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## **Where music and dance become one**

A review by Joy T. Barnum

### **The Spirit of the Conga**

**The Fairmont Southampton Amphitheatre was overflowing with fevered excitement and talk of a previous Tango nights.**

**Outside an orderly queue of persons lined up two by two as if backstage themselves waiting for their time to shine.**

**A huge dance floor was the focal point of the theatre invoking thoughts of welcomed participation in the night itself.**

**I took a seat next to a smiling gentleman who forewarned me that the seat next to me, reserved for his wife, was a "dancing seat".**

**I smiled and wondered at the lives of all these obvious Latin dance fans. My cousin was previously the only insight I had into this world.**

**Wendell and his wife were avid salsa dancers, nay, fanatics. There was talk of Sabor and Salsa Mania, the same sponsors of the event in conjunction with Bermudasalsa.com on a regular basis.**

**I'd been to one salsa class and one Thursday night at Champions, but tonight was for the professionals. I was in for a delightful surprise!**

**To my right there sat a toddler in a stroller old enough to walk swaying to the rhythm. The stage was stripped bare and all that was visible was a set of congas.**

**The night started promptly just as promised and it started with a bang! A husky voice that would guide us through the passion of the Conga for the rest of the evening announced the shows beginning.**

**And it took off from there with a whirlwind of talent and desire.**

**Keith Casey, a well known musician I recognised as a bass player in 2005's Music Festival sat in front of those congas and proceeded to set the mood for the night.**

**His hands danced across the skins as if driven by another force. The audience went wild! Turns out, there would be a lot of that response for the night.**

**Each act performed twice; before and after the intermission. All were good, most were amazing and a few were excellent!**

**The Sabor Dance School Student group got the crowd on their feet for both performances. Their very presence on the night pronounced "if we can do it, you can too".**

**I recognised a very regal Jen Bean and noted the posture of all the beginners.**

**Then my neighbour whispered to her husband, "The blonde... she's in her 50s." Well, Miss Fifty, you looked fabulous!**

**And that's not finished with "for a fifty year old" either. Where did you get those legs?!**

**Darlene, the unseen guide for the night, gave us beliefs and phrases on the conga like, "Conga marks the Cantor of the ancestors".**

**On the stage there were all ethnicities, genders and ages sharing in the same expression, an art form at its very best with the ability to validate such a statement.**

**There were Anya and Christian of New York from Dancing with the Stars, Mass Mambo Dance Company of Toronto, Latin Energy Kids of Toronto, I Freestyle Student Group of Toronto, Cultural Explosion Dance Company of New Jersey, Saltimambo Dance Company of Montreal, Travis and Angela of Bermuda from Sabor Dance School, Marshal and Lorrie of Bermuda from Sabor Dance School, and Latin Energy Dance Group of Toronto.**

**Anya and Christian were clear contenders for a crown if one were being offered that night. Anya's costumes made me want to have her seamstress on speed dial!**

**Silver flash and abdomen accented by skilled manoeuvres, a ballerina's grace and Christian there to execute an effortless twist and melding of bodies to a recorded live version of 'I've Got You under My Skin' was just one of this couple's highlights.**

**The moves Angela had combined with Trevor's fervour were standing ovation material! There she was executing this nearly impossible whole body spin under Trevor's' arm while he didn't knock her unconscious with his elbow.**

**There was an emphatic "Yay!" in the music which Angela punctuated with a high leg kick. Move after impressive move of spinning and splitting and actual enjoyment emitted from their eyes.**

**I love when music and dance become one! Trevor was even singing along.**

**The crowd stood and applauded with pride and appreciation for this committed couple.**

**Watching Marshal and Lorrie gave the crowd something to consider; how on earth**

**did she manage to change her costume repeatedly throughout the magic laced performance?**

**She went from gum popping, pink polka dots to black and gold to white evening gown all while performing an entertaining dance routine.**

**The most heartwarming performance was given by the Latin Energy Kids of Toronto. If watching the Latin Energy adults perform left me in awe of the roots of this passionate expression, watching the kids with their 'Bugle Boy' beginning routine complete with the girls being spun across their backs in original Juke Joint style left me with the greatest feeling of the night — sheer delight!**

**There was even a tiny pair complete in costume; she in her tiny outfit doing the same moves as the older girls and he with his glittered Mohawk trying desperately not to drop her at the end.**

**The event ended with a standing ovation, a cast call, a presentation of flowers to the director, Angela, a mass "thank you" to all, and just as I'd suspected, an open dance floor to which the entire cast left the stage and flooded.**

**All were welcomed. And that's the feeling I had upon leaving this well timed, well produced, professional expression of Latin dance through the Conga, welcomed into Wendell's world and eternally grateful.**

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