

THREE WEEKS IN CUBA

By Monsieur Pierre

London, Friday, December 19th—New York, the next morning—New York-Miami overnight the following Sunday—Miami-Cuba (a matter of 80 minutes) on the Tuesday!

This is how one travels these modernistic days. This is how it happened that on Christmas Eve I was dancing in Havana in my quest to discover the latest developments of the most modernistic of all dances—the Cuban Rumba.

There are very few Dancing Schools in Havana. I made my headquarters during my stay in Havana at the best one: the Sidney Trott Dance Studio in the delightful "Bajo la Luna" (Underneath the Moon) Patio (Spanish Courtyard) of the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, Havana Millionaires' Hotel.

Every year the Havana Municipal Council organise a big Rumba Contest; many thousands of people watch the Contest. I was fortunate enough to have lessons every

afternoon with the 1947 Rumba Champion and to practice every night with his partner.

The Ballroom Rumba in Cuba is known as the "Son". The "Son", according to the tempo of the music is divided into "Danzon" and "Bolero" (slow tempo) and "Guaracha" (quicker tempo). The name of "Rumba" exclusively applies to the exhibition version of this dance.

There are many night clubs in Havana but the best dancing is seen in the "Academias" which are the equivalent of our "Palais". The "Academias" are not as numerous as our "Palais" and are usually smaller.

I discovered that visitors to Cuba usually dance the style of Ballroom Rumba that we do here, the Cubans call this the



THREE WEEKS IN CUBA—Continued

"American System". The Cubans themselves dance the "Sistema Cubano" which I have brought back with me and which is the most fascinating Ballroom Dance I have ever come across!

The "Sistema Cubano" is, of course, in many ways similar to our "American System" but the rhythm is different (it is danced on the "off" beat). Some of the movements somewhat resemble the "Jive" but the latter dance is unknown in the Cuban Ballrooms. This point should be remembered by those who like to imagine that the Rumba has been influenced by the Jive.

The only form of Fox Trot danced in Cuba is a sort of "Rhythm Dancing" similar to ours. The Paso Doble is played extensively and danced in a very simple way. The Dance Programmes include about 80 per cent. of Cuban Music.

I was able to obtain most interesting and useful information on how Rumba Competitions are judged in Cuba and the United States.

Marking is done on the "Olympic Point System", judges concentrating on important points: Rhythm, Position, Authenticity, Originality, etc. Each point is marked from 2 to 5: 2—poor, 3—fair, 4—good, 5—excellent.

The Cuban judges attach the highest importance to Style and Deportment and both the Cuban and American judges agree that couples who indulge in exhibitionistic or suggestive feats should be marked down.

This, of course, does not mean that the competitors' dancing should be dull or lifeless. On the contrary the rhythm of the Cuban ballroom experts is terrific and their variations most attractive. I was thrilled by their demonstrations. But they are always perfectly natural and their balance and control are superb!

I have had the honour to be asked by the Organisers of the "Star" Ballroom Championships to be their adviser in the Rumba Contests.

The Ballroom Rumba in South America is immensely popular because it is kept as a *ballroom* dance. I have made every effort to make this point clear to everybody concerned with the "Star" Rumba Championships. If this principle is followed I am convinced that the Rumba in this Country will succeed not only as a Competition but also as a Standard Ballroom Dance.

P. Piene