

Chapter 10

My point-and-shoot camera became a best friend in 2007 and this chapter has many images! I wanted to capture it all – friends, dancers, and musicians for a keepsake. And who can't love a digital camera!?

I played one last gig with Humbria at Café Cocomo itself. My friend Tom Hoffman snapped a lot of shots of the class and I tried to make everyone pose for shots. Cocomo continued to do well, although the scene really felt different. There was money around due to the peak in the economy (Oct 2007 to be exact), but many of the experienced dancers did not seem to support the club or social dancing. Our classes were the “front door” to salsa for many. I've taught over 50,000 people. But for those that became serious about learning to dance more, most disappeared into the dance troupes within a calendar quarter.. But I enjoyed my time because I could either dance with people or just go watch the bands if bored. I learned a lot about how a band works and how the music is played by these observations.

Avance was the hottest band – just as it had been in the Kimball's days. They had broken up for a period of about five years and when they returned, naysayers were not encouraged. But Karl Perazzo's excellence drove the band back to the top where they sit today –with a new CD just out in Summer 09.

Out of town acts continued to come now and then too and were always appreciated. One such act was Oscar D'Leon. The club Roccapulco in S.F. had been sold in 2007 and the manager – an arch competitor of Cocomo somehow convinced management that he could now bring over “his” crowd and special acts to Cocomo. So, he was given Friday nights – on a once-per-month basis. The Oscar D'Leon concert was one of these nights and the promoter Julio brought in “big guns” by importing Alex da Silva to teach. Of course the concert crowd were more Latino and less into formalized lessons so the class was quite small actually, but it was a first chance to see and hang out with Alex in a long time. I had sued Alex to recover money he borrowed from me just before he went to live in L.A. and my actually getting that money back had led to a “silent period” where we did not speak at all. But after the passage of so many years (and the simple fact that it was my money!), he loosened up by this time.

I took a lot of pictures that night and really enjoyed dancing with his new partner Alien, a Cubana that was simply wonderful. She danced on stage with the band, but it was not a show off thing, it was purely from the heart. And when I danced with her she complimented my lead and I was so impressed that she followed so smoothly and perfectly – something that other partners of Alex used to performing only “power salsa” often were incapable of doing. Alex seemed well adjusted – doing his usual club flirtations with all the girls but always going back to Alien (they were living together at the time). I was incredulous. Some of the pix I took were used in the iSalsa article about Alex that was done as a result of my interview with Alex that very night in the upstairs apartment at Cocomo late. Alex said some great things that validated by philosophies about dance in the interview – such as how having good basic technique is so critical and often overlooked by people just looking to do “moves”. Alex also characteristically said some controversial things in the interview, about congresses and performers paying to perform! He called out the amateurs from the pros and said that people in European countries actually learn dance

before performing. He was very pleased with the result and the iSalsa magazines were hot at the S.F. congress later that year in November 2007.

Karl Perazzo formed a second salsa band called Karabali, that I loved since they played lots of classic salsa from the golden age in 70s/80s by artists such as Johnny Pacheco and Manny Oquendo. The band had 3 members that also played in Santana! (Bill Ortiz, trumpet, Karl Perazzo, bongo, and Jeff Cressman, trombone). Karl played the instrument I was studying, making the experience all the more relevant for me. Other Bay Area bands such as Mazacote, Julio Bravo, Borinquen, Candela all flourished too and the scene stayed healthy while New York's scene seemed to be on the slide. Los Angeles was also going strong.

I went to Asia to escape my divorce and met a whole new dance scene over there, having a great time and making friends there that I still have today. Traveled to Philippines, Thailand, Taipei and Cambodia. Louise Garrison taught with me regularly on Thursdays and she was (and is) a great partner. I rotated partners on Saturdays.

This chapter ends around December 2007.