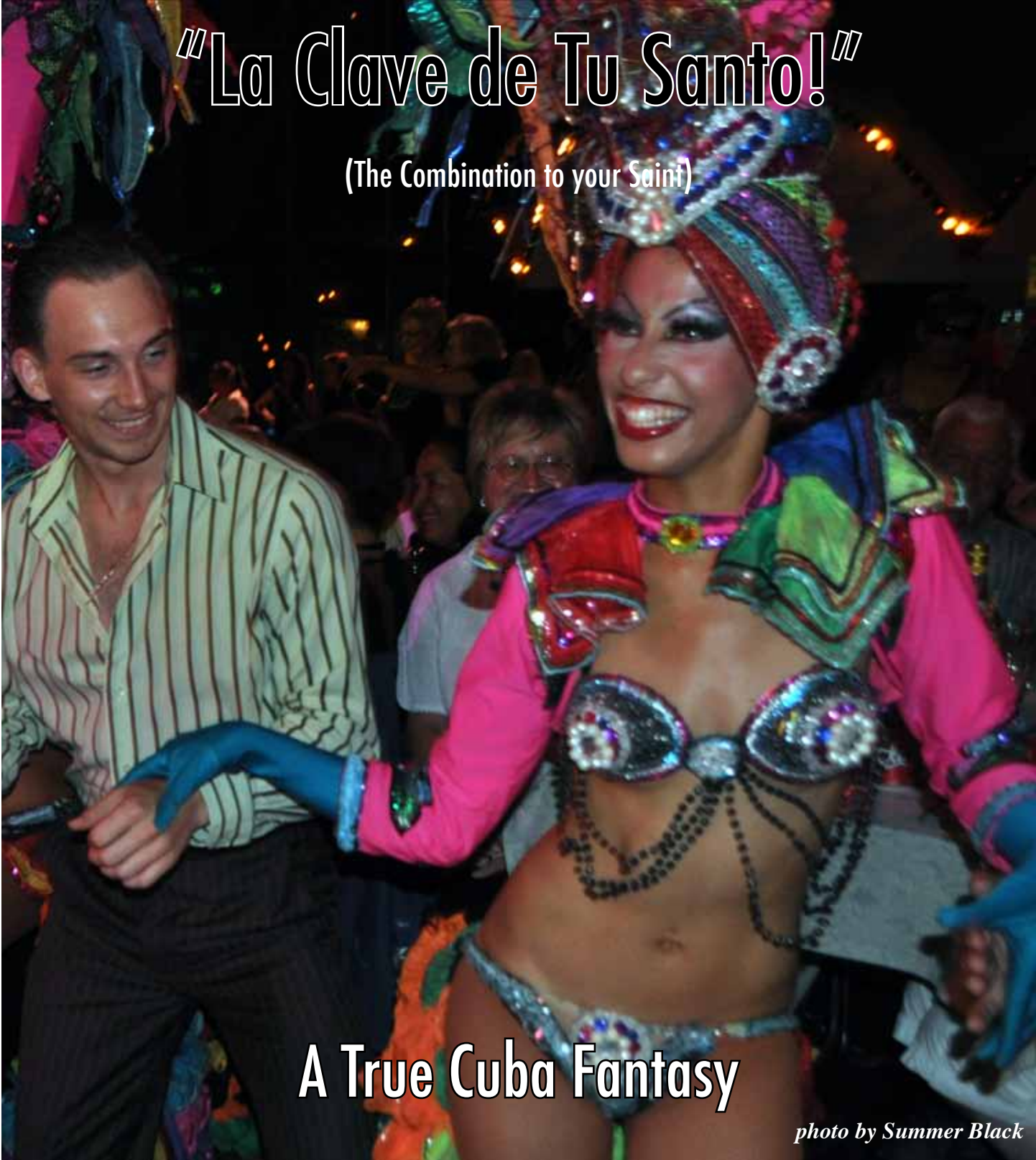


"La Clave de Tu Santo!"

(The Combination to your Saint)

A True Cuba Fantasy

photo by Summer Black



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We hear the following from Australia:

“Australia has lost its membership of the WDC because of its alliance with the WDSF and now the WDSF has banned its top two couples from the World Championships.”

“We are greatly saddened that we are witnessing one of the worst situations in Australia’s competitive dancesport history. There has been considerable discussion about what is perceived as the “banning” of two of Australia’s top couples from the WDSF World Latin 2011 in Singapore. The ACDA would like to do its best in sharing what information we have regarding this current situation and what effect...s this may have, not only for the two Australian couples, but potentially all Australian couples. This is our future and we, the competitors, deserve answers and support from those that have been before us.

The WDSF have stated that our two representatives couples to the WDSF World Latin Championship 2011, Arkady Bakenov & Rosa Filipello and Jeremy Basile & Megan Wragg “will not be permitted” to participate based on them having participated in the Freedom to Dance competition in England, May 2011, which by its very definition was not restricted to ANY international body members and not registered with the WDSF. This action has been taken by the WDSF directly to restrict the couples entry to the World Latin.

As a result, DSA has been asked to nominate two more representatives. We are not sure at this stage if they will do so. However we do know that the most likely next two couples, based on the 2010 Australian Rep Selection Event, also participated in the Freedom To Dance Competition, so they most likely “will not be permitted” as well.

This situation raises many questions for the Australian competitor. To try and get some clarity and comfort on the situation we have drafted a letter to Dancesport Australia outlining our concerns (Addressed to the CEO and 2 Competitive Representatives on National Council). You can read this letter in the documents of ACDA found here - <http://www.facebook.com/groups/australiancompetitive dancersassociation/doc/273686122644727/>. It asks many questions as to how DSA is dealing with the situation and what it means for the future for Australian competitors. We would encourage you to read this document and provide feedback that you feel would help represent all of our concerns better in this tragic situation.”



For an in depth look at the political situation in Italy you can download the DSI newsletter.

This newsletter is produced in Italy and is not a WDSF publication. It was sent to Dance Beat World by Caroline Smith.

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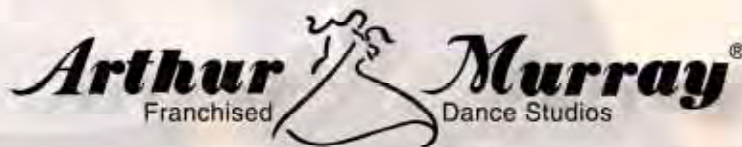
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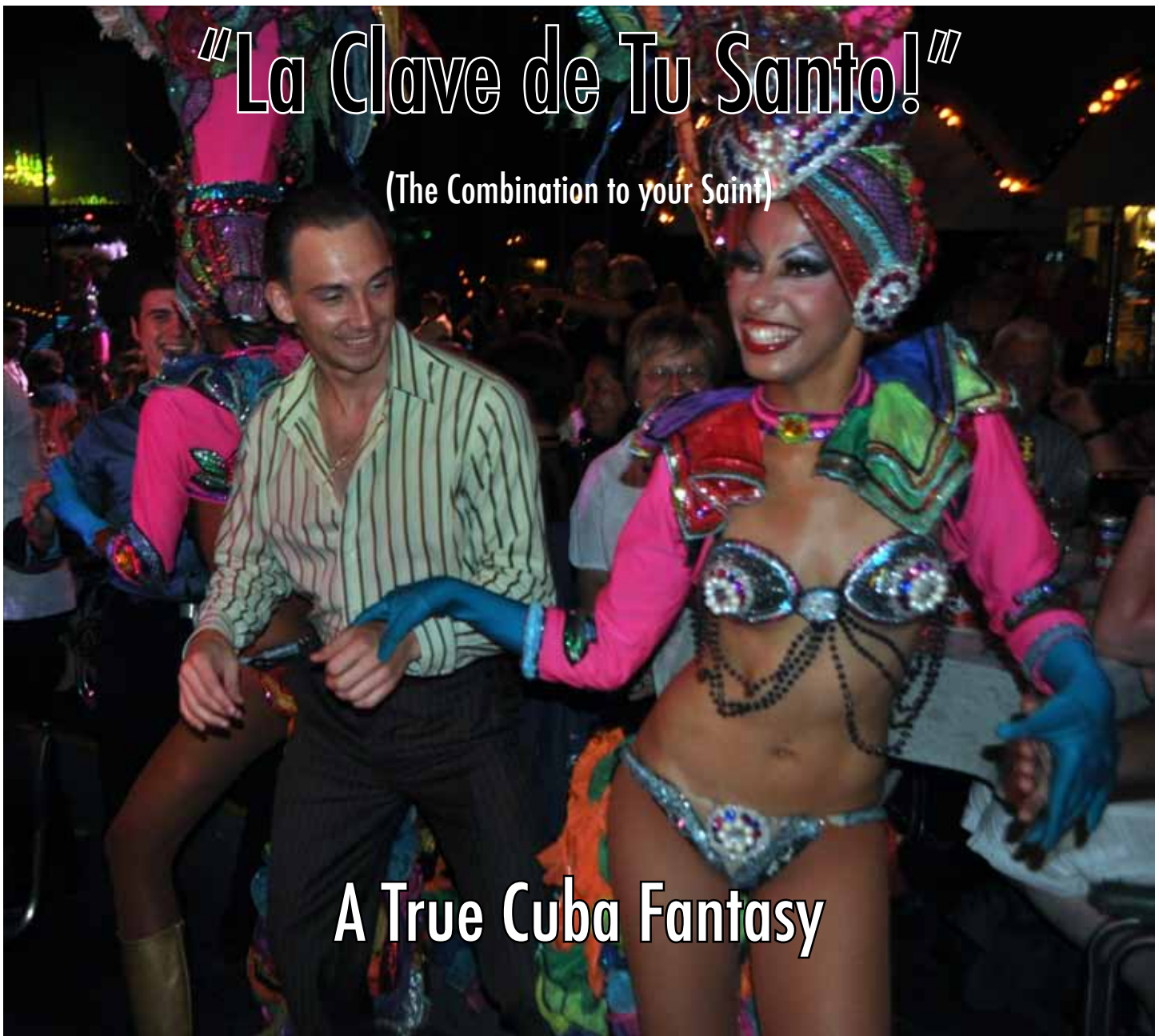
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Report by Didio Barrera, photos by Summer Black & Dance Beat

It's been nearly three hundred years since the importation of West African people to the Island of Cuba began. Every African person that survived that brutal Atlantic crossing, were stripped of everything they held dear; their families, their land, and like livestock, they now belonged to someone else. Their new world and new master managed to take everything away from them, but not their gods, their dancing or their music. These rituals, most sacred to them, must remain free and they did this by disguising them within the Catholic panoply of saints. Chango- became St. Barbara, Oggun - St. Peter, Yemaya - Our Lady of Regla and so on and so on. Their dancing became their passion and their music became their voice. Little has changed in Cuba. Other masters have arrived, progress has come and gone and the political problems of the day are now much different, but one thing as always continues to thrive and withstand the test of time and that is the island's fervor for the peoples' Gods through prayer dance and music.....

1974 Miami. Nearly 90 degrees and everyone at the bus stop is dying for a breeze of fresh air. The inflated old lady seated on the one side of bus stop's wooden bench, with perspiration stains under her arms is fanning herself as if being tortured and saying no nothing. A half drugged, homeless, drunk leans on the bus stop sign whispering to himself. Near them a fidgety young man wearing three inch platform clogs and tight bell-bottom jeans holds his book bag on his left shoulder and impatiently steps into the street and stares down the road to see if the bus that would take him home to Hialeah is ever going to come. It's no use, he thinks, it's been over and hour. It must be another delay. The transportation system in Miami sucks.

As the young man retreats from the street, wishing he had not gone to the Spanish Club gathering after school that made him miss his ride, he catches the eye of a woman dressed all in white from head to toe. She is seated on the bench where the older lady is seated but nearer to him. As their eyes meet the pretty lady with the pale white complexion as fine as milk, wearing a white turban to match her outfit and gigantic gold hoops earrings that clash, smiles at him almost as if to say, "I know you." The boy turns to look forward not wanting to attract any attention and hoping to become invisible to all including the drunken man. He loves to ride busses because to him this is the view to the world, but if there is one think he hates the most about public transport it's the weird people that ride it.

"She is lovely! You are a very lucky young man!" The boy knows that this is the woman all dressed in white speaking to him and so he tries to ignore her and become invisible by standing still saying nothing "Where are you from? You are a very lucky man, to have such a beautiful saint!" The lady in white insists and the young man has no choice but to acknowledge her. "Colombia!" He responds with a sheepish smile. The lady smiles back sweetly. "Do you know, you have a saint? And she is very beautiful!" That did it, the young man's heart now begins to pound. "Why is it always this weird at the bus stop?" he thinks. He should have never answered. Why did he answer? Not knowing what to say he just smiles back. The lady continues with a pleasant smile on her face "I wish I had your saint! She is beautiful and she loves to dance, she is like a gypsy and she is dancing all around you! She is beautiful!" The young man smiles timidly and looks around just in case he is missing something "You don't believe me do you? But it's true! You are very lucky! She is beautiful!"

Saved by the bell he can hear the bus' heavy engine pulling up and with a smile he takes off to get away from these freaky people and this weird woman all dressed in white. He spots a lone seat in the back of the bus, with luck they will not follow. Before sitting the boy looks back one more time and there she is gazing at



Cuba 1859. While the Havana cathedral was lavish with regal splendor of incomparable beauty to celebrate the day of all Catholic saints, not far out in the sugarcane fields you can hear the infectious and continuous beat of the "clave" and the rhythm of the drums celebrating the feast of the West African gods, Obatala, Elegguá, Chango, Oshun, Orunla, Yemaya, Oshun all of them disguised as simple Catholic Saints.

him again with admiration. He hopes she does not come close and he looks out of the window ignoring her and on to the street where he notices the drunk man is now passed out on the bench.....

I was born to parents that love to dance and to Latin music. My connections to African rhythms and rumba rhythms has always been present in my life. I was lucky to have come to Miami in the early seventies and been able to live in an area of Miami called Hialeah where the Cuban culture thrived. So many of my experiences with dance as well as music growing up involved the Afro-American Rhythms. Colombia, where I was born was also a big part of the Caribbean slave trade so many of our own folkloric traditions had this Afro mix. I have studied many of our dances as well as many of the Cuban dances in the past and so for me the opportunity to visit this island that in the past I could only imagine was a privilege. Cuba was the gateway

to the Caribbean and South American during the Colombian years and so nothing can compare to its history and its colorfulness. I did not hesitate when asked if I wanted to go. My answer was yes! No hesitation!

Due to the US embargo of the island, many of my friends had reservations about my departure to the island. Many wondered why I would want to go there, especially some of my older Cuban American friends who are true believers in the US embargo, but for me this was not about politics this was about the culture, the music and

finding the roots of the music that I loved and my parents loved and most important of all, about the dances that I've spent all my life discovering, doing and learning. As wary as I might have been going to this communist country, I was more curious about seeing the island so many of my friends have described - the beautiful beaches and striking architecture in Havana that like a time capsule has not changed since the



Miami Beach





50's. Also they talked about so many cars from that era as well, I just had to see it and experience it all for myself.

From the beginning the organizers of the Fantasy Tour warned us that in the island things could change from one moment to the next and that although we were all going to have a fabulous time, there might be some unexpected changes and things that might be out of their control. Mr. Michael Chapman, Steve & Maria McGill and Herbie Vasquez all spoke during the bon voyage dinner party on the yacht that took us around the Biscayne Bay in Miami and they made it very clear that this was going to be an adventure and that we must be prepared to go with the flow. The Biscayne Dinner cruise on the bay was a first class touch at the beginning of an incredible experience. It took off right from the hotel and went around the bay while we dined and danced.

That same night it was hard for me to sleep! All I could think about was the pretty lady all dressed in white so many years ago at that bus stop, telling me that I had a "saint", or another lady many years later at a Christmas party saying the same exact thing. I was around 25 then. Now I know that those two women had something in common. They were both Cuban and they both followed the Santeria religion. It's estimated that over 30 million people practice this Afro-Caribbean Religion around the world. In my hometown where I was raised (Hialeah) there is a huge number of "Santeros" and churches. In fact not long ago this Miami town was all over the US news when "The Supreme Court ruled that the City of Hialeah ordinances against the ritual animal sacrifice in the Santeria church Lukumi Babalu Aye was unconstitutional and that practitioners of this religion were entitled

to conduct their ceremonies as prescribed by their African traditions and customs. Blood sacrifice, the worshipping [worshiping] of the sacred stones and the ritual use of herbs and plants characterize Santeria as a true African-American syncretism that grew out of West African Yoruba traditions."

For some reason the two episodes with these two ladies stayed in my mind like a groundhog day episode that I've relived over and over again in my mind and I could hardly sleep that night. It must have been just an hour or two before the alarm sounded and it was time to go to Cuba. The trip to Miami International Airport was well coordinated. We left from the Fontainebleu Hotel where everyone was staying in two separate busses. There must have been close to one hundred people in total. We did not have to leave Miami or the USA to find ourselves in another country. When we got to the counter of the charter flight at MIA it all turned into an episode of "Latin Easy Jet." One lady checked you in and weighed your bags. If you had extra weight like I did you had to go and make a line where another lady would charge you a dollar a pound for the excess pounds. This sounded easy until we found out that that other woman never showed up for work and so those of us that happened to have the extra make-up bag and the grand piano had to wait till the lady checking everyone in the first line was finished, before she proceeded to take care of us.

I was quite lucky to be one of the first called because, analyzing the situation, I decided to help her with the names and things, not that I was any better at it with my accent, but I can make a louder noise and keep things moving. This all worked quite well by the end, she was doing the paperwork while I took over the money job. This quick arrangement worked so well that everyone nearly left me behind. However, the people at the counter were so thankful that they themselves took me to the security and made sure I did not get left behind. It was barely 45 minutes before the captain was announcing our arrival in Cuba. Immigration in Cuba was a



breeze and two large buses were waiting to take us to Varadero, each bus equipped with its own personal guide.

The trip to Varadero was about two and a half hours. We stopped only once and that was to buy a "pina colada" charged with Cuban rum and to take in an overlook of the island and the sea. We were all tired by the time we arrived in Varadero and could not wait to get to our hotel room at the Melia Las Americas. The hotel staff was waiting for us with the keys and another Cocktail, music was played but all I wanted was to unpack my bags and head to the beach. When my Cuba American friends describe Varadero as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world they are not exaggerating. Absolutely gorgeous! The water is warm as in Miami and so you don't ever have to go through the shock of coldness. The waves are soft and gentle and you can play for hours. I would have stayed there till sunset but "Xanadu" was waiting!



"Xandu" is a restaurant on the property of the hotel. This mansion used to belong to the well-known North American family, the Duponts, back in the days before the communists took it over. The mansion sits on a small cliff overlooking Varadero Beach and its magnificent beauty. Cocktails were waiting on the top floor where a saxophone player entertained us while we took in the magnificent views around the property. Dinner this evening was set on the deck of the home overlooking the Caribbean and a stage was set up for a show and orchestra to play and entertain while we had dinner. The show was absolutely fantastic. Not one of the dancers was second class and the singers and musicians were brilliant. The theme of the show that night was very Tropicana, carnival style with huge head-dresses with lots sequins and ruffles. But what floored me was the quality of the performers who, in a different setting, I would expect to be mediocre, cruise ship dancers. No! These dancers were top class. After dinner many headed to the hotel where there was Latin dancing till the wee hours of the morning and a few others headed out on the town. I was a good boy and went to bed.

The next morning we had our first cultural ex-

change. We were taken to a town near Varadero called Cardenas and the Cardenas theater. The town is about an hour away from Varadero and is a very rustic town and as most places in Cuba, it too is stuck in a time capsule. They are well known for their taxis being horse and carts and bicycles. But as our guide Maidi pointed out, unlike in most places in Cuba this is not out of necessity. They always had horse and carts as taxis and everyone rode a bicycle. The run down Cardenas theater, like everything else in Cuba, is in major need of repair so nothing could have prepared me or any of us for what we were about to see.

The translator was the Mambo bus tour guide and she explained in English that the first act was going to be a modern version of the Shakespearian play, "Othello." There was a very simple setting, a red sheet spread around a wooden table where six men sat. They used the chairs and table as their musical instruments along with some very traditional bolero music. The mixture was fantastic. The pas de deux between two of the men was not only erotic but on the verge of genius. The scene progression of "Othello" had no holes and kept your attention from beginning to end. I wanted to video some of it with my Flip camera but was so taken with the dancing that I could not stop to film. Due to my job as a storyteller and critic, I'm quite trained in spotting mess-ups or faults with performance, sometimes to the point of annoyance. I nearly have stopped going to the ballet because most ballet companies nowadays are so out of whack that I'd rather watch a youth formation at BYU. The prima ballerinas wobble so much when they are en pointe that I risk being sick. This was not the case here. I did not want this performance to end. It was that beautiful! It was true art in the rarest form.



After a generous standing ovation from our group that seemed not to have an end and a small recess, the announcer spoke again. This time she told us that the next piece was entitled "Un Dia en el Solar." Solar is a word that is very difficult to translate. It's a place like a patio or a courtyard in a ghetto type of neighborhood where you hang your clothes to dry, you talk to your neighbors, you gossip, you socialize, play games, share your food and talk about the daily life of the people. The setting was quite simple, a table, a chair,



experience.

On the way home I felt a happiness to have been so privileged to see this amazing show and at the same time a sadness, that most of these basic elements that compose Latin dance and we had just witnessed are nearly totally gone and disappearing from what we know as competitive ballroom Latin and Rhythm dancing. In my field all we are left with now are incredible maneuvers but no soul, we have forgotten or do not know where these dances came from and like "Santeria," why they were created. In my older years now I long more and more for just a little piece of this art and music to survive in my field. So for me, being at this Cardenas theatre watching these brilliant dancers and talent was an experience of a lifetime and one I'll never forget.



a broom and a bucket, clothes hanging from a string. All very simple to demonstrate the simplicity of the life of the people. In the first scene we saw a lady dressed in a bright yellow, shocking, Sunday dress coming into the "solar" (courtyard) to sell her "tamales." The music, "La Tamalera," is a cha cha and the dancers symbolically demonstrated the birth of the cha cha, this flirtatious dance that has attracted many worldwide. They later showcased rumbas, salsas and mambos with songs all depicting their origins. For me these dramatizations were so true and powerful to the nature of South American life and South American Latin culture that it nearly made me cry with emotion. I do not think there was one person in that room that was not amazed by what they were seeing. The dancing was so simple and basic yet never boring or lacking interest. Every second was welcomed by us, the viewers.

Once the last number was presented the company all came into the audience and grabbing all of us, made their way to the stage where a party

Nothing could surpass that lovely afternoon at the "Teatro Cardenas" and that was proven that same evening when they took us to have dinner and dancing at another well known place, "Josone," a place known for their surf and turf. That night we were supposed to be entertained by a well known family in Cuba who has a group called "Los Munequitos de Matanza." The group had just landed from an extended tour of the USA and other parts of the world, and at one point I think the organizers were not even sure whether they would show up or not, but in the end they did. My observation of that group was that they were very young and a little tired from the touring. Their performance, although at times good, was mostly mediocre. One of the feature leads, a young man, had to nearly be forced to perform by his father. Therefore, as quick as we ate, we left. The organizers were very sensitive to the group by now and so Rumba & Mambo were summoned (the busses were called) and we were on our way. Once at the hotel many danced at the club once again until closing. I decided to go out on the town!

The next day was a free day and the last one be-

was held for nearly two hours, everyone dancing, there were no words uttered between the dancers and us, it was all done through the spirit of body movement and dance. The most difficult part for the organizers at this point was dragging everyone from the stage and back to our buses and to Varadero where we were once again be lavishly pampered awaiting our next ex-



fore departing Varadero for Havana. You could go shopping have a massage or do as I did, just hang out on the beautiful beach and enjoy the water and the beauty of the surroundings. I was a little slow due to the experience out on the town the night before, but after a while I was persuaded by Mr. Chapman to rent a paddle boat. It was all great except nether he nor I knew how to maneuver the boat. We nearly crashed into what looked like a newly wed couple romancing in the water. Actually we put them off their romance three times by nearly hitting them on their heads. Smart as we were we then decided to invite Olivia (Anderson) who was sunbathing to join in, hoping she could contribute, but she was of little use. All she did was sit on the front of the boat and we began to take on water. She tried to bail us out with a plastic cocktail glass she had in her hand, but it was no use, the water kept coming in.

We did manage one thing and that was to go out to sea without control. While desperate at sea, I saw a fit man walking on the beach. Figuring he might be a lifeguard or something I began to call for help with Olivia joining in soon enough: "Socorry! Ausilio!" (Help! Someone help!) To our surprise the well-built handsome and as it turned out, Italian, man took the bait and now we had no choice but to beach and help him in. To put it in perspective you must know that this is a two-seater boat that you paddle like a bicycle and we only had two lifejackets, one for



were heading out to sea again panicking a little, especially the Italian man who barely spoke English, but who did manage to communicate with us, to tell us that he was married and his wife and kid were on the beach next to our hotel and he had to get back. He did help a little by reorganizing where we were seated - him and Olivia both seated in the front of the boat was not the best for our boat, our paddles were now coming in and out of the water and the front of the boat was quite submerged.

The boat was better balanced once he told us where to sit but now he was in a hurry to go back to his wife and child to which I responded in my broken Italian that he could take a swim. We were very comfortable now and navigating and didn't want to take another chance with drowning. To this he responded in a panic that he could not because he did not know how to swim! Now, what would possess an Italian man to get on sinking boat? Whatever it was we were once again back on the beach and as far as I was concerned, I think his luck would have been better with us than with his angry wife on the beach! It was not until after dropping off the Italian that we realized that the rental people may have been going bananas trying to figure out what we were doing, but we quickly looked and noticed they were too busy chatting up Patience (another tour member) to care about us. We last saw her as she sailed off in a catamaran with the two tanned young attendants leaving us to beach the boat all by ourselves.

After this life-threatening adventure, I headed off to get a massage from Walter our own private masseur who came with the group. I have to say the organizers thought of everything. We even had our own private doctor with us and that was good for me since I had had a backache since just before

Michael and one for me. Poor Olivia was on her own holding on to her plastic cup for support. The lifeguard turned out not to be a lifeguard after all, just an Italian man who was going for a walk before we distracted him from his physical fitness routine. So now, up to our necks in water due to the extra weight, we

I left to Cuba and it was not going away. That evening after my massage, my back was like new and I headed, all dressed in white, (nothing to do with Santeria) to the beach party by the pool where an orchestra played for us under the moonlight. After another Tropicana spectacular show by the pool the orchestra played music for our entertainment and we all danced. I first danced with Olivia and the affects of the wine and sea breeze was bewitching me. I could not dance with Patience because she had developed a bruise the size of a golf ball on her right arm. She said it happened on the catamaran while snorkeling? I'm glad she had more explaining to do than I did about our boat.

Maria McGill was seated with us this evening and the orchestra began playing a rumba, bolero "Historia de un Amor" or something of that nature and the music was so incredible I had to ask her to dance. She accepted and that is when it all happened! As the music played and we danced we became one and like an out of body experience my body began to float and I became the music. I'm not much of a believer of anything but it was as if my crazy "saint" had taken over. I hardly remember that dance. All I remember next was being on the beach running around as if in a strange ritual having a fabulous time. At one point I had this pair of strange glasses on me and I remember dancing with so many people, including many of the show people, all as if I was bewitched or something and the music, the water, the moon and I became one. This dancing on the sand by the sea was almost like a sacrificial experience and everyone was having such a great time that we danced until the band and dancers left and then more!



My "saint" had now possessed me and there was no turning back. I remember coming out of

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a vintage taxi right in front of the discothèque and fighting with twenty-year-olds to get in the place, something I would never do in Miami. There I have major standards - no lines, and all VIP. Nevertheless, there was no controlling my "saint." Once inside I danced with so many people I lost count. I think I even saw a few of the show dancers from that night and a couple of the pool and beach attendants from the hotel. The next thing I remember is my eyes opening wide to the sound of my alarm clock warning me it was time to go to Havana. I was never so glad to have a pair of "Jackie O" sunglasses just in case someone might recognize me from the night before. The "Gypsy" had taken hold of me so hard that I was nearly a believer too.

Apparently the "Gypsy" was not the only one out around the town the night before. Our tour guide was also under the weather and if you ask me she looked like she had a major hangover. After being looked over by our own doctor, it was decided that she would no longer come with us but would catch up with us the next day. An hour and a half later we were off to Havana. The Rumba bus made only one stop where Mambo was waiting and by now they were all dancing to another. I just wanted to eat something fatty to stop the affects of the channeling from the night before, so a Cuban sandwich was what the doctor ordered.

On the way to Havana from there we had a new guide all she did was talk about the Cuban cigars. For most of the group this was very interesting but for me who has never smoked and has no interest in it, I couldn't care less if they are long or short, fat or small, it make no difference. Havana was as all have described, a place stuck in a time capsule from the early fifties. Our first stop was at the hotel Nacional where we had a traditional Cuban meal of rice and beans overlooking the "Malacón" (Havana Bay.) A traditional trio was playing some old Cuban tunes: "Besame Mucho, Sabor a Mi, Reloj" and the meal was savored by all with

many of us taking second helpings, especially me trying to recuperate from the "Saint" channeling. On the way back to the hotel all the cigar aficionados decided they were going to the factory to fill their prescription before heading for the hotel. Olivia and Patience were, like me, totally not into the cigar thing, so the moment we stepped out of the bus they forced me into a strange small cute vintage taxi at gun point and off we went to take pictures and film the old city. Once back at the hotel someone invited me for a cocktail and the hotel itself had welcome cocktails but I was determined not to allow my "saint" to take over my body any more and so I went straight up to my room for a nap.

That evening we were back at hotel Nacional for a semi-formal dinner and then another show and dancing. The orchestra this evening was fantastic, the music was traditional and the drums, timbales and claves were in full swing. I did not want to encourage my crazy "Gypsy" again but I had to dance and this led to another and another. Soon I was back in my trance, half man half "saint." This was encouraged by a motivated bartender who kept refilling my "mojito." I want to thank all the people I danced with that night, many whom I have now forgotten, but you were all wonderful and very accommodating to my crazy "saint." There was also a Tropicana show this evening but it did even come close to any of the other shows we had seen. I was one of those lucky bystanders to be picked up at the end by this giant of a woman who had from what I re-



call, two left feet. Nevertheless, we all agreed on the bus that they were not close to what we'd seen before.

That night, as tired as I was, I did manage to keep my saint under control. A Zanax put her and me to bed until the next morning when we came down to go to our next cultural exchange. This outing was in the area called The Forest because it used to be a forest. Now it's an area full of rundown mansions some that have been rebuilt for the well to do in Cuba. The theme of the dance lessons we were about to receive was rumba. We learned that there is more than one rumba. There is a slow rumba and a fast rumba and they are all danced through the clave and like most Latin dances, it's all a ritual of courtship between a man and a woman. They usually flirt and are very explicit during the verse of the music then they explode into the courtship during the chorus. So unlike many of our Latin and Rhythm dances of today, they do not start right away. There is always major foreplay before they do anything. The lessons were constructive and very informative. The teachers were hands on and as always everyone was hypnotized and engaged, almost as if they too were getting ready to receive their own "saint."

After lunch we were all dropped at the hotel and we had free time. Some went shopping, others just chilled. I went to the old town. I walked the old streets and ventured to the forbidden sidelines. This was not my "Gypsy" now, she probably didn't want me to go there, but I went. I saw a fist fight, young 15 year girls doing a mock-up fashion show, people hanging their clothes out their window to dry, a woman throwing waste water on to the street from her window. It was almost as if I was seeing another play of "Day on el Solar" but this time with real characters and an all pervasive clave sound. I did get a bit scared when I thought I spotted someone following me and another character tried to approach me. Maybe he just wanted to sell his "manni" but I immediately made my way towards the cathedral and the safe zone. I was on such a natural high that I wanted to stop in this beautiful restaurant where this exceptional orchestra was playing and have a mojito, but I did not want to go there yet and so I just bought a bottled water and listened to the music.

Back at the hotel the plan of going to the theatre to see the ballet had changed. We were now going to the famous Tropicana for dinner and dancing. The theater itself sits right outside and the massive stage where all the performers come out is huge. The seats were not very comfortable, but they were a good training for Blackpool and the show was amazing. The numbers that impressed me the most were the two guys doing a "Cirque du Soleil" balancing act, the Latin orchestra without instruments making their sounds only with their mouths, but the rest of the show was three times better than the rest we'd seen and that is saying a lot.



Champagne flowed but having to wear a suit my “Gypsy” was most definitely under control and out of sight for the most part.

Our last day was one of tremendous importance. We started with salsa and mambo classes in the forest then we all had a free afternoon, but this time we had to come back early from any adventure to go to the ballet at 4:00 pm. Being taken by old Havana this is what I did once again. I walked the streets but this time on one of the side streets. I was watching this lady reading tarot cards. She was very animated and from the line I could tell she was quite popular. I stood there to watch for a while and at one point she looked at me and said, “You know you have the most beautiful saint! Ochun favors you, you are quite lucky, she is dancing all around you!” This really freaked me out I really wanted to take off but her easy smile and wink while she smoked her big cigar made me stay there. The young couple left and soon it was my turn.

That night in the bus to the Opera house where we would see “El Lago de los Signes” (Swan Lake) I pondered on my trip to Cuba. There was a mixture of happiness and sadness - sadness for some of the poverty I saw and happiness to have been able to experience such incredible moments in this strange yet mystical place.

We soon arrived in the theatre, a beautiful place but like every place in Cuba, in major need of repair. We waited for Alicia Alonzo the famous ballerina from Cuba who now is the artistic director of the Cuban Ballet. The old curtain went up, the prima ballerina from her first step on the floor made my spine tingle. Her use of poine was like watching David Beckham in football boots. There was not a missed step or the strain of a vein in her body. Her young partner was not the same, he looked a bit nervous when he saw her. You could see some slight tension in his body but when alone he was like a gazelle in the wild. But the ballerina was not giving him any breaks, she was going for those lifts whether he was ready or not and most of the time he barely caught her. At one point we thought he might lose her, yet she never quivered once in panic. At the end of the first act, after she finished a difficult maneuver and was en pointe on her own, I noticed the orchestra leader, full of perspiration, waiting to follow her every move. At

the end of this act she finished center stage, backing the audience. Then her toes moved her off stage right while her arms like giant wings took flight but not one muscle on her back or legs was strained as if a real bird was taking off and leaving the stage. I’ve seen Swan Lake a number of times but never danced this well. The audience was all up and screaming “Brava!” till the curtain fell.

In the second act the talented young black male lead was not about to let her upstage him and make him look like a little boy on trial and so his every move was natural and precise and the slight nervousness was not present anymore. Now the beautiful swan was really able to swim and fly with no restraint. The liltts were as if she had no bones and their work together was faultless. At the end when he had a solo and she had a solo they began to play and get out of the norm. They had a duel of spins and jumps. The only one concerned here was the orchestra leader who was by now perspiring to no end trying to keep up with these two. It was sad to see this most magnificent of performances come to an end, but in our minds it would forever live as one of the best ballet performance

we’d ever seen. In the bus we were informed that it was the first time this young man had danced the lead with this, the best prima ballerina of the Cuban Ballet today.

As I sat on the buss rejoicing in the performance just witnessed, I could not imagine anything else topping this, dinner for me would be inconsequential. Yet as we pulled close to the Cathedral and we began to walk to it and hear the sound of the orchestra and its “claves” I could not believe my eyes and my mouth dropped. The plaza in front of the Havana Cathedral was all set up for us to have our final supper. The night was drawing in as the moon rose over the cathedral and the atmosphere was very impressive.

I was once again thankful for the invitation to come and discover so many wonderful things about my ancestry, my music and best of all knowing that throughout history governments and masters come and go, wars destroy and dictatorships control, but nothing and no one can ever control the most beautiful of all things and that is the artistic spirit of a nation, including their dancing, music and spiritualism. That is our real “saint” one that as a dancer I was given the opportunity to find and explore without fear or favor!



European Same Sex Dance Championship

*Report by Wendy Johnson
Photos by Frans Brankaert*

I was very excited to get the invitation to judge this competition as I had judged the Gay Olympic Games in Chicago a few years ago and had enjoyed it very much.

I was not disappointed! Marcel Keijzer, one of the organizers picked me up from the airport and took me to the Bilderberg Hotel right in the heart of Rotterdam. I had never visited this city and was surprised at how modern it was. I guess it was pretty much obliterated during World War II and has been rebuilt with little of the old style of architecture left.

The actual competition took place at Ahoy in a spectacular sports center a 20-minute car ride from our hotel. Marcel had decorated the arena and created a very special ambience with fabulous lighting and fabric draped all over the ceiling. One felt like we were in a club not a sports center.

The panel of judges was very diverse: Denis Kaspar Russia; Ute Streicher Germany; Paul Wilson Australia; Jesper Dalsgaard Denmark; Csaba Inotai Hungary; Karina Geerts-Vercammen Belgium; Greg De Wet South Africa; Andrei Gaspar Luxemburg; Clara Lamar The Netherlands; Marja De Geus The Netherlands; Therese Boutkan The Netherlands; Jan Postular The Netherlands; Janny Van De Stroet and Ron Hoorn The Netherlands and of course my-



self. Chairmen were Vernon Kemp England and Davy Brocatus Belgium.

I have to say I had great fun with these judges and spent considerable time laughing and generally enjoying myself. We even did a little social dancing at the party at the conclusion of the competitive events on Saturday night.

The method of judging is interesting as our first events were the classification of the couples where we as judges grade the couples with

marks that once accumulated put the couples into A, B, C and D categories. I believe there were a few couples who thought they should have been in the A division and were a little put out being graded to a lower level. There are senior events and of course open where all ages can dance.

Some events were straight finals and some quarter and semifinals. I am not sure how many participants there were, but we were busy for three days judging from 10 a.m. to 7p.m. Saturday

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Latin, was very high and exciting to watch. A good deal of thought is put into the choreography with the roles of leader and follower sometimes defined or alternated.

The costuming in the men's divisions was very good for the most part but the Ladies Divisions could use a little help from some of our dress designers. Trying to create costumes suitable for dancers alternating the leading and following is a little challenging.



I have to mention the winners of the Open Ladies Standard, Caroline Privou and Petra Zimmerman. This couple had danced in Chicago and I had been impressed with their dancing but they were now exceptional not only in their dancing but also in their costuming and the grace with which they presented themselves.

The winners of the European Same Sex Latin title also won the Showdance, they were from Denmark, Benjamin Martin and Silas Victor. Both Benjamin and Silas are excellent dancers and I have seen them competing in Dancesport competitions. They had great technique were the most powerful couple on the floor in the Latin division. Their Showdance was also very good

night was a 7-couple Showdance competition and big party. Everyone loved to social dance and it was fun to see the couples mixing it up and dancing with each other.

The level of the A events, especially the Men's



but for me needed something extra to make it "showdance."

The Showdance division was very diverse with some exciting and entertaining routines. I particularly liked Robert Duyerman and Djaya Saputra from The Netherlands who danced a very well choreographed and interesting abstract



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Cultural Evolution Reflected in Ballroom Dancing

By Frank Regan

A number of dance beat readers have requested of me that I write an article dealing with elements of our culture as it pertains to Ballroom dancing. If you have the IQ of a cucumber or are in any way intellectually challenged, do not attempt to read this article. It will probably put you in a coma or give you a brain stroke.

"The mores of a culture are reflected in dance." This is an assertion that has been sociologically established and historically validated. While a sizeable portion of energy and research has been expended in this area with regard to dance forms within the performing arts, very little has been published about the correlation to ballroom dancing. In order to have a clear and blatant picture of how the winds of change have affected a medium of non verbal communication, in this case Social or ballroom dance, let us utilize the form of Standard Ballroom dance as the pure and significantly structured framework of reference that it provides for a discussion of comparative distinctions.

Ballroom dancing owes its origins in the 20th century chiefly to the US and the UK. Needless to say dance invariably springs from the music and the fact that the truly great dance music of the 20th century was composed, played and popularized in America is naturally accepted as an integral factor in the process. For the purpose of this discourse, we will refrain from going any further back than 1910 and the roles that Vernon Castle, Arthur Murray and John Lee played in the earlier part of the century. It was a time of extreme conservatism which by today's standards is no doubt difficult to grasp by a modern generation of music video addicts (not that I am critical of music videos. Choreographing them has improved my credit rating considerably) The aspect of male dominance and the rigidly structured thinking of the time was portrayed in the relative dance position in which the lady was denied any freedom of expression, this being emphasized by her solid position directly in front of the man.

The context for movement was one of a linear nature, overly conceptual and unnatural to the point of preventing any semblance of the fluidity that we now so fondly refer to as "body flight". Constant attempts to fill linear space as opposed to curved space are an indication of rigid and inflexible thinking. The nineteen thirties was an important milestone in the evolution of ballroom dancing. The music of American composers had become all the rage in the British Isles and ballroom dancing was joyfully seized upon by a culture desperately seeking di-



number eventually coming second. The third placed couple presented a comedy dressed as a couple of bears that I found very entertaining. The top four routines were all very good and it was difficult to make a decision.

The winners of all the A divisions carried the title of "European Champions." An American couple won the Senior Mens division but as they did not reside in Europe had to allow the second place couple to have the title.

I would love to see same sex divisions included in our competitions here in the USA as there are not so many events for them to dance in. I think it would be good for our business generally and would bring us into line with social acceptance in the world. It bought a lot of joy to me to watch everyone having fun and enjoying the same passion for dance we all have. Perhaps

version from the negative effects of "the great depression."

The Brits of course were even more conservative than their American cousins and continued to perpetuate the male dominated dance relationship. They did however, make a breakthrough when Maxwell Stuart introduced the aspect of diagonal alignments thereby laying the foundation for the centripetal swing of the waltz and the filling of curved space in 3 dimensions.

The outbreak of World War Two had a noteworthy effect on ballroom dancing. Of course by this time, women had been experiencing a number of healthy years of having the vote and were playing a vitally important role in both the traditional work place and the armed services. The mind set of a society was gradually changing. Women were now allowed to "BE." The Male began to permit the female to have



a couple should be just defined as a couple, not a man and a woman.

I thank the Organizers, Marcel Keijzer, Davy Brocatus and Hadass Armon for giving me the opportunity to take part in such a wonderful competition and look forward to judging more of these events.

I concluded my trip with a day of sightseeing in Amsterdam that I just loved. I went on a boat ride through the canals of the city, explored the Museums and walked through the city centre. Now I felt like I was in Holland with the old buildings and beautiful scenery.

It was a fabulous trip and I am always so grateful for the wonderful world of dance that affords me such a great lifestyle. 'Til my next adventure.....

her own space. She was now no longer in front of him but a little off to one side. How thrilling was that?

Well not only was it a tremendous breakthrough for those crying out for tolerance and equality, it was the beginning of the opportunity for freedom of upper body expression for the lady. The World War Two period was one of massive enthusiasm in America but even more so in the UK where people flocked to the ballrooms in order to escape the horrors of the Nazi bombing raids which we endured on an almost daily basis. The Ultra conservative society of the thirties began to seek an outlet in the emerging permissiveness of the Forties as men and woman desperately sought comfort in the romantic context of the ballroom.

The British dance teachers, in their process of discriminating analysis created a technique

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which was not only a vital communication vehicle but also reflected the Man –Woman relationship in its distinctions of cause and effect. It now became apparent that there was a direct cultural correlation between the early expressions of the dance position (nose to nose) and the increased lateral disposition that had shown up during the Forties clearly suggesting that there was no going back.

Was this the ultimate and irrevocable result within an unfolding cultural symbolism of the non verbal? Well heck no! It was just the beginning. The fabulous lady dancers of today have asserted their position –no pun intended – both culturally and academically by moving even further into their own space, to the point where they can employ the principles of asymmetric Cambre and applications of spiral energy in “Body Space”(see the Imperial EMOD book for more info on this) The effect of all of this has been to take the audience from the domain of an observer giving an account to the domain of presence. Whereas during the nineteen thirties, considerable attention was drawn to the feet. In the 21st century – at the other end of the spectrum- attention is focused more on upper body expressions (the left side of the brain sees the feet. The right side sees the face and upper body) This increase in the lateral disposition has been a vital ingredient in the non verbal expression of cultural reform. It has also created a singularly conspicuous context for the filling of curved space. Knowledgeable dancers and coaches have now come to terms with Einstein’s assertion that there are no strait lines in nature and that to attempt to impose linear motion on a turning movement is oxymoronic to say the least.

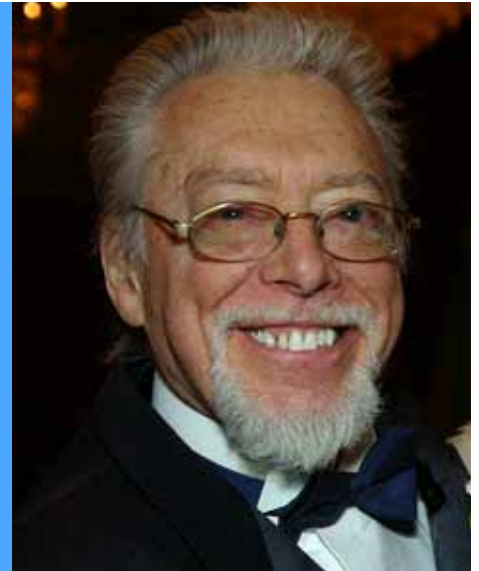
The recent willingness of our culture to be empowered by the natural order of things is reflected not only in our concern for the environment but also in our response to the spatial dynamics of the man –woman relationship, there being

no better illustration of than Ballroom dancing. Music and dance both express the emotional tones of life. There are distinctions within both mediums that are timeless .

It has veritably been declared that there is no such thing as “Old fashioned music or Old fashioned dancing. There is only “Good Music and Bad Music, Good Dancing and bad Dancing.” There is however a cultural relationship between the style characteristics of a dance and the time period of its popularity. The relative freedom that today’s generation enjoys is symbolically expressed in the expression of the dance hold as opposed to the restricted connection of the nineteen thirties and is kinesthetically more conducive to the filling of curved space.

Those who are less open to the sociological effects of dance on a society may well remark that this is just a lot of Who –Ha and that the dance teachers are solely responsible for any changes in dance. This is not only a somewhat short sighted interpretation, it also fails to recognize that dance teachers (whether you like to admit it or not) are also part of society. It brings into focus the age old philosophic question, “Do people influence events or do events influence people?” Most would agree that it is probably a little bit of both and certainly in this case there has been a reciprocity of cause and effect affecting the final outcome of the phenomenon in question.

Speaking of questions, the next one is, where is it all going to end? Have we reached our limit with regard to further expression of both the individual and the couple? Quite obviously, the man and the lady will always have to be in the same room with each other and by that metaphor we accept that they have become as laterally disposed as is physically possible without losing contact. What then will be the next reflection of societal change? Since it has reached its limits in interpersonal space, chances are that



it will occur slightly in personal space and more emphatically in BODY space. In other words, as coaches and dancers discover the empowering facets of internal energizations in BODY space and the applications of “the spiral dynamic,” the process of change will become more internalized. It will be observed at a level of subtlety, first by the educated eye of the objective observer at cause. i.e. the experienced judge and eventually at effect by the audience.

What will the overall effect be? It will, in all probability, be a realization and general perception of a more emotional performance and a veering away from, homogenization and superficiality and the mechanical. As to how much of the evolutionary process will make itself felt before 2012 is anybody’s guess. Meanwhile . Keep on dancing.

Frank Regan is a former multinational champion (Standard and Latin), published author and Maestro choreographer for the Miami City ballet

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