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Doing the salsa 'Bermly style'



dance but a group of performers from the Island gave it a distinctly Bermudian flavour when they took part in an international convention. A party of 17 from the Sabor Dance School travelled to Canada recently for the Third Annual Montréal Salsa Convention — and wowed the audience with their moves.

The Bermudians were among about 400 dancers from all over the world who strutted their stuff on the stage of the Metropolis concert hall and at the Sheraton Central Hotel in front of an audience of thousands.

And convention participants got the opportunity to shake it up "Bermly style" at a special workshop led by the Sabor and hear all about the Island from its members.

Convention organiser Alvarenga Moris told The Royal Gazette: "The Sabor dancers definitely bring a new, refreshing energy to the salsa. Basically it's because they have such a different feel for the music being that there are more from a Caribbean island. That's what they carry onto the stage and I think that's what people feel from them."

The Sabor Dance School, which is based at Bermuda College, has about 200 members, aged from six to the oldest dancer, who is 74.

The troupe which travelled to Montréal consisted of a professional group of two couples — Angela Hayward, Travis Gilbert, Teresa Whitter and Marshall Weller — and a student group of 11: Theresa Hall, Jermiko Dillas, Debra Ross, Fabian Minors, Debra Pharoah, Howard Williams, Samantha Harries, Kenneth Chase, Tracey Pitt and Angela and Nalton Brangman. Two other members attended to give support.

Sabor director Ms Hayward said this was the third time the school had attended the four-day event.

"It was fantastic, a really great experience," she said. "It's nice coming to this convention in that we have seen it grow and grow. For us, as Bermudians, it's great because the Metropolis is a concert-sized arena. You have to put a lot of energy into your performance — that, in and of itself, is an experience."

She added: "I think we did a fantastic job. One of the things you recognise is that we are able to be on that stage with the other performers. Even though Bermuda is small in numbers, we are big in heart and we have the quality to be able to be there."

Mr. Gilbert, general manager and partner of the BermudaSalsa.com Group, which incorporates the Sabor, agreed. He said: "Very few members of the international Latin dance scene believe that salsa dancing found its way to the shores of Bermuda less than one decade ago.

"In Bermuda this infectious art form has been embraced by every segment of our society and has transcended many of the social barriers that so easily divide the population of our small island home."

He said preparing for the event took months but the hard work paid off when organisers commented on the improvement in the Bermudian dancers. "The Sabor dancers are now an anticipated component of this annual international dance showcase," he said. "This year's performances were representative of the hard work and attention which has gone into developing Latin dance in Bermuda."

The student dancers performed a piece called Moon Gate, with the women dressed in shimmering blue dresses and the men in silver shirts. The senior company of the Sabor performed Mandevilla in more traditional red and black salsa costumes.

Both routines were created by Mark Anthony Sheppard of the Mambo Tribe Dance Company of Toronto.

Mr. Gilbert and Ms Hayward led the dance workshop — entitled Beginners Salsa Bermly Style — and are now planning two new routines for next year's convention.

Sabor instructors described performing at Montréal as a huge boost for their students — and something many thought they would never get to do.

Instructor Ms Whitter said: "Bermuda was represented solidly as always, each year better than the last, and I think regular attendees have now come to expect good things from us. Support for Bermuda grows each year."

Dancer Ms Pharoah said: "What Bermuda may lack in size, we definitely made up for it in spirit. We went out there, we were seen and we were most definitely heard — supporting our fellow performers and taking every opportunity we had to invite others to reciprocate by visiting us in Bermuda."

Mrs. Brangman said: "It began as a tremendous opportunity to follow a personal dream, but in reality, I think the 'Moon Gate' family of performers realised that we were also representing our dance school, Sabor, as well as Bermuda at large.

"It was truly a 'live in the moment' four-minute thrill that will last me a lifetime."

Mr. Williams said joining the Sabor had led him to meet "some of the most exciting people" in his life both here and abroad. "Two years ago I would have never thought I would perform at such an event," he said.

Ms Ross added: "The trip to Montreal by the Sabor Dance School group was a wonderful experience. And because our school has hosted many of the international performers here in Bermuda, we were recognised and warmly welcomed by so many of the other performers."

Ms Hall perhaps sums up the trip best. "It was such an amazing opportunity," she said. "Being up on that stage performing in front of an international audience was a dream come true for me and I'm so glad to have shared it with my fellow 'Moongaters'.

"It was great to have such a large group of 'Bermudian Salseros' travelling together and supporting each other - I love my salsa family."

* For more information on the Sabor Dance School visit www.bermudasalsa.com.
