

Rumba and Chachachá: Multicultural Contexts in the Greater Toronto Area¹

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Abstract: This article focuses on two twentieth-century Latin dances now popular among people of diverse race, ethnicity, age and socio-economic backgrounds in the Toronto area. The article provides a historical introduction to the dances, Toronto contexts for these dances, and portraits of some participants.

Much current interest in Cuban popular music focuses on son and salsa; however, more than forty years ago, two genres of Cuban dance music took North America and much of Europe by storm: the rumba and later the chachachá. This paper traces a brief history of these two dances and then examines their contemporary contexts in southern Ontario, specifically the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the largest metropolitan area in Canada. The performance of rumba and chachachá in southern Ontario constitutes what Mark Slobin calls a sphere of cultural activity (1993:55). He writes that transregional musics such as the waltz and tango “have a very high energy that spills across regional boundaries, perhaps even becoming global” (19).

This paper provides an initial sketch of the “affinity group” (69) for rumba and chachachá in southern Ontario. The affinity group members may have little in common in terms of race, ethnicity, class, age, or other factors but are joined by their attraction to these dances (69). These groups are an increasingly important aspect of musical life in North America and thus beg to be documented and studied. That Cuban-based music and dance have generated adherents in southern Ontario should come as no surprise, given that the rhythms and sounds of Latin music in general have made people from many parts of the world get up and dance.² As Lise Waxer wrote: “Transcending geographic and cultural boundaries has been central to Latin music’s affective power—its capacity as dance music to literally move thousands of people” (1994:140).

The paper is divided into three sections: (1) a historical introduction to the rumba and chachachá; (2) the major contexts for Latin dancing in southern Ontario at present; and (3) a discussion of the experience of participation based on interviews with and a survey of some participants in the scene. In the spirit of the reflexive musical ethnography³ recently come into vogue, I should admit that my desire to research this scene has been driven in part by my own participation in it.

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² I am using the term “Latin” in a broad sense to refer to Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking areas of the Americas and Europe.

³ For examples of such ethnographies, see Berliner 1994, Rice 1994 and Walser 1993.

A Brief History

The term “rumba” has several applications in Cuban music and may be used in a variety of contexts. The main distinction is between the black rural genre that originated in the 1800s and the primarily white urban genre that appeared later. The rumba of black Cubans has been referred to as *authentic* or *traditional* in the ethnomusicological literature, while the white urban rumba has been called *commercial*, *cabaret* or *exhibition* rumba.⁴ Rodriguez describes the three types of black rumba as the “rumba complex,” which includes the guaguancó, columbia and yambú (1997:831). The guaguancó “has most deeply penetrated into other functional spheres of Cuban music and is most generally identified with the concept of rumba” (831). The guaguancó may be a couple dance with a stylized sensual dialogue between the man and woman featuring strong pelvic movements (Moore 1995:169). It was forbidden by the white ruling class in Cuba at the end of the nineteenth century (172). This type of black rumba influenced theatrical or stage rumbas performed by whites at the turn of the twentieth century (Moore 1997:56-58): “Lina Frutos is said to have caused a scandal in Havana by incorporating certain African-derived pelvic movements into her performances, despite the fact that she typically performed in floor-length dresses.” Guaguancó influenced cabaret rumba in the music, choreography and meaning of the dance (Moore 1995:187). Moore laments the fact that the commercial or cabaret rumba has gained little recognition as a focus of scholarly research. Despite cabaret rumba’s “prominent role in what might be called the globalization of marginal culture” (Moore 1997:167), little has been written about it. Moore helps to fill this void by writing about stage, cabaret and commercial rumbas of the early twentieth century. These forms are hybrid, and during the period from 1920 to 1940, “Cuba collectively reinvented itself by negotiating a new equilibrium between black and white” (Moore 1997:221).

In the United States, a stylized rumba dance based on guaguancó was first performed on Broadway on April 26, 1930 while the Havana Casino Orchestra played Moisés Simón’s son⁵ arrangement of *El Manicero* (“The Peanut Vendor”) (Schechter 1999:142). From that time forward, American journalists, bandleaders and the public have used the word “rhumba” or “rumba” to describe the Cuban music they heard and the dance they saw (142). In 1933, a series of exhibition rumbas were performed at the Chicago World’s Fair, reflecting the broadening interest in this dance (Moore 1997:186). The rumba was in vogue in Europe as well, particularly in Paris, where Moisés Simons and other Cubans performed.

As was the case with *El Manicero*, some of the music North Americans and Europeans were calling “rumba” was called “son” in Cuba (Robbins 1992:187). The son, like the rumba, was originally a black rural form from the 1800s that by the 1920s had moved to white urban society. It was in 2/4 time, had a medium tempo, and used a characteristically syncopated rhythmic pattern, the *clave*. “During the twentieth century, the son complex, because of its influence on dance music and projection into practically all social and functional spheres of musical activity in the country, has been the most important musical genre in Cuba” (Rodriguez 1997:829).⁶

⁴ For a full discussion see Moore 1995 and 1997.

⁵ Simons was the son of Spanish Jewish immigrants.

⁶ When I was in Santiago de Cuba in 2002, I saw Cubans dancing to son pieces in several venues, including the Casa de la Trova. The dancers’ moves were similar to the ones I have seen and learned in Toronto for rumba, mambo, chachachá and salsa, including back breaks, hand-to-hand movements, cross-body leads and underarm turns.

Probably the best-known Latin music director in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s was Xavier Cugat, who was born in 1900 in Spain and immigrated to Cuba at age four with his family. He studied classical violin and then moved to the United States in his late teens hoping to become a professional violinist. However, after realizing that he would never be a first-rate soloist, he became a caricaturist for the *Los Angeles Times* and started a Cuban band as a hobby in the late 1920s. His orchestra used Cuban percussion instruments such as bongos (pair of small drums), claves (pair of wooden sticks struck together), maracas (gourd rattle) and guiros (scraped gourd with inscribed grooves). In 1932, the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York invited his orchestra to become regular performers, and in 1941, Cugat began regularly weekly national radio broadcasts. Like many other musicians, Cugat referred to both fast and slow Cuban rhythms as rumbas and described the music this way: "The rumba is...played in fast or slow tempo. Most rumbas can be played either way. In a rumba orchestra, there are two distinct units. One is the melodic group,...the other, the nonmelodic group...[which includes] claves, maracas, guiro and less, frequently, the jawbone. The drums...are strictly on their own" (Cugat 1948:105). About the dances, he wrote: "The rumba is actually the name for more than one dance. The son and danzón are both rumbas: the first is medium slow, the latter is very slow...The young people popularized [the rumba] in Cuba because they are not permitted to go out without a chaperone or talk alone, but with this dance they can stop and talk on the dance floor" (1948:197). Moore adds that in the popular theatre, "as in the case of dance, virtually any musical composition could be described as a rumba" (1995:174).

While cabaret rumba may be danced today in Toronto nightclubs such as the Tropicana in Havana, a related form of rumba is popular in dance studios around the world: the *ballroom* or *dancesport* rumba.⁷ Dance purists who find the cabaret rumba unworthy of attention decry this version of the rumba even more (Moore 1995:168). The dancesport rumba uses music of the bolero, a white urban Cuban form from the 1800s related to the danzón (Pedelty 1999:35) that during the 1900s took on a characteristic rhythm of long–short–short (usually a half-note followed by two quarter notes) and a slow to medium tempo. The lyrics of the twentieth-century bolero often reflect conflicting elements in a relationship: love and hatred, or jealousy and passion (Roberts 1979:161). The dancesport rumba expresses these emotions through facial expressions and gestures and uses strong pelvic and hip movements. Its tempo is slow, and its rhythm is the characteristic long–short–short rhythm of the bolero. In 1948, this form of the rumba entered the syllabus of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, an English dance society founded in 1904.⁸ Current dancesport rumba tempos range from 90 to 108 beats per minute; in contrast, Cugat's rumbas range from slow to as fast as 158 beats per minute. The dance orchestra of the most important international dancesport competition, Blackpool in England, has issued a number of recordings with rumba tempos averaging 102 beats per minute.

Another Cuban dance that has influenced the contemporary Latin dance scene is the danzón, a type of square dance in 2/4 with a binary structure of two eight-measure phrases.

⁷ The movement to gain full Olympic status for ballroom dancing, which began in Europe, has led to the name change from "ballroom dance" to "dancesport."

⁸ The American style of dancesport rumba uses a basic box step, breaking (stepping back) on Beat 1 for the slow step, while the international style rumba breaks on Beat 2 and holds Beat 4 for the slow step. Since 1956, the syllabus of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing has used the international style.

Enormously popular at the turn of the last century, it was regarded as the Cuban national dance for a while.⁹ In 1938, Orestes Lopez composed a danzón called “mambo,” which had an improvisatory fast section at the end. Independent mambos began to be played and recorded without the preceding danzón, and the fast-paced mambo became a new Latin dance rage in the 1940s. A slower version of the mambo, called “chachachá,” was created by flutist Enrique Jorrin, who recorded with Orquesta America in 1953. Its name is an onomatopoeia for the sound made by the dancers as their feet chasséd across the floor (Waxer 1994:160). A French dance teacher working in England, Pierre Lavelle, visited Cuba in the early 1950s and saw the chachachá; when he returned to England, he began teaching it. The name “chachachá” was shortened in North America and Europe to “cha cha” in the 1950s. Dance steps for the cha cha were standardized for teaching in 1956 by the Latin Dance Branch of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing. Current dancesport competition cha cha tempos are usually 120-126 beats per minute.

The dancesport rumba, mambo and cha cha share many dance steps and patterns, which are described in a myriad of “how to” manuals. Manuals for Latin dances have flourished since Irene and Vernon Castle popularized the tango on Broadway in 1913. Both rumba and cha cha are included in the five dances required for competition in the Latin category of dancesport. (The other dances are samba, paso doble and jive.) Costumes for competitions are often modelled on Cuban cabaret costumes of the 1930s, and the women are usually scantily dressed.

Contexts for Latin dance in the Greater Toronto Area

From the early 1900s to the early 1960s, Latin dances such as the tango, rumba, mambo and chachachá were popular in North America; however, with the advent of rock and roll in the 1960s, most young people came to regard couple dancing as passé. In the 1990s, couple dancing re-emerged as people in their teens, twenties, thirties and forties began to learn how to move to music in rhythmic patterns with a partner, often for the first time.¹⁰ Possible reasons for the re-emergence of couple dancing include the rise of Latin-influenced popular music (by performers such as Gloria Estefan, Marc Anthony and Lou Vega), the growth of interest in salsa (a fast dance with some roots in Cuban son), the revival of swing, the world music movement, and the rediscovery of the challenge and enjoyment of moving in synchronization with a partner.

In order to understand the current popularity of Latin dance in southern Ontario, I examined the contexts in which it is currently performed. As a result of that ethnographic study, conducted between 1998 and 2003, I have identified seven types of performance contexts for Cuban music and dance in the Greater Toronto area. The first type consists of events within the small Cuban community and the larger Latin community. According to the 2001 Canada Census, there are 1,970 Cubans and 141,455 Central or South Americans living in the Census Metropolitan Area of Toronto, which has a total population of 4,682,897. In the city of Toronto alone, which has a population of 2,456,805, more than 54,000 people identified themselves as Latin American, forming the sixth largest group. (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census Data: Total Immigrants and non-permanent residents, by place of birth). Within this community, dance events may be sponsored by social clubs, soccer clubs or cultural associations. Events may be on a small or grand scale, including galas held in large halls or hotel ballrooms. Music and dance provide an important sense of identity, whether it is specifically Cuban or pan-Latin.

⁹ For more on the danzón, see Moore 1997.

¹⁰ See the section on Dance Club Blue Silver for its membership data.

The remaining six types of contexts are what I call “multicultural contexts,” which expanded as Latin music became more mainstream in the late 1980s and 1990s. The years from 1988 to 1990 were pivotal for Latin music in the Toronto area. In 1988, Harbourfront sponsored its first annual Latin Festival; in 1989, the nightclub Berlin established Salsa Tuesdays with lessons and live bands, and invited Tito Puente to perform; the nightclub Bamboo presented a week-long festival of Latin music for the first time (Waxer 1991:211). In 1990, Tito Puente also performed at the Harbourfront Latin Festival.

These six multicultural contexts advertise their events in English media and some may advertise in Latin media as well:

1. Clubs and nightclubs (primarily for dancing, usually commercial venues);
2. Non-profit cultural and language associations;
3. Small and large halls (primarily for listening, often commercial venues);
4. Non-profit festivals;
5. Dance events and competitions;
6. Dance studios, classes and social clubs (primarily for teaching; usually commercial).

In this categorization, I am not including events such as office Christmas dances where a DJ may play one or two Latin songs such as “Oye como va,” along with pop music, swing and rock. The first four contexts usually have mixed Latin and non-Latin audiences and participants. The final two contexts may have no Latin participants, and are the focus of the final section of this paper.

The first type of context within the multicultural community consists of clubs and nightclubs—commercial venues primarily for dancing. There is usually a liquor licence. These clubs may be Latin-owned, in which case they usually feature Latin music, or they may be non-Latin owned, in which case Latin music is featured one or two nights per week. Currently in Toronto, more than fifteen clubs offer Latin music, the most well known being El Rancho, Plaza Flamingo, Cervesaria, Lula Lounge and Manhattan Fuel (formerly Berlin). Clubs tend to be located in the downtown nightclub district or the Italian/Portuguese areas along College Street and St. Clair West. La Classique is owned by a Colombian, Alberto Gomez, who has been offering lessons in Latin dancing since 1990. The main dance is the fast tempo salsa, with the occasional tango, cha cha and cumbia, a Columbian dance in a slower tempo than salsa. Students take lessons early in the evening and may stay to practice as the regular, often Latin clientele arrive later for general dancing. La Classique has a DJ, but occasionally hires a live band. There are more than fifteen local Latin bands that play in these clubs and at other events.¹¹ The nightclub Manhattan Fuel (formerly Berlin) is not Latin-owned but has held Latin Tuesdays since 1989 in the uptown area near Yonge and Eglinton (known locally as “young and eligible”), an area with many young singles. Salsa lessons are offered for beginners and intermediates, and then a live band plays for general dancing. Dancers range from beginners to

¹¹ Local bands that perform at festivals, in nightclubs and halls, and for cultural associations include Cassava, lead by Rodrigo Chavez, and Pacande, lead by Diego Marulanda. Both groups have CDs and comprise Latin and non-Latins. The group Klave y Kongo is entirely non-Latin and specializes in the older Cuban son repertoire. Formed in 1995, the band was started by a former rock musician, Blair Martin, who learned son mainly from recordings. (Interview, 1998) Most bands play a few cha chas (such as “Guantanamera” or “Oye como va”) as part of their programs and encourage impromptu dancing. Slow bolero or rumba music is rare.

highly skilled virtuosos, and often there is very little room to manoeuvre on the floor. Continuing the tradition started at Berlin, Manhattan Fuel sponsors salsa competitions, showcasing the best couples in the Toronto area.

The second type of context, cultural and language associations, includes the English-Spanish House and the Spanish Centre for Language and Culture, both of which offer dance lessons, music performances and shows for mixed Latin and non-Latin audiences. The Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association, founded in 1977, has a mainly non-Latin membership and sponsors political and cultural events. It holds a Canada-Cuba Friendship Day at the end of August. In August 2002, a son group from Santiago de Cuba, Quinteto de la Trova (actually a sexteto at that time), performed at this event at Nathan Phillips Square, in front of Toronto City Hall.¹² The repertoire of the Quinteto is son, but the group occasionally includes a chachachá such as “Guantanamera” or “Rico Vacilon.” In August 2002, there was some spontaneous dancing at the event; however, attendance was limited. (The raised stage had a banner that read, “End the U.S. Blockade of Cuba.”) The Quinteto made many appearances in southern Ontario over the summer, performing in venues from each of the first four types of contexts above.¹³

The third type of context consists of small and large halls that are primarily for listening. Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall, large Toronto concert halls, have hosted Cuban bands in their recent World Music series, including the Afro-Cuban All-Stars, Sierra Maestra and the Buena Vista Social Club. The repertoire of these groups is primarily son. Despite the fact that the audiences in these large halls usually just listen, during the Cuban concerts at Massey Hall, people from the audience danced at the back of the hall, on both the main floor and upper levels, and were invited on stage as well. Smaller listening venues include Hugh’s Room, which in June 2002 hosted a special three-night Cuban music program that was sold-out each night. The Quinteto de la Trova performed each night with jazz saxophonist Jane Bunnnett, who has won awards for her Cuban-based jazz albums. In this venue, there was no spontaneous dancing, probably because the emphasis was on jazz.

Festivals provide the fourth type of context for Latin dance and dance music. Throughout the 1990s, three of these festivals, all Latin-focused and all free-of-charge, achieved tremendous success. The Harbourfront Latin festival, “Ritmo y Color,” began in 1988. From 1990 to 1997, it was run jointly with a Latin organization, Las Flores Foundation; but in 1998, it ran solely through Harbourfront, a waterfront venue funded by three levels of government and private sponsors. The festival takes place over three days during the summer and has an advisory board with a number of Latin Americans actively involved in the arts. The Festival has local and international performers, workshops, films, food, and arts and crafts. The audience is a mix of Latins and non-Latins and includes families, singles, dancers and non-dancers. The evening concerts are crowded, with standing room only. Usually there is impromptu dancing by both Latins and non-Latins in the aisles and near the stage. In July 2002, the Quinteto de la Trova was booked as the first group of the opening concert, and they also gave a concert and workshop the following day. Attendance for the opening concert was more than 15,000 and for

¹² Unlike the United States, Canada has maintained economic and political relations with Cuba. Some Americans visit Cuba via Canada, because of the regular flights and political climate.

¹³ The band was brought to Canada by a retired Canadian schoolteacher, who met them while vacationing in Cuba. She provided accommodation in her home and acted as their chauffeur and manager.

the entire festival, 40,000. (The musicians later told me this was the largest audience for which they had ever played.)

Two other Latin festivals take place in the northern part of Toronto in the main square for the former city of North York. Las Flores Hispanic Fiesta began in 1981 at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds and then moved to Harbourfront, which jointly sponsored the festival from 1990-1997. Las Flores became independent again in 1998, moving to North York. The second festival, Super Latin Fest, began in 1995 and is usually held over the same August long weekend as Caribana, a festival showcasing Caribbean dance and music. Despite the conflict, there has been no problem attracting thousands of people for both events. Profits from Las Flores and Super Latin Fest are donated to local charities. As with the Harbourfront festival, local and international entertainers provide music and dance; and booths offer Latin food, recordings, books, magazines, arts and crafts, and information on cultural centres and language classes.

The fifth type of context for rumba and cha cha consists of special dance events and competitions. Probably the most publicized event in Toronto was the world touring production *Burn the Floor*, which was conceived in Australia and played at the Hummingbird Centre in 2001 and 2003. This show featured sixteen dance couples from fifteen countries. Most began dance lessons at a young age and all have won dancesport competitions. Dancesport competitions are held in the Greater Toronto Area several times yearly and may be for amateurs or professionals. Ninety couples competed in the Ontario Amateur Dancesport Championships held in March 2003. Latin dance has also been highlighted at the annual Dance Ontario weekend in January.

The sixth and final type of multicultural context includes dance studios, classes and social clubs. At school board night classes, private dance studios and dance salons, couple dancing is experiencing a rebirth. While the best-known studio is probably Arthur Murray, there are dozens of other small and large studios and classes. Latin dance classes may be taught by Latins or non-Latins. Paula Videla-Rodriguez, who was born in Colombia and performs and teaches flamenco, also teaches salsa and chachachá. She has competed locally and internationally and opened her own studio, Dance to Live, in 2001 near St. Clair West's "Little Italy." Another teacher with her own studio is Violetta Majewski, who emigrated from Poland and opened her studio, Violetta's Dance Place, in 1995. She studied classical music and ballet in Poland and now has more than one hundred students learning Latin and ballroom dances. Many new Canadians of East European and former Soviet countries are studying Latin and ballroom dance because dancing was very important in their former homelands. They also enrol their children, who perform well at provincial, national and international competitions.¹⁴ Cathy Gullo, a native Torontonians who studied ballet as a child and learned Latin dances in her late teens, has been teaching and organizing dance events at an Italian club, Famée Furlane, for the past eight years. She has noticed changes in age and ethnicity of participants, especially in the number of East Asians who have become dedicated students of dancesport in both the standard dances, such as waltz and foxtrot, and the Latin dances (Interview 2002).

The dance experience in individual lives

In addition to observing and classifying the different types of Latin dance contexts in southern Ontario, my ethnographic method included interviewing participants in the scene, reflecting on my own participation in it, and conducting a survey via questionnaire of some thirty

¹⁴ Joseph Berger's article in the *New York Times* (June 11, 2003) describes a parallel situation in the United States.

students in three dance classes to learn how this form of expressive behaviour functions in social and psychological terms. Most of the students were between 25 and 49 years of age and their places of birth included Poland, Italy, Germany, Iran, China and Vietnam. In response to the question, "What made you decide to take Latin dance lessons?" the two main responses were "for exercise" and "as a social activity". Other reasons included the following: to be able to dance at weddings; to experience dancing they saw in the movie *Shall we Dance?*; to reduce stress; to provide an emotional outlet or a challenge; and "to keep happy and young." In response to the question, "What do you hope to achieve?" only four students wished to compete. The others wanted to become better dancers, to have fun, and "to have something to do even when older." When I asked, "What do Latin dance and dance music do for you?" responses included: "they're exciting"; "they help to express and release your feelings and bound up energy"; "they cheer you up"; and "they move my soul to dance."

I was particularly fascinated by the number of Chinese who actively participate in the scene; and to understand this better, I focused on one non-profit dance organization, Dance Club Blue Silver in eastern Toronto, which reflects the changing demographics of Toronto and in particular the large number of recent Chinese immigrants. Forty-three per cent of all immigrants to Canada in the 1990s settled in the Greater Toronto Area. According to the 2001 census, 267,890 people in the Toronto Census Metropolitan area were born in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census). People of Chinese ethnicity make up the second largest group in the city of Toronto after Caucasians. They are also the second largest group in the nearby municipalities of Markham and Richmond Hill. Most of this Chinese immigration has occurred during the past ten years.

Dance Club Blue Silver, which offers classes to more than three hundred students weekly, reflects this immigration pattern. The Club began in 1956 as a German social club in downtown Toronto that promoted ballroom dance. In the mid-1960s, Jeff Henssen, a dance champion who immigrated to Canada from Holland, was brought in to teach. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the Club had a small membership of fewer than seventy-five adults. In 1982, the Club moved from its original location to two separate locations—one to the west of the city and one to the east in Scarborough, now part of the amalgamated City of Toronto. By the early 1990s, membership had grown to approximately three hundred in the two locations, and by 1999, it was more than seven hundred. It has remained above seven hundred for the past four years (Richard Day, Interview, 2003). Currently, most of the Club members are over forty years of age, but there is a small group of younger people, including a separate class for teenagers. I have been taking classes at the Club since 1999; in the spring of 2003, I was enrolled in one of the Latin dance classes, which had approximately forty students. There were no Latin Americans in the class and over half the students were of Chinese heritage.¹⁵

In the fall of 2002, the original teacher retired from the Scarborough location, and teachers Phil Lee and Patricia Goh were hired. Lee, in his late thirties, was born in Hong Kong and immigrated with his family at the age of four to Vermillion in northern Alberta, where his parents opened a Chinese restaurant. Goh, in her mid-thirties, was born in Malaysia to Chinese parents, who sent her to boarding school in England at age eleven, where she also studied ballet and piano. Lee and Goh met at the University of Alberta as undergraduates. Both have Master's degrees in business and accounting and are professional accountants. When they moved to Toronto to pursue their careers, they decided to try various activities as hobbies,

¹⁵ Lise Waxer noted that in the 1950s, her uncle, a first-generation Chinese Canadian, danced mambo and cha cha in nightclubs in Toronto (Waxer 1994, 172)

including cooking and aerobics. Eleven years ago, they enrolled in a beginners' dance class at Dance Club Blue Silver. They learned the steps so quickly and enjoyed dancing so much that the teacher recommended that they compete. Once they began competing, they rose quickly through the ranks. They held three out of five Ontario Amateur titles in the same year and became grand finalists in the Canadian Ten Dance Championships and Canadian Amateur Standard Championships. They later became grand finalists in both the Canadian and North American Professional Championships. Today, in addition to their day jobs in business and banking, they teach more than two hundred students weekly at Dance Club Blue Silver. They married two years ago, saying that it took them a long time to get married because they were so busy with work and competing (Interview, 2003). In November 2002, a feature article about Lee and Goh was published in the largest Chinese newspaper in the Greater Toronto Area, *Ming Pao*, which has a circulation of more than 200,000. The article noted that they were the first Chinese couple to become Ontario Provincial Champions and that they also competed internationally at Blackpool in England. Goh says they enjoy all the challenges of dancesport, including physical, mental and inter-personal challenges. They recently became certified dance teachers while maintaining their careers in the business world.

I asked Goh why she thinks many Chinese are taking dance classes in the Toronto area. She said that many Chinese view couple dancing as part of their culture, so learning Latin and ballroom dances is a continuation of this. They also view music and dance as important, and they may enrol their children in lessons as well (Interview, 2003). Goh also noted that Chinese participation cuts across economic boundaries, and that participants who do not own cars regularly come to the dance lessons on public transit.

For people who are shy, dancing allows them to express themselves non-verbally and to be less inhibited. Couple dancing provides rhythmic and physical challenges as well as challenges in inter-personal dynamics. (If a couple can survive dance lessons together, they can probably survive anything.) Group dance lessons are inexpensive and cut across socio-economic boundaries. However, private lessons are a different matter; and if a couple competes, they spend a lot of money on lessons, fees and costumes. Group lessons provide a safe environment, especially for women, with set "dance holds" and patterns. Further, most dancers do not over-indulge in alcohol, because it prevents good rhythm and coordination. From my own perspective as an amateur dancer, I was fascinated to note that the best dancers and all certified dance teachers know each other's parts. Teachers must be able to teach and perform both parts, and in classes, a male teacher may illustrate certain aspects of a dance in the female role with a male partner, or a female teacher may dance the male role with a female partner.

Most dancesport students know little or nothing of the history of the rumba and cha cha. They are concentrating on moving in rhythmic patterns to the music, and expressing themselves through movement, whether they are improvising or using set patterns. From my experience, I can say that some students have difficulty hearing the rhythm in the music; others have difficulty with the fluidity of body motions. But as Toronto musician Rodrigo Chavez noted: "In Latin dance, everyone can jump in and have a good time.... everyone forgets their daily worries. The first priority is happiness...[R]egular life is hardship... but dancing takes it away" (Interview 1998).

Conclusion

The Rumba and chachachá have been transnational, global dances for more than forty years. Now there are thousands of people across Canada enrolled in dance classes at private studios or other venues. These affinity groups cut across class, race, ethnicity, age and income. The students are learning sets of movements with shared meanings while dancing as pairs in a safe environment. Many students have never danced in a “dance hold” position before and the experience of moving in patterns to music as a couple is quite different from dancing independently. Many people who don’t dance (including my teenage daughter and 22-year-old son) have been attracted to the Latin music that has become mainstream recently, such as Santana’s “Smooth” (a new cha cha) and Lou Vega’s “Mambo No. 5,” without realizing that these are examples of older dance genres. Even ice skaters who progress through the Canadian figure skating program skate to a rumba at the Silver level and a cha cha at the Gold level. This paper has presented an overview of these two dances in southern Ontario in the 1980s and 1990s. Further research needs to be done on their history from the 1930s to the 1980s.

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