

## Chapter 7

This chapter is also a healthy one for salsa. While Café Cocomo loved salsa nights, it was always searching for a way to fill the other nights. In Jan 2002 they tried Jazz on Wednesdays. Other clubs opened/closed and we had the invasion of the L.A. teachers. I always think of San Francisco as the real home of modern salsa – along with New York, which exported its mambo style as well. But if you ask a typical dancer in any other country what style they dance, they will invariably say “L.A. style” or “New York style”. San Francisco always gets the short end of the stick in the arts, being over shadowed by the entertainment capital of the world – Hollywood.

Alex da Silva really transformed salsa in L.A. when he started teaching and eventually moved there. After his move, his shows only became bigger and more athletic. The dancers down there caught the fever. Edie “reluctantly” started teaching private classes according to her famous web site SalsaFreak.com that she started to essentially blog about (before there were blogs) addition to salsa dancing. Edie release a “Cool Moves” video that had no sound whatsoever since she could afford the copyrights! But there is one certainty: L.A. people know how to merchandise anything popular! !! Before long, there were L.A. teachers with videos making quarter-million bucks a year and Edie was traveling the world to spread L.A. style! Other teachers recognized the opportunity as well and started traveling. So, naturally they came to San Francisco to teach us the style that we gave them through Alex! (L.A. people: flame on) We were visited by Luis and Joby and other soon-to-be-divorced salsa couples. This was really a milestone in other ways too, since the L.A. style was really a performance style. This led to a lot of dancers wanting to be performers and many teachers learning that they can promote themselves through teaching their students to perform, collecting dues and allegiance in the process.

Back in L.A., no stone was left unturned in merchandising salsa. Albert Torres, whom we had met in 1998 in the parking lot of the Mayan Temple club there (he bought is a hot dog!), became the modern day Godfather of salsa by organizing huge salsa conventions. But for lack of a better word they were called “Congresses”. Here was a place all the performers could come together and congratulate themselves on a job well done! How Hollywood! (think awards shows) And Albert had a winning formula: Have the performers pay YOU! It is a fact that he actually charged most of the dance teams to perform at the Congresses – the largest one being in Los Angeles in May. Top teachers who were world known would get paid to teach and perform, but they were the exceptions. I am not sure about the way the bands were compensated. As with any convention, vendors hawk their gear at a congress too. With some 300 shows the first year I went, it was a bit much, especially since we were forced to sit through those before any of the big-name bands would take the stage. In the years since, Albert deputized various people in other cities to organize for him there and the San Francisco congress actually has outshined the L.A. congress (run by Ricardo and Michelle) by having a perfect venue – Oakland convention center and a refined production.

We taught at Alberto’s on Tuesdays and the crowd was great. In dot-com days, everyone had money to spend. After the crash it tailed off. But Alberto’s operates to this day and is likely the oldest club in the Bay Area (Alberto sold it several years ago to his employees). Glas Kat did well in San Francisco and Cocomo rocked. I taught on Thur/Sat and the crowds were huge. I had an average class size of 117

people in the year before the dot-com crash and there many smart, young, South of Market workers showing up. My Saturday average reached 95 - and while large, was notably less than Thursdays! Salsacrazy.com grew and grew and Salsacrazy himself – Evan began holding special parties where he could effectively corral his web viewers easily. He sold advertising to clubs as well since his sites became the dominant presence on the web for salsa.

Cocomo tried salsa on Fridays and Cesar – the owner of the original Cesar’s Latin Palace (now Roccapulco, San Francisco) tried to re-open in another location. Around mid-year 2002, Cocomo decided to give a shot to Fernando and Hiroe – teachers that were willing to work hard to promote salsa on a night that was relatively open, but also a night were people traditionally don’t go out as much. Salsa Mondays was launched and it has survived to this day. No live bands were used, but many of the more meek dancers felt safer with DJ music and the lessons were longer, in order to cater to more “serious” students. Fernando and Hiroe (now “Mimi”) worked hard as promised and made it successful. They later brought Tango to the club on Sundays as well..

At the end of 2003 we taught at “Salsa Stars” workshops in Oakland and dancers Joel and Sorcy tried to revive a famous old huge ballroom in Oakland called Sweet’s Ballroom to do salsa. From stories I heard, Sweet’s was THE place – an elegant huge space that hosted Pete Escovdeo’s band and others. It is supposedly the place where his children first performed, including Sheila (a.k.a. Sheila E.). The space was gorgeous, but nothing could make the crowd warm up to the cold and scary downtown Oakland area. We taught for a few weeks before its failure. As of Fall 2009, someone is now trying to revive Sweet’s once again!

Alex da Silva came back up for a several month stint at Roccapulco club in San Francisco, teaching classes on Wed nights and they were quite popular. After all, he had been absent from his home town (actually raised in Richmond, CA) for years, grown in popularity worldwide and was “new” for a lot of the current dancers at the time.

This chapter ends around December 2003.