



Salsa, the dance, has a passionate place in the Nashville nightlife. In fact, there are some people who make extra efforts to get up and dance. Among those are a local Salsa Meetup group that goes by the name “¡Diablos que bailan!” or, “devils that dance.”

“Sometimes, we are kind of like a salsa dancing street gang, except without the switchblades. Just sharp moves. We are really cool, passionate and kind-hearted people ... and yes, a little wild.” That’s the description of the Salsa group, provided by group organizer, Carey James Balboa, or as many will know him, International DJ Carey James. I e-mailed with Carey for this story, while he was DJ-ing in Costa Rica, doing his progressive house and world music, like Salsa, in what he describes as “tropical Salsa clubs.”

As devilishly tempting as such clubs may sound, Nashville, in fact, has any number of venues that offer hot Salsa dancing evenings, including Ibiza, Coco Loco, and BB Kings. Free dancing lessons, and nights for beginners, intermediate and advanced

Salsa dancers are available for the adventuresome, as well as for those who are, as one Diablos que Bailan member (who asked to go unnamed) described it, the “addicted.”

When you want more of a good thing, sometimes you get organized. That’s what Balboa, DJ Carey James, did. “It all started a few years ago when my Latino friends and I (from all over the world) began to dance in random places because we wanted to be free from the normal club atmosphere. We would dance in the street, parking lots, parks, atop parking garages, any flat place we could find that was cool.”

“Sometimes,” he continued, “we can be party creatures of the night, yet we are professional and very nice people. We have doctors, professors, lawyers, and everything in between. A few months ago, I decided to actually organize, because no one else was doing it like us. In just a few short weeks the group gained 72 new members.” He adds, “We are always willing to help new people, and beginners are welcome.”

So, what about the dance itself gets people up and moving, in everything from clubs to parking lots? "Salsa," says Balboa, "is a way to be very sexy with class and style." Or, "as they say here in Costa Rica... PURA VIDA!" which means "'pure life.' Salsa is that and passion passion passion passion." Fun, with "some extremely scandalous and sexy moves," but also, Balboa says, a "safe dance for the ladies who don't want their butts molested in clubs!" In fact, he says that while the Meetup group really doesn't have rules, "if someone did not know how to behave around a lady, we would ask them to leave."

And while the group, and lots of other Salsa lovers, definitely go to the clubs, there is also something called "flash mobs," which Balboa says is a "new craze in Europe," when "people gather in random locations to do different activities." Nashville has at least one version of the craze, a "Salsa dancing flash mob."

Diablos Que Bailan get together on "random days in random locations and set-up to dance," our anonymous member tells us. "Carey is a professional DJ and carries a portable sound system. I always carry a table, chairs, cooler, 6-8 extra pairs of dance shoes and cases of water in the trunk of my car because you never know when we'll 'flash mob' someplace!" About the shoes, "For women, technically, salsa shoes have a heel at least 2-1/2" high. But that is unrealistic for street dancing. Practically speaking, it would be any shoe that did NOT have a rubber (or sticky) sole. There are a lot of spins and turns in Salsa and the less friction, the better."

As she tells the story, the "best" of these flash mob Salsa moments, at least so far, "started with a text message to meet on top of a random parking garage on Elliston Place. We danced for maybe an hour before the garage's security guard came to run us off." The \$50.00 incentive, to let them stay, didn't work. "So, we all caravanned to the center of Bicentennial Mall," text messaging those who had not yet arrived. That worked, with "unbelievable acoustics", until "the Park Ranger came to tell us the park had closed. He was sorry, though, because he said it looked like we were really having a great time [and we were!]."

The flash mob then moved, with more text messaging to stragglers, to "the Baptist Hospital area and set-up in the parking lot of one of the clinics. Amazingly, the hospital sent over their helicopter to shine it's light down on us to see what

we were up to, and then two police showed up. Imagine – a whole group of nicely-dressed people with coolers of ice-water, chairs, etc., dancing to a professional sound system in a parking lot in the middle of the night [by this time it was midnight or so]. We weren't doing anything wrong or bad. We were all polite and sober. We were all happy and having a great time. And, we always clean up behind us when we leave."

Checking out the local Salsa dance scene can be done, of course, by going to one of the clubs that have weekly opportunities. One of those is **Coco Loco Restaurant & Lounge**. Santos Gonzalez, Operating Partner for Coco Loco, said that Salsa, "was born in (New York City) in the 70s. Salsa in Middle Tennessee has gained popularity over the last seven years. Although we have a passion for Salsa at Coco Loco," he continues, "Bachata, Regetton, Cumbia and Meregue seem to be a little more popular here in Tennessee." Obviously there is more than one kind of caliente dancing going on.

Ibiza Night Club is another spot to check out Salsa. Calling itself the "best Latin Dance Club in Nashville," Ibiza, like Coco Loco, offers free Salsa lessons several nights a week.

Balboa encourages folks to learn more about Salsa by another means, a new movie "El Cantante," starring Marc Antony and Jennifer Lopez. The movie is "about Salsa history in the U.S., and Hector Lavoe." It's opened, though not yet locally. "I saw the sneak peak," Balbao says, and "it's hot!"

So, in the clubs, or on a parking lot or roof top, or whatever random flat space you can find, Salsa is happening – with passionate music and moves, and free lessons provided. But be warned, as our anonymous Diablos Que Bailan regular tells us, "It is addictive! Que viva la Salsa!" ■

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