

DANCE BEAT

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UNITED STATES National Amateur DANCESPORT CHAMPIONSHIPS



Laura Johnson Photography



“Spring” it on!

Mild and sunny weather combines with hot dancing to make this year's US National Amateur Championships in Provo a real winner!

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With live music and over 6,000 entries, Vegas Open has come of age!

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Having a blast in Cuba!

Brigitt Mayer reports from Havana. Story pg. 30



THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE # 1

...and what a great experience it was!

Report by Brigit Mayer

I did not know what to expect, the format was unusual, I did not know who would be there besides the experts that were announced in the publications; I just trusted my friend and colleague Barbara Nagode Ambroz! She has been going to Cuba now for more than 20 years asking me many times to come along and it never panned out. Well this time it did and I was rewarded with a truly fun and exciting experience.



Authentic Rumba Guaguano

So what happened there in Cuba??? What was Barbara's vision? "For a long time, I have dreamed to organize a workshop in Havana... and the dream came true." Barbara said. "I wanted to share a real Cuban Experience in an authentic learning environment with my colleagues and students. The purpose of the workshop was to acknowledge the musical and dance heritage of Cuba, to learn from the underlying philosophies and to apply the discoveries to competitive Latin-American dance." styles.



Barbara Ambroz with Silvina Fabars, Cuban legend for Danzon

The project was organized by Barbara in cooperation and with big support of the Cuban Ministry of Culture. The participants were from all over the world (22 countries), competitors – professionals, amateurs and Pro/Am, dance teachers... many from European countries, all there for the love of dance and to learn about and go back to the roots a bit more. I was particularly interested in the music development having started my own research for Ballroom Icons 11 years ago and more for the Blackpool history lecture I held in 2012...I just wanted to find out more. So Barbara recommended booking a lesson with Dr. Alen Olavo Rodrigues, a musicologist and I was curious to hear what he had to say.

On the first day, after meeting all the participants we started off with a city-tour which also led us to the Museo Folclorico Havana where we got our first introduction to folkloristic, religious and musical background of the Cuban peoples and their dances - and we got a first insight into Dr. Olavo's passion for his subject! At the end of the museum tour a group



Cuban Cha Cha Cha

of folklore dancers and musicians demonstrated things we had heard during the tour and that was it - the dancers got unleashed - what followed was the first of many dance-jam-sessions throughout the trip - you had to be there to completely understand J - it continued into the streets of Havana, in front of Ernest Hemingway's favorite bar (La Bodeguita del Medio), where Cubans created the

M o j i t o for him, which we had just "tested" at lunchtime where musicians played and we danced, what else... we continued stroll-dancing through the narrow streets, taking it all in - the first COHIBA EXPLENDIDOS were purchased and smoked J This would be great fun I could just see it... oh and did I mention that there was to be a stage performance with all participants at the end of the week?! That evening there was more music and dancing outside of the

Theatro Mella where the performance was to take place on Saturday.

What followed were three intense days of "Cuban infusion" with authentic dances and music. The ladies that came without a partner had the pleasure to dance with Cuban professional dancers that were there



Tony Meredith & Nadia Eftedal

for the entire time and made such a difference!!! Their enthusiasm, singing and happy disposition was just wonderful. They came along to the nightclub outing where we heard one of Cuba's leading salsa bands; so we all had dance partners there too...fabulous!



Pool fun!

We learned about authentic danzon, son, mambo, cha-cha-cha and rumba guaguano and for more fun: salsa rueda de casino, which we North Americans know very well, where pairs of dancers form a circle, with dance moves called out by one person, a caller (or "líder" or "cantante" in Spanish). Many moves have hand signs to complement the calls; these are useful in noisy venues, where spoken calls might not be easily heard. Most moves involve the swapping of partners. This originated here in Havana and made its way through Miami into the rest of the world. This was supposed to be our big final number on stage.

Everyday Dr. Alen Olavo Rodriguez spoke to us about the music and dances, how everything came to be through African slaves of the Spanish and



Jorge Amado Perez Machado

later the French colonists; the musical development of the cha-cha-cha and Perez Prado's mambo that nobody wanted in Cuba etc.etc. Too much to disclose here and I can only repeat how enthusiastic this man is - it was catching. Ruud Vermeij, Max Winkelhuis and Barbara at the end of the day summarized, and the group worked on how to maybe apply certain findings to our Latin dances.

Tony Meredith and Nadia Eftedal taught about Mambo New York style the way it was done at Paladium times and today, and our cuban salseros had a blast with that one! Fast and furious...



Yoga at 7 o'clock in the morning

Slowly but surely everything was fused into a big show with group numbers and solos by ballroom dancers from our world and Cubans. And what a great show it was. Barbara was greatly assisted by Ruud and Max in that endeavor and not to forget participants that became involved in putting all the music together and Siscu Pérez from Spain who became the Emcee in the theatre. The audience was local of course and most likely exposed to our dance style for the first time ever. They welcomed us with great enthusiasm and seemed quite impressed by skills and form of the International Style Latin dancers!



Dancing in the streets of Havana

Both groups will be influenced by each other now - I am certain! You could sense the appreciation and respect from both groups for the style and skills of the other - and you could see the different dancers teaching each other moves on the sidelines ... this continued onto the beach, where we spend our last day. Competitors from Europe wanted to learn more about West Coast swing, so Tony and Nadia were busy in the sand (see pictures).

The last night we invited Barbara to the nightclub in the hotel, we secretly had ordered a cake and Champaign, to celebrate the first birthday of the CUBAN EXPERIENCE and to thank Barbara for her



Museo Historico Havana



Tony & Brigit

effort to put all this together. This was not an easy task, don't forget you are dealing with a socialistic regime and things work differently...I am sure Barbara could write a book about that Experience...

I just hope that she also enjoyed it because we are all looking forward to her CUBAN EXPERIENCE # 2!

SOLOS PERFORMED BY:



Amado & Silvina

Juan Osvaldo Cuevas & Omari Veranes from Santiago de Cuba, both 81 years old, danzon
Michael Malitowski & Joanna Leunis, England, rumba and cha-cha-cha international style
Tony Meredith & Nadia Eftedal, USA, west coast swing and mambo
Lenny Gouwerok & Laura Zmajkovicova, Hong Kong, International style paso doble and with Monica Wong Pro/Am rumba
Ageo & Rosa from Havana Cuba, son
Justas & Jekaterina Kucinskas, Lithuania, Latin showdance
Ahmed & Miresi, Havana, Cuban cha-cha-cha and authentic mambo



Barbara & conferoncier Siscu Perez

CUBAN EXPERIENCE - TEAM OF EXPERTS
Prof. Dr. Ruud Vermey, Maximiliaan Winkelhuis, Jorge Amado Perez Machado, Prof. Graciela Chao Carbonero, Silvina Fabars, Moraimo Bravo, Dr. Alen Olavo Rodriguez, Tony Meredith, Nadia Eftedal, Barbara Nagode Ambroz



Dancing on the beach