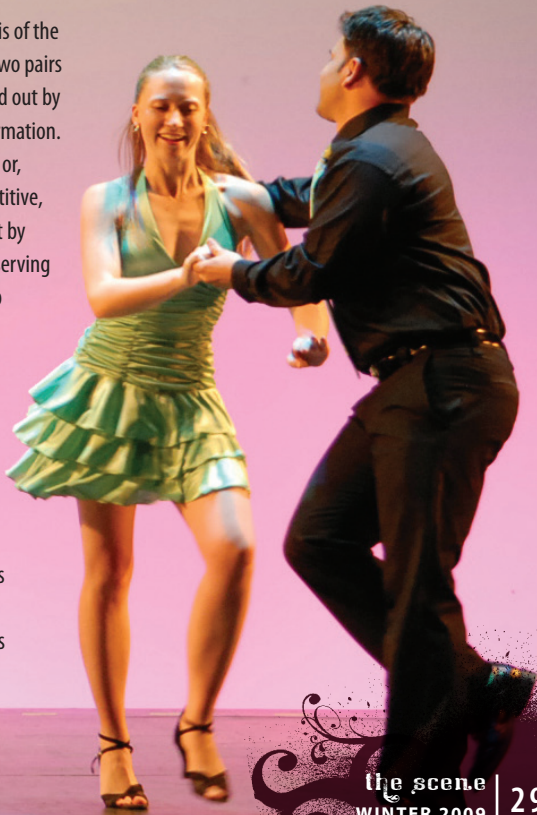
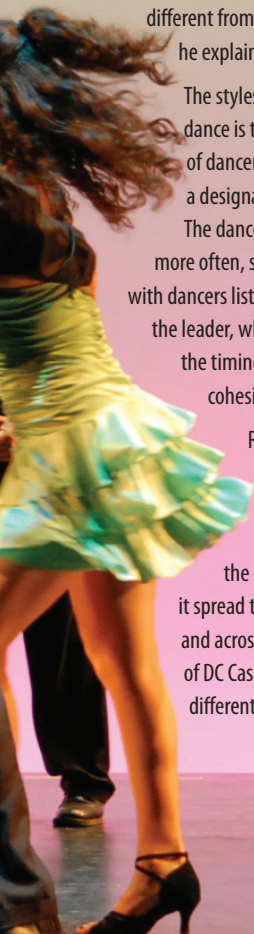
Rueda was danced in private clubs called Casinos in Havana, Cuba in the 1950s. Recently, it spread to the rest of the world and across cultures. The members of DC Casineros represent seven different countries and this year’s

World Amateur Salsa Rueda Championship winners were from Canada, Oregon and Ecuador.

In D.C., the dance may have bigger benefits than previously understood, said Gill. While reading a memoir by a military veteran last summer, she had an idea that rueda may be helpful with mental therapy for the growing number of veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Rueda is a particularly therapeutic dance because of the circle formation and group interaction, Gill explained.

“There is this feeling of community it provides to the participants,” she said. “Leading or following multiple dancers can be helpful in building trust with others.”

This is something she hopes to explore during her upcoming post-graduate work in Dance Therapy.



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Salsa Etiquette: the birthday dance

by Grace Badillo



@h, the day has arrived. You have the perfect outfit, earrings and shoes. Everyone will be there and for once it's all about you, The Birthday Girl! Or so you think.

You arrive and are showered with Happy Birthday wishes and hopefully enough gifts to fill a U-HAUL. Then it happens: the DJ announces your birthday dance. All eyes are on you as you take your place in the middle of the circle. The song comes on, and suddenly you find yourself in a tornado. The guys think they are doing you a favor by throwing their finest moves at you for those seconds that they have you in their arms. Suddenly, what was supposed to be a dance for you has become a show-down of "look at me, I am better than he is" for the guys.

What many of the gentlemen in the circle have failed to recognize is, it's your birthday, and so they should dance at your level and for your pleasure. If the birthday girl is a beginner, then beginner moves should be executed. If the birthday girl is an advanced dancer, the guys can challenge her without making her look and feel like a rag-doll or a prop.

After being in night clubs and teaching for many years, I have seen hundreds of birthday dances and have heard every complaint in the book from the ladies.

tips for the birthday girl:

- ✿ You pick the song. If you know the song, it will be easier to dance the hits and changes.
- ✿ Tell the DJ to slowly fade the music out after two minutes, so if the circle is insane you can end sooner than later.
- ✿ If you don't want to turn doubles or triples, smile and speak through your teeth to tell

the guy, "no double spins." They should get it and comply.

- ✿ If you lose your balance on turns, squat slightly and pose, legs close together and heels down on the floor. This will keep you from falling over.
- ✿ Don't forget to bow and thank everyone, even if you feel like you just left a war zone.

tips for the guys:

- ✿ Listen to the music. If you are the first to dance with her, this means you are in the introduction portion; don't open the position. Travel with her around the floor and make her look like a queen.
- ✿ Be very careful during the passing of your partner. Girls get stepped on quite a bit and also lose footing because the pass was off or the capture didn't work. Taking her away from her partner will throw her off balance; this is never appreciated, so wait for the pass to be initiated by her or his lead.
- ✿ If she dances on 1, you dance on 1. If she dances on 2, you dance on 2. It's her birthday, not yours.
- ✿ Your lead should be gentle enough to be understood and strong enough to be felt.
- ✿ If you happen to be with her at the end of the dance, a simple dip rather than a very low to the floor dip will suffice. Don't make her look or feel awkward.



Following these tips will ensure that you won't be party to a disastrous birthday dance.

Grace Badillo of *Dancing with Grace* will host the *Salsa Etiquette* column. If you would like your etiquette-related question or complaint addressed in print or on *The Scene* website, email to grace@dancingwithgrace.com

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Salsa Classes 7:30pm-9:30pm
By Earl Rush
Featuring DC's Hottest DJ

Thursdays

Salsa Classes 7:30pm-9:30pm
By Orlando Machuca
DJ Hercules

Fridays

Salsa Rueda Classes 8pm-9:30pm
By SAOCO
Live Salsa Band **Sin Meido**
DJ Hercules

Saturdays

Salsa Classes 8pm-9:30pm
By Karen Aguilar
DJ Hercules
DJ Heavy

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