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- DJ Neo
- Salsa Fuego
- Willie Colón
- Clarendon Grill
- Frank Regan
- Holy Salsa!
- Dancegasm





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table of contents

Editor's Note and Staff	3
Clarendon Grill	4
Dancer Spotlight	7
Jeri Dembrak	8
DJ's Corner: DJ Neo	10
Holy Salsa!	12
Cuban Party with Orquesta Ashé	14
Be Scene Collage	18
Cover Story: Salsa for a Cause	20
Literary Corner: Dancegasm	24
Salsa Fuego	26
Salsa Legend: Willie Colón	28
Kids in Salsa: Titans	30
Salsa Etiquette: The Bad Dance	32
Dear Salsa Professional	33
The Seven Sins of Salsa	34
Say What?	37
Celebrated Choreographer Frank Regan	38

4



8



12



14



20

**SALSA
FOR A
CAUSE**



26



28



30



38

Shaka Brown

INSTRUCTOR | CHOREOGRAPHER | PERFORMER | CONSULTANT

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2009

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2010

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Editor's Note:

I am indebted to you, the reader, for continuing to give *The Scene* your support. Unfortunately the economy, the nefarious bug that seems to be sparing no one, has affected us as well, requiring me to start charging the \$2 issue price. We certainly hope you find the quality of publication we provide worth the cost.

The printing expenses are just too daunting without being somewhat compensated. We are working on a subscription service, to have the latest issue delivered directly to your home shortly after the release. You also will have the option to support our product through donations. If you have other creative ideas on helping us cover the costs of production, we would love to hear from you.

There still will be many opportunities to score a free copy. Besides the release parties, we will start posting daily salsa questions on our site www.thescenemagdc.com. The first person to answer the question correctly will receive a free copy of the latest issue. Also, shortly after the release party, my staff and I will attend at least five venues where we will offer some free magazines.

Always visit our site for updates.

Thank you for your continued support and I hope to see you out on... *The Scene*.

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Mondays at Clarendon Grill

By Mathina Calliope



You might be an advanced dancer or you could have taken your first salsa lesson last week. You might be African, Caribbean-American, or perhaps you claim The Island—read Puerto Rico—as your home. Perhaps you’re from Hong Kong or an Irish-Italian-German-Swedish mutt. Perhaps you dance On1. Maybe you dance On2. You might even dance On3. It happens. Salsa might be your whole life or it might be an occasional indulgence—a happy way to blow off steam. No matter. If you have been in D.C. for more than a minute and you care at all about the dance, you have been to The Grill.

Walking to the club you have felt the congas thumping through the ground: *tun-tun, pa! tun-tun, pa!* The door opens and the club releases a couple into the night, emitting also an assault of heat and the sounds of trumpet and piano blaring from speakers. Inside, tables—cleared for the dancers—grip the walls. The dance floor is a blur of color. Light bounces off sweat-covered bodies.

In keeping with most non-dancers’ perceptions of the venue (“Clarendon Grill has salsa?”), nothing about its décor suggests tropical rhythms or passion. Far from evoking Havana, the Clarendon Grill instead appeals to a hard hat aesthetic. Under a Lucite slab at the bar, a lot of literal nuts and bolts are scattered around, small toy dump trucks, and bulldozers arranged dioramalike. A prominent painting (also featured on the bar’s Web site) depicts a welder, goggled eyes blank behind a metal mask. The club’s demographic the rest of the week runs to your brother’s friend’s college roommate’s band and the people who come to hear them play. (CG is just one of a handful of Arlington, Virginia’s clubs that offer live music several times a week—modern rock covers, acoustic—plus Texas Hold-em Tuesdays.)

Nevertheless, salsa Mondays at the Clarendon Grill are a D.C. institution. On any given Monday, an estimated 80 percent of the Clarendon Grill clientele are regulars. Keith Warner, a former bouncer at the Grill, says that on the few Mondays he couldn’t work, he didn’t trust his replacement to know what to do with a salsa crowd. He had to “basically brief them,” he says: Monday’s dancers “always come back and they only drink water.” Which begs the question: why would a bar, restaurant, or club even have a salsa night? The D.C. salsa community has been aggrieved repeatedly, shot in our own fancy feet



by our health—and wallet—conscious behavior, as clubs and bars launch salsa nights for several months only to fold them down when they see how little they make.

Monday was a dead night anyway, Clarendon Grill's general manager, Danny Garcia, explains. One night, bartender Gordon O'Keefe took a random drive around South Arlington with a Colombian friend-of-a-friend. They stopped at a Latin music store on Columbia Pike and started digging through the milk crates, asking the owner for suggestions on what to buy. They brought back CDs to the Grill and O'Keefe started playing them. The club hired Ann and Dan Gordon (and later Keith Givens) to teach lessons. Eight years later, Monday is one of the bar's busiest nights.

Clarendon Grill's enviable location surely plays some role in its success, but regulars know there's more to it than that. There is something nourishing and home-like about Clarendon—its reliability, its good floor, its consistent deejaying, its low \$5 cover, and its reasonably priced and not watered down drinks. Manager Garcia attributes the Grill's success to the people who make it happen—to bartender O'Keefe and to DJ Bruno and to Givens.

Something else seems to be at play: the good relationship between the club and the dancers. O'Keefe especially seems to appreciate the clientele—he understands dancers' needs. Garcia says he is repeatedly impressed by O'Keefe's dedication to the crowd. "He's out there mopping the floor," he says somewhat incredulous. "I tell him, 'Dude, the floor is fine,' but if the floor's no good... you know dancers." And dancers know business doesn't run on the good vibes they bring in. Sure, some people still try to sneak in water and will only visit the bar so they can pinch beverage

napkins from the stack and mop off their sweaty heads. But O'Keefe points out that many more regulars do their part, coming in early for a steak salad or some wings, and happily turn over a couple of dollars for a legitimate bottle of water.

A number of Clarendon specifics make it unique among D.C.'s salsa outlets. Despite running his own dance company, Latin Motion, Givens does not host performances at the Grill. Ditto birthday dances (with rare exceptions for especially loyal regulars). Instead, birthday revelers are allowed to bring in their cake and are provided with napkins, plates and forks free of charge. For ordinary (if injury-prone) dancers, freebies include band-aids and ice.

Clarendon Grill, like any salsa spot, hosts conflicting dynamics among members of its diverse crowd. Its very layout provides a vehicle to showcase some of them. The thoroughfare between the dance floor railing and the bar, for example: trawlers look for partners, drinkers camp out in clusters, and dancers—well, dance. Along the bar the drinking crowd collects, some of its members knees-out on stools, defiant. Meanwhile, hardcore salseros grab any four or five square feet of space, no matter how irregularly or dynamically shaped, to dance in, handicapping the trawlers' progress. The drinkers don't seem to care too much for the dancers' ingress, either. At least if the dancing couple kept it small, there'd be a little up-close entertainment. But few hardcore dancers really keep it small, even if they're considerate. Spinning takes space. So the drinkers pull their chins in and back up like passengers on a filling elevator, drawing their drinks in toward their chests and edging the barstools that last centi-



Photos: Jon Trevino

meter toward the brass foot rail. The trawlers dodge orbiting elbows. Such is the uneasy but symbiotic relationship among Clarendon's Monday night guests.

By contrast, down on the dance floor, something pure is happening. Despite the visual chaos of colored lights, muggy air, and intricately moving bodies; despite the auditory chaos of voices and rich, layered music, what is happening out there is simple. No complications, no drama. The steps may look difficult, but the idea is forty

thousand years old: one man, one woman, music.

Perhaps Clarendon devotee Michael Fernández puts it best when he tries to sum up the role of the Clarendon Grill in the lives of D.C.'s salsa community. Searching for a metaphor, he finds the one social institution he can think of that offers the same combination of fellowship, ritual, and joyful abandon. For Fernández, and for many others, the Clarendon Grill is nothing short of church.



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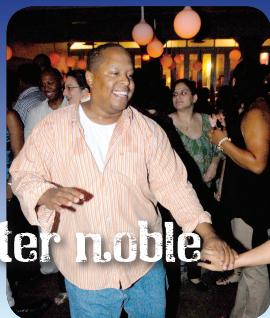
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A Masacote Entertainment Production

dancer spotlight



peter noble

Place of birth: Syracuse, NY
Day job: Social Worker
Representing: Washington, D.C.
Dancing salsa: 2.5 years
Likely to be found: Pure

On1 or On2?

"On1."

Dance Shoes or regular shoes?

"Regular shoes."

Where did you discover salsa?

"Latin Jazz Alley."

What makes a good dance?

"A great connection."

What makes a bad dance?

"A disengaged partner."

A favorite song to dance to?

"*Dime Que Me Quieres* by Calle Real"

Are you addicted?

"I regularly go to salsa parties, special events, concerts and rueda classes. I'll let others give me an "addicted" diagnosis but I've got a serious love for dancing."

What do you drink when you dance?

"Water or Coke."



máylis carroll

Place of birth: Sarlat, France
Day job: Recent graduate, searching for a job in global affairs
Representing: Northern Virginia (and Paris)
Dancing salsa: 6 years
Likely to be found: Clarendon Grill

On1 or On2?

"On2."

Dance Shoes or regular shoes?

"Dance shoes. Always!"

Where did you discover salsa?

"Leon Harris' salsa/tango parties my dad used to take me to."

What makes a good dance?

"Salsa is a partner dance, therefore connection is key."

What makes a bad dance?

"When I have to worry about oncoming elbows, feet, and other hazards."

A favorite song to dance to?

"*Los Oportunidades* by Jimmy Bosch"

Are you addicted?

"Yes. When you integrate salsa in all your traveling plans, it is a sure sign that you've got the bug."

What do you drink when you dance?

"Agua."

D.C.'S OLD SCHOOL SALSERA

By Hildi Pardo

Although the middle-aged, fair-skinned blonde refuses to tell her age—she says one never asks a woman her age or weight—there is little she won't tell about D.C.'s salsa history. Jeri Dembrak, salsa instructor and promoter, is a walking encyclopedia of stories, characters, and dates y of D.C.'s salsa scene history. And there are few people in the salsa scene who haven't collaborated with or received instruction from her in one form or other.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa., Dembrak, an ESOL and Spanish teacher, grew up surrounded by the musical influence of her parents. Chuck and Jean Dembrak met while dancing the jitterbug. Her father was RCA's East Coast Vice President of Promotions and discovered and founded, among others, Tommy James and the Shondells. "This is where my addiction to music comes from. I always studied some form of dance: ballet, afro-ethnic, modern," says Dembrak. "My mom, to this day in her retirement, is out six nights a week in the ballroom scene."



Dembrak stands out as *la rubia*, or the blonde salsa teacher. She studied Spanish since middle school and was an exchange student in Costa Rica both in high school and college. Dembrak earned degrees in Spanish, Political Science, and Latin American Studies from Denison University in Granville, Ohio.

She relocated to D.C. in 1986 and one summer night ended up at Chelsea's, the premier salsa club at the time. There she saw an older couple that made a lasting impression. "I couldn't believe how classy and elegant they were; they just flowed together creating the most beautiful tapestry I ever saw," she recalls.

In 1994, Dembrak began salsa lessons with Leon Harris on Thursdays at Habana Village. Before signing up for classes, she says, "I didn't know what I was doing; I could keep a beat but I was just getting thrown around. I knew nothing about lead and follow."

After several months, Harris sent Dembrak to Miguel Dutary's Wednesday class. She soon began to fill in for Dutary, repeating his lessons by memory. "My style is very much his style," she explains.

Dembrak calls herself "old school." "I believe a man should wear a suit and tie, and ladies should dress to the nines. I agree with Eileen Torres on that." She reminisces about those days, "At Chelsea's, Tulio's, Fellini's... everyone dressed up on the weekends. It was very classy."

In February 1996, Dembrak emailed her first The SalsaNews newsletter, hitting AOL's maximum character limit and maximum number of email addresses. It was one of the first newsletters to list clubs, instructors, and lessons for each night of the week. Dembrak wrote club reviews and challenged readers to see how many clubs they could hit in one week. "There is not one salsa venue, club owner, promoter or instructor that can say I didn't support them. No one has ever paid me to promote them. I always

thought, if you can make the scene big enough, there is room for everyone."

Readership of Dembrak's newsletter ran wide. One night in 1999 while teaching at Nick's in Springfield, Dembrak noticed two men talking and laughing, seemingly at her. Slightly annoyed she asked, "Who the hell are you?" "I'm Larry Harlow. I'm your biggest fan." To which she replied, "Well, I'm your biggest fan!" Dembrak had not realized the legendary Harlow had joined her newsletter's listserv.

In December 1997, Dembrak and Wendell Robinson, a student and a regular within her "Habana Village family," co-founded the D.C. Salsa Festival, predecessor to the D.C. Congress. It was held at Diversité nightclub. Robinson says they invited several people to instruct and the classes were packed. The event was so highly attended, they had the second one within a few months. Larry Harlow was the guest performer in the spring of 1998 at the University of the District of Columbia.



"I ALWAYS THOUGHT, IF YOU CAN MAKE THE SCENE BIG ENOUGH, THERE IS ROOM FOR EVERYONE."

Photos: Jon Trevino

From 1998 to 2002, Dembrak worked full-time on salsa. "I don't think of it as a profitable career," she explains. "When you add up the time—writing newsletters, sending emails, preparing curriculum, teaching classes, creating and distributing flyers—it comes out to about \$1.50 an hour. There is no health insurance, no vacation or sick days. It always amazes me when people want to teach salsa."

Dembrak doesn't pass up an opportunity to share her knowledge about the history of salsa. "I love my Puerto Ricans, but the foundation of salsa is Cuban. Celia Cruz coined the term," explains Dembrak. "Exporting the music from Cuba—*son, son montuno, guaracha, guaguancó*—these terms were too difficult to say and differentiate. It was a lot easier to say 'salsa' as a generic term for the rhythms of Cuba. Celia Cruz said that salsa, with all those different rhythms, sounds better. . . like a sauce. . . the different ingredients enhance the flavor just as different instruments enhance the music."

At one time Dembrak didn't know the difference between salsa and mambo. She traveled to New York to take On2 lessons from Ismael Otero, the "Million Move Man." When she returned she called Alan Austin, one of the old Chelsea's dancers and said, "*Aprendí a bailar mambo.*" She learned to dance mambo, she said, to which Austin replied, "*¿Para qué fuiste a Nueva York? Yo siempre te he llevado En2.*"—"Why did you go to New York? I've always led you On2." She had no idea she had danced both On1 and On2.

She continues, "Back when I went to Habana Village. . . no one asked if [you] danced On1 or On2. No one even asked if you could dance. Now, you feel like you are being judged. I think people take it way too seriously."

Dembrak explains how the music defines what beat to

move on. "A lot of Grupo Niche is actually On3 because of Colombian salsa's cumbia influence. On1 music emphasizes the singer, like Marc Anthony and Victor Manuelle. Examples of strong On2, which emphasizes the band, are Tito Puente, Perez Prado, or El Gran Combo."

Dembrak's calling is in teaching. She encouraged or taught many of D.C.'s biggest salsaeros, including Eileen Torres, Shaka Brown, Irene Holtzman, Danny Roman, Keith Givens and Barbara Bernstein.

As a teacher, Dembrak has made many lasting friendships with her students. When Carlos Torres, 32, arrived from Puerto Rico in 2003, he found Dembrak's website.

At first impression, Torres says, Dembrak didn't look like a typical dancer. But once she started teaching, he saw how knowledgeable she was not only teaching dance and technique, but also about the different types of salsa, the history of the music, the singers, and songs. "I realized she really knew what she was talking about," says Torres.

Years later, if he is in the area, Torres will join Dembrak's Sunday class or salsa potlucks. "She's a good friend. We talk a lot about each other's lives."

There are two things Dembrak tries to instill in her students: have fun and take care of the lady. A recent student, Gene Yoshida, 34, says, "She has a great sense of humor and makes it fun. What I like is the classes are very practical, and progressively build from week to week."

Regarding future projects, Dembrak is thinking of writing about the history of D.C.'s salsa scene. She has boxes of newspaper articles, videos, flyers, t-shirts, and festival booklets. "I have all the documentation," says Dembrak. She certainly has all the memories, too.



THE DJ'S Corner

Featuring

DJ "Neo"



Interviewed by Lorenzo Haire

Paul Hernández, DJ Neo, clarified he didn't get his name from the main character in the movie *The Matrix*. Hernández ascended quickly on the DJ scene, recently winning a DJ battle at Clarendon Grill. Last year he won Best DJ from StuckOnSalsa (a Stuckie award) based on votes cast by the salsa community.

Q: You were first a club DJ, not strictly salsa. Why did you cross over to salsa?

A: I grew up around salsa music but didn't really get into it until eight years ago. Like many, I only listened to salsa monga (commercial) artists like Victor Manuelle, Tito Rojas, Frankie Negrón. It was when I saw Eddie Palmieri performing on the mall downtown during a Fourth of July festival that I wanted to make the switch to spinning salsa exclusively. The

rhythm of Eddie Palmieri's piano and the voice of Herman Olivera got me hooked. I started doing a lot of research online on artists like Palmieri and ended up learning about Fania All Stars. My ears were opened to a new style of salsa.

Q: Have you deejayed anywhere besides D.C.?

A: The furthest I traveled to deejay was Virginia Beach. The scene down there is still young but growing at a fast pace. D.C. has a bigger variety of events, like the Resolution Jam and the D.C. Salsa Congress. Also, D.C. has places to salsa every night of the week.

Q: What do you do if you are in a groove and someone asks you to play something you dislike?

A: Most of the time, if I have it, I'll play the request. But if it's a song that completely messes up the

groove at the time, then I will most likely play the song towards the end of the night or if it fits into my set.

Q: What genre and artist in particular move you?

A: MAMBO (On2). My top five artists at the moment are Alfredo Linares, Grupo Mango, El Combo Moderno, Gustavo Garcia, and Roberto Ortiz y su Orquesta.

Q: Tell us something about DJ Neo that we may not know.

A: I used to do amateur boxing three years ago and won two tournaments.



The SalsaMetro.Com 11th Annual New Year's Eve Salsa Party and Dance

A close-up photograph of champagne being poured into three tall, slender glasses. The champagne is golden with a thick head of white foam. The background is dark with blue and white bokeh lights, suggesting a festive party atmosphere.

**This year's event will be held at
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Attend the event for as little as \$40.

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Holy Salsa!

By Emily Goulding

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly called the Mormon Church, opens their monthly Friday night salsa dance with the following prayer: "Lord, please let us enjoy ourselves."

The Germantown, Md. church basketball court is transformed with pastel-colored strobe lights, then struck with merengue singer Elvis Crespo's command of *Pintame!* "Paint me," the song announces. "I told the painter to paint the face of the most beautiful girl within my heart..."

Nicaragua-born Rodolfo De Trinidad helped found the event in order for the growing number of Latinos in the congregation to have a place to enjoy themselves without feeling pressured to drink or smoke, activities forbidden by the church. De Trinidad's ideas for the event are in alignment with the young adult ministry's aims of introducing young single Mormons to each other in order to marry within the faith. Over ten years, a total of seven marriages have resulted from salsa events.

Shortbread cookies and Rainbow Twizzlers are provided as snacks and water is the only drink to be found. Couples can only dance facing each other at a respectable distance; and those dancing inappropriately—too close—together—are politely tapped on the shoulder as a signal to stop.

"You have to really watch out for them," says Kenneth Toledo, the organizer in charge of events for single Mormons in the Washington, D.C. area. "Sometimes they hide out in the corner, where they're hard to catch," he says with a wink.

Toledo, who was born in Puerto Rico but raised in New York, is one of many Latino men at the event. Like Di Trinidad, he was raised by a single mother and jointly converted to Mormonism. They explain that single mothers in Central



America and the Caribbean are attracted to the church's dictum of support and community. Here in the D.C. metro area, single Central American men that come to the United States to work are also attracted to the LDS faith for its sense of community. Under the strobe lights, twenty-year old Honduran immigrants dance with quiet, third-generation Mormon girls.

Alejandro Albarega of Tegucigalpa came to the dance with his two older brothers, who converted from Catholicism to Mormonism a couple years after arriving in Washington. Albarega still wears a shiny gold Catholic crucifix as a necklace, but he says it's just for vanity, as he is currently in the process of converting.

Eyeing around the room, he asks, "Hey, is it true that American girls like the way Latinos speak English?"

Plenty of Anglo men at the church are interested in Latinas, as well. Salsa get-together organizer Matt Wassum explains that since many young Mormon men do their missions in Latin America and learn Spanish, "They like to pick up on the Latinas."

Since it was founded in New York in 1820, the Church has been active in converting followers by sending



out young missionaries to spread the Word. Today there are more members of the church abroad than in the United States.

Attendees say they prefer dancing at church as opposed to salsa clubs, but LDS members often meet at places like Lucky Bar and Habana Village anyway.

Jans Corona is a twenty-seven year old church-goer who moved to Maryland by way of Florida, and originally, Cuba.

Corona had not danced salsa since coming to the U.S. as a teenager, but began to dance again at church. There, he says, he can dance just for dancing's sake—like people did back in Cuba.

The dance floor is mostly comprised of salsa novices, but there are also a few experts. Ballroom dance is highly emphasized at Brigham Young University and in other established Mormon environments, and a couple of trained dancers devise a deft quick-step samba to Shakira's "Hips Don't Lie" reggaeton collaboration with Wyclef Jean.

According to Wassum, dance and music have always been esteemed in the LDS tradition, as they are a means of bringing people together.

"Have you ever seen that show So You Think You Can Dance?" Wassum asks.

"Lot of Mormons," he says with a nod.

The makeup of the Church was not always as diverse as it is today. Until 1978, official doctrine declared those with dark skin to carry the Curse of Cain and barred people of color from entering the priesthood. But you wouldn't know this history by attending this event, where believers from around the world dance salsa on church grounds.

Past midnight the dance closes just as it opened: with a prayer. As the woman leading the congregation closes her eyes to pray, the stage lights give her a halo-like glow. "Lord," she says, "we are grateful for the opportunity to celebrate life."

"Please let us meet in another month to enjoy the Latin dance."





CUBAN PARTY with ORQUESTA ASHÉ

By Rosy Valenzuela

Sweaty bodies compete for space near the stage, while aggressive rhythms rise to a crescendo as the bandleader reaches his arms out to the audience and screams, “*Despelote!*” On cue both men and women undulate their hips as though overtaken by the power of the edgy bass and street *tumbao* of Cuban timba. This could be a scene from a club in Havana, but the “Cuban Party” also happens with D.C.’s Orquesta Ashé every first Friday of the month at LEFTBANK in Adams Morgan.

“When I first came to D.C. three years ago, I found a lot of dancers, but there weren’t any live timba bands playing Cuban music,” says Aramis Pazos Barrera, who founded Orquesta Ashé—a 12-piece band with a dedicated local following among D.C. Cubans and dance aficionados. “A lot of people think that timba is salsa with rock. It’s not. For me, timba is a fusion of rumba, funk, son montuno, jazz and the street sounds of Cuba,” says Pazos.

Salsa and timba share the common base of the *clave* and although both originated from the *son montuno*—a Cuban musical genre—timba evolved independently.

Musically, timba is distinguishable from salsa because it has a faster and more aggressive *tumbao*—the base conga rhythm, extremely technical arrangements with intricate syncopation, heavily synthesized sounds requiring double keyboards, and large, big band-style horn sections. Timba is recognizable by its contemporary use of old Afro-Cuban rhythms, evocative lyrics inspired by everyday Cuban life, and for the sensually provocative moves it inspires among the dancers. The style exploded onto the Cuban dance scene in the early 1990s, during one of the worst periods of political repression, and provided an alternative to the traditional Cuban music popularized in the U.S. by Buena Vista Social Club. Because Cuban timba artists rarely are allowed to tour the U.S., very few Americans have been exposed to this contagious blend of jazz, *son* and urban funk. Timba’s appeal is that it can be appreciated by both the latin jazz analyst and the salsaero.



Determined to expose the D.C. dance community to modern Cuban music, Pazos asked his musical contacts—friends from his days in Cuba—to send him transcribed arrangements of his favorite songs from Los Van Van, Maraca, and other popular artists and started recruiting local musicians. It was difficult to find musicians who understood the complex timing involved with timba, he said. What he found was a lot of musicians who were curious about the rhythm and intrigued by the combination of funk and Afro-Cuban jazz. “You can read and play salsa from a sheet,”

Pazos says, “but you can’t play timba from a sheet.”

Pazos was born and raised in the



neighborhood of El Cerro in Havana, Cuba and graduated from the prestigious

National School of Arts with a

degree in Folkloric and Modern Dance Performance and Instruction. He danced professionally for such renowned dance companies as Conjunto Folklórico Nacional and Ballet Tropicana in Cuba, the Bolshoi Ballet in Russia, and worked with the Director of Riverdance in Mexico.

“As a kid, I always wanted to be a musician,” Pazos says. “However, in Cuba they push you to specialize in the field of study they think you would excel in at an early age. So I had to focus on dance and leave music behind as a second choice.” He identifies Beny Moré, the father



of Cuba’s big band sound, as his inspiration. Moré never studied music, but directed his own band and was wildly successful and popular.

Despite Pazos’ admiration for the legendary singer, contemporary musicians such as Los Van Van, Manolito y su Trabuco, Bamboleo, Issac Delgado, and La Charanga Habanera take center stage in his rolodex of great timba bands playing today in Cuba and Europe. Dissemination of Cuban modern dance music is slim in the United States due in part to the U.S. embargo and the politics that have isolated Cuba. Europe, on the other hand, has been very open to accepting Cuban musicians who tend to spend more time on tour there than at home in Cuba.

“Ashé is Aramis’ vision,” explains Jean-Francis Varre, Ashé’s musical director and vocalist. Varre was approached early on by Pazos, who, he said, set the pace and raised the bar high. The original 14-member group included four singers, two trumpets, one trombone, one saxophone, one bass, one piano, one flute and three percussion instruments—congas, bongos, and drums. Their goal was to one day play at the Kennedy Center.

After practicing for a few months in small cramped studios and, at one point, in a storage area, the group started performing at local D.C. venues such as Duke's City Lounge and Black Cat, and at D.C. street festivals. In the last three years, they performed four times at the Kennedy Center.

Although musically Ashé had a rough start, the group rose in popularity very quickly among local dancers. "We are not the highest of musical proficiency, but we give the most energy," explains musical director Varre. "We have gotten to where we are strictly on Ashé." The group's name, Ashé, in the West African language Yoruba means "life force" or "energy."

It is typical for most Cuban dance bands to have the musicians sing, dance and sweat profusely along with their audience, playing songs that can last up to ten minutes. Pazos brings this energy to Orquesta Ashé. "He's the gasoline and knows how to inspire people out of nothing," says Varre.

After two initial years of non-stop performing, Pazos took a seven-month break, reorganized the group, increased their repertoire with more current music from Cuba, and re-emerged into D.C.'s music scene in September 2008. The reorganized band caught the attention of local talent Sam Turner, percussionist, and Grammy-nominated pianist, Gonzalo Grau, both of whom have joined Pazos onstage at LEFTBANK.

Director of his own group, La Clave Secreta, Grau said he saw Ashé's energy and decided he wanted to work with them. He has provided Ashé's musicians with a better

understanding of timba's technical syncopated rhythm, aggressive runs and prominent percussive sound. The group's musicians credit Grau for supplying the building blocks they needed to achieve a higher musical standard.

With new musical guidance and a growing fan base, Orquesta Ashé is back and on a mission to raise the popularity of contemporary Cuban music in the D.C. metro area.





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SALSA FOR A CAUSE

Using salsa to better lives

By Kira Zalan



This summer **Manuel Martínez**, a long-time D.C. salsa aficionado, spent thousands of dollars of his own money to organize and teach a summer dance camp for poor children in his native Puerto Rico. "I'm not rich. Not even close," he says.

The group of kids, who are between 11 and 16 years old, face violence, poverty and poor nutrition on a daily basis, he explains. "They'd come into class without being fed at home. When they ate, they ate things I wouldn't feed my dog," says Martínez.

At first, the kids were hardly disciplined or willing students.

"They had gangster attitudes, coming to class wearing sunglasses, acting like they don't care," Martínez says. But within a few weeks of dance classes, their transformation was unbelievable. "They started to listen; their energy lifted. One girl would never look you in the eyes; she looked ill and had terrible self-esteem. We saw a difference in her posture and in her confidence by the day."

Dance is just a conduit to affect the kids in a positive way, says Martínez. "They have no foundation at home and, often, dance is the first opportunity they have to express themselves."

Any structured dance can make a difference, says Martínez. He chose to teach salsa and tango because that's what he loves. But all structured dances

transmit discipline which the kids lack in their lives.

"And, of course, it teaches you the value of working for something great," he says.

These kids live in a world of uncertainty and aggressiveness. The key is to be encouraging without lying to them, says Martínez. A teacher who talks to them and disciplines them respectfully makes a big difference in their lives. "You explain things and take time to make them understand. Few of them have that at home," he says.

The program didn't go exactly as planned. Martínez encountered resistance from the same people he thought would welcome his attempt to better the children's lives. The Director of Recreation and Sport was not helpful, and neither were state and local organizations, particularly when he appealed for a place to teach. "They didn't need to put in any money. Still, those in a position to help, didn't help," he says.

When Martínez told his students the program would be cut short, they were quiet. "They're not accustomed to showing emotion," he explains. Martínez, on the other hand, cried. "I worked so hard and was left with all this frustration. But he says he's not giving up. He's using this summer to make the right contacts and will try the project again next year.

"I want this to last, even if this summer was just to build the basis for this program," says Martínez.



In summer 2007, **Lisbeth Calvio** helped start a salsa group aboard the USS Nimitz, an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. She has been active Navy for the past thirteen years and was a psychology intern during deployment. Together with her Chief Petty Officer, who was also the ship's substance abuse treatment counselor, and others—Calvio helped organize a salsa group called the SalsaHolics.

“We were promoting a healthy addiction and coping skills instead of alcohol or substance abuse,” she says.

Statistics show that veterans are at a high risk for drug and alcohol abuse, which often is attributed to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. With more veterans returning from repeated deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, the numbers for substance abuse are on the rise, says a study by the New England Journal of Medicine.

According to the National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse counselors, 40 percent of Iraq/Afghanistan veterans will experience mental health problems, 60 percent of which will also have a substance abuse disorder.

Calvio, with her training in psychology, understood the stress of 12-plus-hour work days and being away from

home. “Dancing is a great stress reliever and a morale booster—a healthy addiction,” she says. So she helped organize a salsa night where the group performed a rueda routine for the crew. The performance was a hit and group membership quickly grew.

When Calvio returned to D.C. and her shipmates headed back out to sea, she wanted to support the USS Nimitz Salsa-Holics, who now hold salsa classes several times a week.

“I knew how hard it was being out there, and then the timeframe for them to be home got condensed.” There is usually twelve to eighteen months between ship deployments, she explains, but Calvio’s shipmates were required to deploy ahead of schedule.

Last summer, Calvio posted a message on the D.C. Salsa Meetup message board: “ATTN DJs: Salsa for Deployed Sailors and Marines!”

“I thought one or two DJs would give me some music to send for the group,” she says. What she got was over 30 CDs from about ten local DJs and different salsa lovers in the community.

“We ended up sending a couple of care packages which included all those salsa CDs,” says Calvio. “They were so grateful.”



Last year salsa instructor **Grace Badillo**, whose company slogan is “salsa for a reason,” volunteered at Arundel Lodge in Edgewater, MD. The facility provides services for the county’s mentally ill adults and Badillo’s company, Dancing With Grace, signed up to teach basic dance steps and perform for the patients.

“They had normal performance anxiety,” says Badillo about her student group, which was to perform on the first day. As the group was changing in a room provided by the facility, Badillo noticed the space was in fact a counseling room. Large pieces of paper hung on the wall on which the members expressed their thoughts. “I’m ugly because I’m retarded—no one will ever love me,” said one poster. “I hate myself. I’ll never get married,” said another. “Why did this happen to me?” said a third.

“Everybody just stop,” Badillo told her students, who were chatting nervously and changing into their costumes. She pointed to the walls and said, “What you are doing—it’s not about choreography, the moves or any mistakes you might make—it’s about the people here who don’t have normal social lives. We’re here to make them smile.”

Everyone was in tears as they read the desperate messages on the wall, says Badillo. “They forgot about performing, and did a phenomenal job. It was about adding happiness to these people’s lives.”

Because of mental handicaps, the patients couldn’t learn salsa the way it’s usually taught. Badillo says the classes were very basic. “We used the tiles on the floor to teach them where to step,” she says. “They were so grateful to have us there. As thanks, they secretly learned the Macarena and performed it for us at the end. Can you imagine how much work it took for them to memorize those moves?” she says.

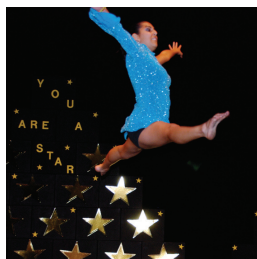
Badillo has a long list of volunteer activities on her resume—hundreds. They range from providing dance scholarships for the Hispanic Youth Symposium, raising money for esophageal cancer research, providing supplies for orphans in Puerto Rico, raising money for kids’ cleft lip operations, and rehabilitation for victims of rape—to name a few. In 2008, Badillo received the President’s Volunteer Service Award, accompanied by a letter on White House stationery signed by President Bush.

A few members in the community use their talent and love for salsa to raise awareness or volunteer. But, not nearly enough people do, says Badillo. On numerous occasions, she says, she attempted to organize instructors and performers to give back to those in need, but ran into an overwhelming lack of interest. On one occasion, she recalls, she made hundreds of phone calls, which received no response.

“If you don’t have money, that’s fine,” says Badillo. “Give an hour of your time.”

“The meaning of life is to give of yourself, to help those in need,” she says. “It always comes back to you seven-fold.”

Grace Badillo is also a columnist for *The Scene*.



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The Dancegasm

By Mathina Calliope

He roves the room in search of a partner for the next song. He selects a dancer who is watching and waiting and times his approach. He moves close to her and submits his upturned hand with a smile, and she smiles back and lightly hooks her fingers over his. As she trails behind him onto the dance floor, the next song starts and he slides into it like coming home—the songs have been good all night but *unh!* This song . . .

Oh, how this song suffuses him, every cell. The song is inside him; he is inside the song. The dance has not even begun, but already the mystery has started; he feels his will release his body and he feels the song replace his will. This does not happen with every dance. This does not even happen with most dances. He finds a slip of space and turns to face her, to draw her into closed position, and he sees it on her face—it's on for her, too. The song thrums along her spine; it undulates her vertebrae in just-perceptible waves. It flowers in her head and chest and like gladness it rushes from her heart through her arteries while she awaits his lead, pent and tingling. Her union with the song is as complete as his and like a mathematical property—he equals the song equals her.



Their eyes meet and they wait, their bodies marking the beats with subtle pulses, until the six-seven comes and they step together. He signals a cross-body lead, a double inside turn. His lead is as light as her follow. The signals stream like neurons springing across the synapse; almost before he has an impulse about what to lead next she has received the signal and starts the move. She becomes pure response. She reacts as if by reflex. It helps that everything he leads seems ordained by the song; seems, once led, as if it were the only move possible, as if no other maneuver could express the combination of notes and rhythm in that measure.

There is no discontinuity between her limbs and his. They are corporeally indistinct. Their eyes meet, flick away, meet, flick away. The charge that runs between their eyes is of an intensity that they must periodically interrupt in order to survive.

The song breaks and they shine separately—the music a surge through each body. During this section they look down; it violates etiquette but the rawness of their connection demands the reprieve.

The break in the song ends and he collects her. They find each other's eyes again. When the tempo changes their adjustment is so instant and simultaneous that it seems the music must originate in them. Now the song is resolving and he pulls her near, shrinks their steps, ceases lifting his feet from the floor, and moves



instead only his torso and hips. She mirrors his movements precisely. Their bodies press and they undulate laterally in concert, eyes closed, until they sense the oncoming musical climax and part so he can spin her—a final flourish—and draw her once more to rest against him as the instruments' last shivering notes hang in the air. They breathe. They withdraw and slide their hands along each other's arms to latch fingers again. Their eyes meet and hold as their chests rise and fall.

The next song begins and other partners await them. There is nothing to say, and so they let go and drift off.

There is a name for such a transcendent dance experience: the Dancegasm. It is not, despite the blunt evocation, strictly sexual, though an aspect of sexuality is rarely absent from a Dancegasmic encounter. Rather, the name is an attempt to capture the sublime wonderfulness of every detail of this four-to-six-minute rendezvous.

Several factors are necessary for the event to occur. The song must not be common or in any way ordinary, catchy, or pop-like. It must be *groovy*, meaning it must stimulate the dancers to a state of communion with the rhythm. It must pulse through their veins. Slow songs are better in this case; and cha-chas are best. A song like this tends to transfigure the dancers' faces into expressions of ecstasy and disbelief at the *unh*-ness that inheres in it. The intimacy of the *ménage à trois* (man, woman, song) elides the usual lag time between signal and execution; the resulting sensation is one of telepathy. The leader releases the follower for a shine just when the follower is feeling a desire to express some bit of the song on her own. Onlookers might

suspect the two are enacting a choreography.

In a Dancegasm, the universe outside of the song and each other is erased—the dance is all that exists. It contrasts to inferior and more common engagements in which one of the partners attends to other dancers or onlookers, seeking their attention and approval.

Dancegasms can happen between first-time partners or between dancers who have danced together before. They are far from automatic, however, even between partners who like each other's styles and dance compatibly. The stars must align just right, and sometimes they do so at a salsa congress.

If, once, you had a Dancegasm at a congress, it likely was of the highest order. It probably caught you off guard and it probably happened during a maiden dance with a new partner. It made your night and it made you remember why you love salsa. The delayed bus trip, the pricey and crowded hotel room, the sleep abstinence, the shrieking feet, the watered-down drinks, the too-long songs played by the orchestra, the too-fast songs played by the DJ, the performance snafus—all irritations and inconveniences evaporated in the face of that one encounter. The Dancegasm redeemed the entire congress for you. And henceforth, it has become the sole motivating object of your salsa life. The search for another one has rendered every subsequent congress an expensive and overwrought quest for the Dancegasm—salsa's holy grail.

Mathina Calliope is at work on a memoir about her immersion in the salsa scene.

CECILIA VILLALOBOS'

SALSA FUEGO

by Nick Walker

At Costa Verde, even the beginner salsa classes move pretty fast. Instructor and choreographer Cecilia Villalobos has a reputation for pushing her students and she doesn't like to break down every step.

You'll have to pay close attention to each new turn because, before you know it, she's already adding another combination. But if you really find yourself lost, just ask one of the members of Villalobos' dance group, Salsa Fuego, for help.

"Before Ceci, I had never tried salsa classes," says Jasmine Vializ, who recently moved to Miami but performed with Salsa Fuego for several years. "When I danced with Ceci it was a huge commitment—I attended all the classes and all the rehearsals—and I saw an improvement in only a few weeks. It was so intense."

"Ceci is very professional—she's strict," says Glenda Olmeda, who first performed with Salsa Fuego at The Salsa Room's Halloween party in 2008. "You have to be very precise. Sloppiness is not an option. You practice until you get it right."



Originally from Perú, Villalobos moved to the United States in 1996, launching Salsa Fuego almost immediately. The group has six dancers and performs about 8 to 10 shows a year. Four years ago, Villalobos also started a local female student group called Chicas Fuego.

Before moving to D.C., Villalobos lived in Sao Paolo, Brazil, where she earned a dance degree and danced with the Sao Paulo Dance Company.

"I studied Argentine Tango, hip hop, ballroom, salsa, cha cha cha, modern, jazz, samba, capoeira, and lambada," Villalobos says.

When she came to D.C., Villalobos started teaching at the Virginia Ballroom, now known as Elan Dance Sport Center. "I started teaching On1, then On2 started. I teach both, but if you're having fun, you can dance On1 through 8—sometimes

you have to anyway, to follow your partner. You dance with your heart."

If you have trouble feeling the rhythm of each song, Villalobos suggests learning to play a musical instrument.

"Whenever someone has a little musical experience, it's easier for them to follow the music. Try the timbales, conga, guitar, piano, whatever—it's just for fun. Take lessons for three to four months."



Villalobos' first performance in the U.S. was at Nick's Nightclub in Alexandria. Soon after, she was performing at the Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center, alongside well-known salsa acts such as Victor Manuel, Tito Nieves, Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, Gilberto Santa Rosa, and José Alberto "El Canario."

One performance Villalobos will never forget came at the Peruvian Festival on July 26, 2002 while on stage with the salsa band El Gran Combo. She remembers the exact date because she was nine months pregnant with her daughter, Mariah, and gave birth later that night.

At her home in Alexandria, Villalobos has converted her basement to a dance studio complete with wooden floors and wall-to-wall mirrors. Most of the time she teaches private lessons, but the members of Salsa Fuego come by to practice on the weekend.

Villalobos estimates she is currently teaching about 150 people between her home studio and Thursday nights at Costa Verde. Some of her well-known former students include Abdul Al-Ali, Karen Aguilar, Galileo López, and Earl Rush.

She teaches others you won't run into at the clubs—a group of five boys and twelve girls ages 6 through 12. "They are already through the basics, and they are going to be performing next year," she says. "With kids, it's about making it fun." She even tried teaching salsa to 3 and 4 year-olds, but found that it was too difficult to

keep the kids focused at such a young age.

Salsa Fuego performed in Perú in 2006, for the country's first ever Salsa Congress. Next year, Villalobos plans to take 30 to 40 students to Machu Picchu for five to six days, hopefully for the Corona Festival, she says, to go clubbing and to perform.

Sometimes charitable groups will ask Salsa Fuego to perform at their fundraisers, and Villalobos tries to be helpful. Salsa Fuego has participated at several events to benefit victims of leukemia, for example.

"When I was in Brazil, the first thing my mentor told me was to be humble;

give a little of what you have," Villalobos says.

Villalobos currently is working on a new set of instructional DVDs featuring intermediate and advanced salsa lessons. Until then, you can learn the moves directly from her at the recently re-launched Thursday salsa nights at Costa Verde.



"When I was in Brazil, the first thing my mentor told me was to be humble; give a little of what you have," Villalobos says.

WILLIE COLÓN

BY KIRA ZALAN



Photos: Jon Trevino

A fourth of July sun baked the midday crowd gathered on a Washington D.C. plaza. Families, lovers of Latin jazz and unassuming tourists vied for the shade of trees and umbrella-covered tables. Everyone moved slower than the weekday capital rush. Then local DJ Nancy Alonso took the stage, introducing the man so many came to see: Willie Colón, the trombonist whose talent proved crucial to the creation and revolution of New York's salsa movement.

Dapper in a beige suit, white shirt and a blue tie, 59-year-old Colón pulled out his trombone and began to play a signature tune—*Che Che Colé*—as the crowd applauded and pressed in closer. The tiny temporary dance floor soon overflowed, while those few who remained at tables moved to the rhythm in their chairs.

William Anthony Colón was born in the Bronx in 1950, a time of transition for New York's Latin musicians. His grandmother encouraged him to play the trumpet, but it wasn't long before he replaced it with the trombone after he heard Mon Rivera Barry Rogers play. By age 15, Colón was signed to Fania Records, the preeminent Latin music label.

"People confuse salsa," Colón said in an interview with Latin Music Examiner. "It is not a rhythm, it's a concept." Colón is famous for incorporating elements of jazz and rock with traditional rhythms from Cuba, Brazil and his ancestral homeland Puerto Rico. Over his long career, which spans four decades, Colón's creativity and bold combination of genres was crucial to the modernization of Latin music that came to be known as salsa.

"Have you seen the movie *El Cantante*?" Alonso asked over the microphone as Colón left the stage after his July 4 performance. "Willie Colón created that music, and he is here to attest to that."

Colón was the bandleader behind the legendary singer Héctor Lavoe, to whom the famous songs that Colón

plays are often attributed today. “Isn’t that a Héctor Lavoe song?” was a common question uttered as Colón played hit after hit on the hot July day.

Colón and Lavoe’s collaboration emerged from a casual suggestion by Johnny Pacheco, co-founder of Fania Records. Between 1967 and 1973, the two produced countless chart-toppers that would come to define the Fania era. Colón also collaborated with salsa greats Celia Cruz and Rubén Blades. According to his website, Colón has created more than forty productions and sold more than thirty million records worldwide.

Colón earned the nickname “El Malo” meaning “the bad guy” after his first album came out under the title in 1967. It was an image he would encourage throughout his career. The following year he appeared on his “The Hustler” album holding a gun to a man’s head with the words, “I’ll Kill Him If You Don’t Buy This Record.” He pushed the line so far, the FBI once had to draw one for him. On the 1971 album, “La Gran Fuga,” (The Big Break), Colón appeared as if on a wanted poster. Izzy Sanabria, the cover artist, said he had Colón take a photo booth mug shot, and transposed the image



onto a real FBI poster, complete with serial number and finger prints. According to Sanabria, the Bureau forced Fania Records to recall the albums and release a version that didn’t reference the FBI.

But Colón’s bad boy image was but one facet. He was also political, becoming a civil rights activist in the 1960s. Colón’s website says he “fused his musical talent, his passion for humanity, and his community and political activism into an extraordinary, multifaceted career.” Indeed, Colón’s public service is broad and intertwined with his music. He has served as a member of the Latino Commission on AIDS, as a member of the Board of Directors of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, and a member of the advisory board of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers Foundation. Colón made a failed run for public office in New York in 2001, and became New York Mayor Bloomberg’s liason to the Latin Media and Entertainment Commission.

In 2004, after 40 years of contributing to musical history and his community, Colón received the Latin Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.



KIDS In Salsa

by Cristina Martínez



Photos: Jon Trevino

It is Saturday afternoon and some classrooms in the Albert Einstein High School in Silver Spring, Md. are filled with high school students taking the SATs.

Over the testing silence, a faint rhythm of stomping feet can be heard from one wing on the lower level of the school. Inside, a group of students is practicing their sevillanas, a variation of the flamenco dance particular to the Southern region of Spain. The Titanes Salseros—named after their high school mascot, the Titan—is the Latin dance performance group at the school and this year they performed for the second time at the D.C. Salsa Congress.

The performers range from 14 to 20 years of age and practice on Saturdays and weekday evenings. When preparing for performances and competitions, the practices can last up to six hours. The group agrees the amount of time they put into practice is challenging but worth it, giving them a feeling of accomplishment. They are like a family, they explain.

The Latin dance group at AEHS was founded 15 years ago by Yolanda Glower, and initially focused on folkloric dance. Their current organizer, Paula Pero, took over in

2000 and invited fellow D.C. salsaero Ricardo Loaiza to teach. Pero showed off the Titanes' trophy case from her nine years leading the group. The trophies, some as tall as two feet, range from "Best in Show" to "Best Bachata" and "Best Merengue." According to James Fernández, the school principal, "Much of the credit

THE TROPHIES, SOME AS TALL AS TWO FEET, RANGE FROM "BEST IN SHOW" TO "BEST BACHATA" AND "BEST MERENGUE."

goes to Ms. Pero who spends countless hours with the kids and sets high expectations which they achieve and exceed," says Fernández.

The group's repertoire includes merengue, bachata, cha cha cha, cumbia, samba, and more recently flamenco. They perform all over the D.C. metro area, including competitions at local high schools, talent shows, pep rallies, elementary schools, churches, and once at a

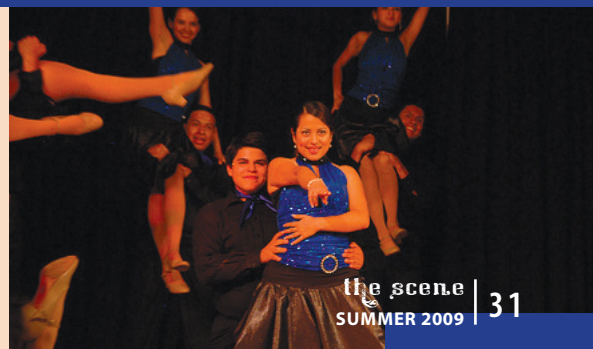
Wizards Game. They were even called upon to perform at a local wedding. The Titanes already have performed 30 shows this year and have several booked throughout the summer.

While most of the students plan to keep dancing salsa as a hobby after they graduate, some plan to do it for a living. Karen Zepeda wants to pursue dancing as a profession. She choreographed a major part of the salsa section for the group's D.C. Salsa Congress routine, which also showcases other styles of dance such as flamenco.

According to Pero, the main purpose of the group is to give students something to do after school, and to fight the negative statistics that many Latinos kids deal with, such as high school dropout rates. Team members must keep at least a 2.5 GPA to stay in the group, half a grade point higher than the requirement for other school activities and sports.

The students receive a lot of support from their families and the school. "My mom comes to all my shows," says student David Cuevas, "She gets really excited about the performances." Isabel Argoti's little sister "wants to learn all the moves." Principal Fernández has been very supportive as well and recently took the Titanes out to dinner at Ledo's Pizza. He says, "I personally love to watch them not only because they are so precise and entertaining but they really enjoy what they do."

The group's success comes from their dedication and passion for dance. These young salsaeros are sure to be part of the D.C. salsa club scene in no time.



the bad dance

by Grace Badillo



Suffering through a bad dance can be very difficult, but there are ways to make it less painful. Remember, ending a dance abruptly is impolite and should be avoided.

if she hangs on you:

You ask a lovely lady to dance and find that she puts all her weight on your arms and grips your fingers so tight you are losing circulation. In this situation, realize immediately she is a beginner and is difficult to lead. At the first opportunity, get out of closed position and change into an open position to avoid holding her arm weight. You should avoid large patterns in order to avoid unresponded leads, which could break your fingers. Instead of performing patterns, strike up a conversation while dancing in open position (either in a one hand hold or double hand hold). Once she is more relaxed, you can try a basic turn to see if her grip has loosened a bit. If she continues to grip your hand hard, make your own hand more limp, which should cause her to loosen her grip as well.

he is off beat:

No ladies, you cannot force him to dance on beat by back-leading. Instead, smile politely and say, "Are we off?" If he is a beginner and cannot find the beat, he may ask you to help. That is your chance to get the two of you back on track. Otherwise, just take his lead.

he leads so hard that it's uncomfortable:

During a rough dance you can say, "Ouch," when something hurts and hopefully he will get the picture. Saying, "Careful," with a smile also should signal to him that he needs to adjust his lead.

He doesn't protect you while implementing all of the fabulous moves he learned online: many of us have seen, or been victims, of horrific dance floor accidents. Dance floor wounds like bruised shins and legs, or broken toes, fingers and nails, or torn cartilage are all too common. This situation is dangerous enough to stop the dance. You can say, "I am hurt and need to sit down." You should be honest about being afraid to dance with him. Men actually appreciate gentle honesty.

he touches you a bit too much:

First, don't assume he is a pervert if his framing arm falls a bit low. Many people haven't had formal training and don't understand they should be holding your shoulder blade and not your waste. Simply raise his arm, and he should get the message; if he doesn't, kindly tell him, "This dance is a little too touchy for me," and end the dance. Suffering through an entire dance feeling molested is not something a woman should have to endure. Give him the opportunity to apologize or talk with you about it afterwards so there are no hard feelings.

Send your *Salsa Etiquette* questions to grace@dancingwithgrace.com

Dear Salsa Professional,

By Shaka Brown

...what makes someone a "salsa professional"?

The salsa world is unique in that there are no real standards for determining what qualifies someone as a "professional." So what is it that separates the professional from the amateur? Here's a general guide to what makes a professional.

Professional Image. They have business cards, a phone number, and possibly a website. If they hand you their information on a napkin, then they are not prepared to call themselves a professional. While there may be individuals available for hire that don't have a business card, having one shows they have taken some consideration of their professional image and the fact that they're a product.

Pricing Schedule. A professional can tell you exactly what their services cost. While there is always room for negotiation, a professional will work with you in a way that demonstrates their experience. If you ask them how much they charge for a workshop, a private lesson, or a performance and they can't give you an answer, then they haven't worked enough to understand their value.

Commitment to Excellence. A professional knows their capabilities as well as their limitations. They are able to offer you advice towards accomplishing your goals. Beware of the person that tells you they are perfect for the job before they have any details of what you need.

Professional References. You should be able to see examples of the professional's work via word-of-mouth, performance videos, and student referrals.

While a professional must be a good dancer, not every good dancer is a professional.

A professional does not have to be a full-time dancer. There is not a lot of money in salsa, and the industry can support only so many people that do it exclusively. So don't be reluctant to hire someone that teaches in addition to their "normal" job.

...what's the difference between On1 and On2, and which should I learn first?

There was a time that two very different styles of dance could be defined by the break step. On1 was "L.A. Style" and On2 was "NY Style." L.A. style can be summarized as explosive and involving tricks. NY style was smooth and focused on musical interpretation. However this was nearly 10 years ago, and today there is so much blending of styles that On1 vs. On2 is hardly a significant distinction.

The basic step involves moving backward and forward in time to the song. Some prefer to change their direction on the first and fifth beat of the song, while others choose to make the second and sixth beat the step to break on. That's it. It seems silly to be such a contentious issue, doesn't it? Someone who is just starting to dance salsa may be bombarded by folks insisting they learn to dance On1, while others swear by On2. So which should you "learn first?"

When you learn to drive, should you learn to drive on the left or the right side of the road? When you meet someone should you shake hands, bow, or kiss them on the cheek? Do you see where I'm going? It completely depends on where you will be driving or greeting someone. In terms of learning to dance salsa, observe the people with who you want to dance, or who you admire. Once you find your "ideal" dancer, ask where they learned and what style they are dancing. Their response should give you some direction in which to start.



Send your *Dear Salsa* Professional questions to info@shakabrown.com



“THE SEVEN SINS OF SALSA”

By Barbara Bernstein and Glen Minto

AVOIDING THE FOLLOWING COMMON MISTAKES WILL HELP YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DANCING.

1a. Leading yourself (for ladies)

Leading yourself means anticipating what the leader is planning and moving yourself without waiting for his lead. Ladies often don't realize they are doing this. A lady may sense a turn is coming and turn herself without waiting to be led. Or she may get the beginning of the lead and then move herself through the turn faster than the leader was leading her. In both cases she has “taken over the lead.” This is unsatisfying for the leader because, in a sense, he's not really needed.

1b. Out-shining the ladies (for men)

Let's face it guys, the ladies are just sexier than we are. When the ladies look good, we look good – so don't commit the sin of out-shining your lady. You're dancing with the girl and you decide you want some “me time,” so you give the lady a free spin and let her do her thing while you do yours. If you see the lady doesn't know what to do, or she's only doing the basic step, don't overdo your shine. Always be mindful of your partner's dance level.

2a. Dancing off time (for ladies)

Being “off time” means to not dance within the rhythm of the music. Dancing consistently on any beat also may not be fully correct if the rhythm changes, but at least the timing is predictable to your partner. The most egregious meaning of off time is dancing four beats in what is really four and a half beats, or three and a half beats of

music, etc. In this case, dancing off time means dancing independently of the music's tempo, with no connection between the movement and the music. It is difficult to teach someone to feel that “musical pulse” if they don't feel it. If you have been told you have difficulty hearing the beat, you should pay attention to your partner's beat and try to match it. That way you are still in synch with your dance partner.

2b. Dancing off beat (for men)

Seriously guys, you have to figure out where the 1 or the 2 is in the music. Beg, borrow, or steal a timing CD or get the help of an experienced dancer. You must get this as quickly as possible. It's better to spend two months focusing primarily on getting your timing right and focus on moves later, rather than developing bad timing habits. After you've learned how to dance to the music's timing, then you can go on to be a Master of Time. You see, you'll soon find out that once you understand the timing of the music, you don't have to constantly step on 1-2-3 or on 5-6-7. You can control your timing, which will make you the envy of anyone who is watching. This way, if a song is super fast, you don't have to dance at super-fast speed in order to dance to the beat of the music.

3. Thinking there's only one right way to dance salsa

We choose how we like to do things based on what we feel looks best or feels most natural. But there are many “acceptable” ways to dance. It's best to think of—different

styles as variable approaches rather than right or wrong ways to dance. This is particularly important: a dancer should be flexible so they can dance with anyone. We all dance comfortably with our dance class friends or dance teammates. But the world is populated by many who aren't in that set, and to dance with them, a great deal of flexibility and acceptance is helpful.

4. Learning to run before you walk

This sin refers to dancers trying to learn advanced moves before having a real handle on the basics. People are naturally attracted to flashy movements, but any lady will tell you that well executed and physically comfortable basics are more fun than poorly executed flashy moves, which can be awkward or dangerous. Be patient studying the fundamentals as you learn them in layers. First you just get the moves, then you smooth them out, and then you grasp them well enough to add styling and flairs. Once you are solid on fundamentals, the more advanced moves are easier to grasp, and you will execute them more skillfully.

5. Not practicing good dance etiquette

There are lots of etiquette rules that can be breached. People may dance taking up too much space on a crowded dance floor; they may dance to show off; they may invade their partner's space. Essentially, etiquette is a matter of being aware and considerate of those around you—your partner as well as others. And good etiquette is common sense. For example, you don't want to do tricks on a crowded club floor, as your partner and those around you could get hurt.

6a. Assuming that errors are your partner's fault

It's rare that an error is due entirely to one person. For example, if a couple is dancing and the lady doesn't have enough tension in her arms, the man must lead more forcefully to get her to follow. To avoid feeling yanked, the lady may loosen up further and then the man must

lead even stronger. The issue can be corrected if just one of the partners adjusts what they're doing. You cannot change someone else, you can only change yourself. People who can compensate for others are much loved on the dance floor as this takes skill and consideration. So make it your business to strengthen your own dancing, and don't worry if your partner isn't always doing things the best way.



6b. It's always the guy's fault (for men)

Guys, we're men, and so we have to take being hit like a man. When a lady hits you in the face, and you know it's entirely her fault, try to smile and proceed with extreme caution to finish dancing.

7. Not having fun and taking yourself too seriously

Dancing is often an expression of joy. Think of players' victory dances after making a touchdown. To keep that fresh, joyful approach alive on the floor, make sure you don't lose that outlook as you learn. Getting every step or technique just right takes a lot of practice. It isn't the end of the world to mess up a move or lose your balance on a double/triple turn. Most important is having a great time as you learn.

So remember that it's all about fun, and dancing with love, joy and playfulness in your heart. When your dancing comes from a place of loving music and movement, it will show; the technique will come in time. This attitude will make your experience rich, and will make dancing fun for your partner, too.

See full version of this article at

www.thescenemagdc.com/blog

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Glen Minto is a guest contributor.

*Supporting
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*Dance is for everybody.
I believe that the dance came from
the people and that it should always
be delivered back to the people.*

— Alvin Ailey

"Say What?" Salseros weigh in



By Cathy Freeman

Q The origin of salsa music is controversial, with as many explanations as there are answers. So we asked some local salseros—where did salsa come from?

Liz de la Rosa -VA

It really started in Cuba and took off from mambo. A mix of Latin styles changed and evolved in New York City, and then moved to Puerto Rico. This is the style we know today.

John Evanhoff -D.C.

It came from Cuba, derived from Afro-Caribbean rhythms. After becoming more popular, it migrated to Puerto Rico and other parts of the world.

Larry Brooks -MD

Africa! Then it moved to Cuba and to the islands. There are arguments that it came from Puerto Rico, but it is definitely from Africa.



Liz

Kenny Almodóvar -VA

It was started in New York by Puerto Ricans. They took the mambo from Cuba, took away some of the horns, added the trombones and jazz elements, toned it down a bit and that became salsa.



John

Andrea Glasco -MD

The soul, of course!



Larry

Sharyn Moreau -MD

Latin bands in New York City took the sound of the mambo and other Latin music, sped it up, and salsa was born.



Kenny



Andrea



Sharyn

CELEBRATED CHOREOGRAPHER

Frank Regan

By Karina Hurley

It would be difficult to guess Frank Regan's dance background by simply looking at him. At 74, the former ballroom dance champion is distracted and quiet. He fidgets on the chair in his home in Alexandria, Va.—attempting to remember the entire life voyage that landed him here. With white hair and an almost invisible white beard, he struggles with specific details, but he's certain of one thing: at age 22, when he returned home after serving in the Korean War, he made a decision that changed his life. He would do something completely opposite from violence: dance.

"Besides, I met a lot more beautiful women in the dance world than in the military," says Regan in between laughs.

Regan had been dancing throughout his childhood, and at 13 he was already a ballroom dancer, a passion he had to quit to join the military. How this native of Glasgow, Scotland, ended up being a Latin dance choreographer in Washington D.C. would take a book to retell. But since that day in 1957, when he decided that he was good enough to turn his talent for dancing into

a career, he's lived, danced and taught in numerous cities, directed and choreographed hundreds of productions, written two books, and won countless prestigious dance and artistic awards.

While technically living in Canada, Regan spent a

lot of time in New York, and specifically at the legendary Palladium Ballroom.

"When I came here I knew nothing about Latin dance," Regan recalls. "But I was fascinated by it, so I started taking lessons from the greatest Cuban and Puerto Rican stylists."

Regan absorbed *mambo*, *guajira*, tango, boleros and even some Brazilian rhythms, such as capoeira and samba.

Not only did he want to learn how to dance them, he wanted to learn how to

create the rhythms. So he learned to play bongos, timbales, conga and Latin piano. Being friends with Tito Puente and Tito Rodríguez helped, but it was really actor Marlon Brando who pushed him towards playing percussion.

Brando used to frequent the Palladium and play the conga with Machito, a legendary band leader. One day, he saw Regan dance and assumed he was from Cuba.



When Regan broke the news about his Gaelic background, Brando asked the question Regan has been asked many times: How can an Anglo-Saxon dance Latin dances better than many Latinos?

The answer lies in Regan's passion and respect for the rhythms with which he fell in love.

"I just immersed myself in this," Regan says. "I do believe there's something in the genes. But I've dug into the pathology and neuromuscular side of it: the Anglo-Saxon feels things in the legs. People from Latin America feel things from their emotional center."

Having earned a master's degree in theater and dance studies with a minor in anatomy, Regan has concluded some theories on the topic. The hip-movement in Latinos, he says, comes from the rib cage, whereas in whites it comes from the legs. Africans, on the other hand, can do both consecutively and simultaneously.

Although it is rare, there are some Latinos who don't have a sense of rhythm, he explains. There are also white dancers who, like him, have gone out of their way to absorb the Latin culture. If one wants to become a great dancer in Latin dances, Regan advises, one must be determined to apply an experiential approach: identification, mimicry, and osmosis as well as intellectual analysis.

"My goal was to be respected by the Latin community and to show my respect for their culture."

Regan also specialized in ballroom dance, flamenco,



A young Frank Regan plays the conga drum

jazz and ballet. In his choreography, he looked to fuse his love of Latin dance with these forms.

In 1993 Regan started a non-profit company in D.C. called the American Dance

Montage and created a two hour show depicting the evolutionary history of ballroom and Latin dance, which received special recognition from the U.S. Department of Cultural Affairs.

"Dance is constantly being rediscovered, and it all comes full circle."

About seven years ago the artistic director of the Miami City Ballet was in need of a choreographer who had a background in ballet, ballroom, Latin dance and also was a dance historian. Regan's name was suggested to him by the celebrated icons of the Palladium, Augie and Margo Rodríguez. He was hired as the period and stylistic choreographer for a ballet series, of which one episode was called "Mambo" and featured the music of Tito Puente and Perez Prado.

Choreography, says Regan, is a form of non-verbal communication, which demands creativity and knowledge. "Being an English major does not make you a poet; but it helps." Thus having a dance background does not in itself make you a choreographer, but it helps—and mainly, he says, it's a gift.

Earlier this year Regan choreographed a 23-minute ballet piece called "Sophisticated Salsa" for the New Jersey Ballet. He sold the copyright of his choreography for the next three years, and the show is scheduled to play this fall.

Unlike many respected old-school dance choreographers, Regan embraces change. And in the world of music and dance, he has witnessed many changes since his days at the Palladium. According to him, when Latin jazz was revived and musicians started calling it 'salsa,' dance teachers saw an opportunity to promote a new movement—one in which individual turns were more prominent, as opposed to the rotary movements of a couple as a unit; and, of course, breaking On1, which is easier than breaking On2. The new moves, which were related to the upper-body character of disco, appealed to a wider base of dancers.

"This generation sees Latin dance as something new and wants to take it to another level—whether it's from a rebellious or innovative nature," Regan says. "Dance is constantly being rediscovered, and it all comes full circle. Now I see things coming back to the way they were in the 50s."

Frank Regan appreciates not only the evolution of dance, but life. He loves the fact that his career has taken him to places as far away as Hong Kong and Japan. He loves the uncertainty of what future projects, places or people await him.

"I enjoy the whole aspect of serendipity, of random things happening and how it takes you in different directions."

Regan's outlook and, he believes, his dancer physical conditioning, have been crucial for his recovery. Two years ago, a food-related infection compromised his kidneys and almost killed him. He had to be dialyzed every week until a month ago. Now out of danger and looking forward to turning 75, he's preparing his comeback: A Latin show featuring *guajira*—a slow Cuban rhythm with a type of cha cha cha feel, which has been neglected by musicians and dancers for quite sometime, he says. Rehearsals are in place, and the show will debut this summer in the D.C. metro area.

"I enjoy the whole aspect of serendipity, of random things happening and how it takes you in different directions."



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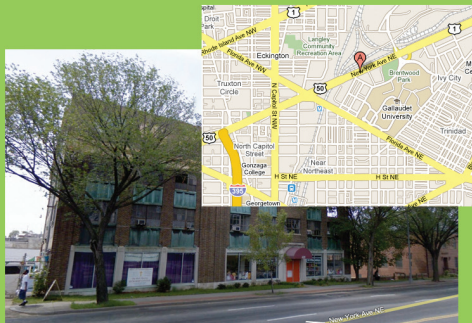
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