

Chapter 2

In 1996, salsa was flourishing and doing well enough to attract competition at several other clubs. 330 Ritch opened, El Vacilon, Coconut Grove in SF (supposedly owned by gangsters). Mad competition amongst Alex's students – now teachers reined. Alex himself decided to open a "club" – The Mambo Club - which was really just to rent a hall and hire bar service. He printed up flyers in the style of The Mambo Kings – the great movie out at that time with stars such as Celia Cruz and a host of connected L.A. salsa teachers, personalities like Albert Torres dancing in the club scenes. But Alex's endeavor characteristically was underground and he pulled no permits for the place, so it opened to a huge crowd and was promptly shut down after the 2nd week of operation!

Fred Flores (DJ now) started the first dance competition in the same space used by Alex for his Mambo club and ignited a flurry of competitions in the bay area that continues (ad nauseum) today. Kimball's continued successfully without Alex and started printing calendars in full color. Their graphics designer Rodney House did creative designs each month and also designed my first printed flyers (B&W).

In the Fall of 1995, Kimball bought a restaurant space across from the Opera House and Davie's Hall in the city of San Francisco and started his first salsa effort in the city – Kimball's West, on Fridays and Saturdays. Nicole was asked to teach and we were hurt (By that time I was teaching with my future wife Tech). I held my first workshop in Nov 1995. There was more press as you'll see in articles in the scrapbook. I had a mailing list of about 500 people and sent out postcards to promote (old fashioned!). More workshops were held in 1996 and I began to teach at Studio J when Alex left to move permanently to Los Angeles around that time.

More clubs opened up and Salsa was really hot then. We took a trip to attend Calle Ocho festival in Miami but we were disappointed to find that it was canceled last minute due to some military incident with Cuba! We danced and ate lots of Cuban food to drown our sorrows. We say Grupo Niche live at a small club there.

Chapter 2 ends about Spring 1996.