

6th March 2013

To The Secretary

Please find a final report and CD with videos and images enclosed for my recent study trip supported by LUTSF in Havana, Cuba 13 Dec 2012- 10 Jan 2013. Thank you for supporting this invaluable research and training project, without the support of LUTSF I would not have been able to undertake this training.

The aim of the project was to undertake advanced training and research in Rumba and Afro-Cuban dance / body movement and its relation to music and contemporary Cuban Salsa. I planned to do this by undertaking 1-1 training with leading artists along with attending the 2 week Advanced training programme with Key 2 Cuba.

Cuba is a constantly changing place and due to lack of resources, publicity of events is scarce and most often depends on word of mouth from the right people and being in the right place at the right time. It is a place where things happen spontaneously and surprises around every corner such as stumbling across a Rumba gathering, santeria ceremonies etc and in order to get the most from this, it was important to embrace this spontaneity. It was difficult to plan ahead, however, as I had already researched various contacts before leaving for Cuba I was able to make the most out of the time available.

The trip far exceeded my initial plans and expectations for opportunities to learn, study, absorb and develop.

At the beginning of the trip, I met several visitors who had their cameras stolen on the street and inside concert venues, it was clear that it was unsafe to travel around with cameras/ video cameras, and certainly to avoid using them openly in public due to this high theft rate as well as not wanting to draw attention as a lone female especially when travelling through areas less frequented by foreigners. This unfortunately meant that I wasn't able to video/ document many of the performances/ informal street dancing as I had hoped to, although on some occasions I was able to discreetly film with a small phone camera with poor quality results.

I attended a broad range of performances from informal street gatherings, and organised street events, band rehearsals of leading groups in people's houses to Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies, ancestral worship celebrations - Bembe's, Palo de Muerte where I witnessed authentic Afro-Cuban dances in their rawest form including witnessing members being possessed by Afro-Cuban gods / trance induced states through dance and music.

I attended a number of performances by leading Timba bands– Los Van Van, Adalberto Alvarez, Habana de Primera, Maykel Blanco, Azucar Negra where I danced with street salsa dancers and observed how the Afro-Cuban

movements are integrated into contemporary Salsa. At one of the main salsa clubs, I was coerced into taking part in a salsa dance competition with a Cuban street dancer competing against other professional Cuban couples and drew 1st place.

I attended Rumba performances with Clave y Guanguanco, Rumberos de Cuba, and Calle Jon de Hamel as well as performances of contemporary salsa music at the Internacional Festival of Jazz, including performances by Rolando Luna Carillo (Buena Vista Social Club) and Chucho Valdes.

The roots of the Afro-Cuban dances are based in the characters of the Afro-Cuban Gods represented and it was important for me to understand the cultural context, history and representation of each of these as the dance is dictated by personality in addition to specific steps/ stylistic movement. Facial expressions, interaction/ role playing and taking on a characters personality are all important factors and the movements in isolation from character/ personality are nonsensical and devoid of life and spirit.

The movements begin deep within the core of the body where the beauty and fluidity of the movements carry through. Through the Key 2 Cuba programme and working with Kerry Ribchester, I was able to explore this inner subtlety of connection. Through the one-one training I was able to work on the connection between the rhythms and dances of the Orishas (Afro-Cuban Gods) although I found it surprisingly difficult to find tutors that were able to break down these relationships.

The highlights for me were ;

- 1-1 professional tuition
- Being inspired by the energy and passion of the dancers.
- Securing Joint first place in salsa dance competition competing against professional Cuban couples.
- Being immersed in the culture and tradition and attending local, authentic Afro-Cuban ceremonies, celebrations , performances and Rumba sessions in peoples houses, far from any pre-planned tourist ventures.
- Absorbing the Cuban passion and spirit that comes alive through music and dance from contemporary to folkloric.
- Meeting and dancing with so many amazing and inspirational dancers, musicians and performers

Thank you once again for an inspirational experience.

Yours sincerely
Nikki Kemp

REPORT

Training and research in Rumba and Afro-Cuban dance / body movement and its relation to music and contemporary Street Salsa. 13 Dec 2012- 10 Jan 2013. Nikki Kemp

The trip far exceeded my initial plans and expectations for opportunities to learn, study, absorb and develop.

Cuba is a place immersed in culture, history and tradition with an infectious passion for music and dance. It is constantly changing on many levels, and due to a lack of resources, publicity of events is scarce and most often depends on word of mouth from the right people and being in the right place at the right time. It is a place where things happen spontaneously and surprises around every corner such as stumbling across a Rumba gathering, Santeria ceremonies or a prestigious group rehearsing in someone's living room etc. In order to get the most from this, it was important and therefore difficult to plan ahead. I had already secured many contacts before leaving for Cuba, so I was able to make the most of the time available.



corner such as stumbling across Santeria ceremonies or a rehearsing in someone's living room etc. In order to get the most from this, it was important and therefore difficult to plan ahead. I had already secured many contacts before leaving for Cuba, so I was able to make the most of the time available.

Streets of Havana (above) Rumba gathering (below) photos by Key 2 Cuba)

At the beginning of the trip, I met several visitors who had their cameras stolen on the street and inside concert venues, it was clear that it was unsafe to travel around with cameras/ video cameras, and certainly to avoid using them openly in public as well as avoiding lone female especially areas less frequented by the Central Havana considered safe, the is insufficient to live on visitors are a target to income/ gain access to equipment that is not available in the country. This unfortunately meant that I wasn't able to video/ document many of the performances/ informal street dancing that I had hoped to and where I could I used discreet filming from my phone which was low quality. However on reflection this also meant that I was able to absorb more, as my focus was on the experiential aspect .



due to this high theft rate drawing attention as a when travelling through tourists. I was staying in area. Although Cuba is average monthly salary and therefore foreign secure some extra

A summary of the programme of study I undertook is listed below.

14 x 2-hour, one-one sessions daily with Rumbero/ percussionist Chaugito Santiago Garzon Rill; learning the rhythms, calls, responses of Rumba drumming. Due to these connections with Chaugito, I was introduced to and invited to performances by other leading artists including Rumberos de Cuba,

Chuchu Valdes as well as being invited to several authentic Afro-Cuban Bembes/ Santeria and Palo ceremonial celebrations.

4 x 2 hour one –one sessions in Yoruba dances of the Orishas with Dionisio Paul Palma from Conjunto Folklorico Nacional – learning the steps/body movement and relationship to music/ rhythms

1x 2 hour session in advanced Rumba dance female styling and movement with Jenny Dalmao

Key 2 cuba intensive Advanced training programme 27 dec- 10 jan 2013
21 hours tuition in body movement, Heller work and afro-cuban dance with Ildidia and Leonel, leading dancers from Raices Profundos under the direction of the renowned Juan de Dios.

I went to a broad range of performances from informal street gatherings, and organised street events, band rehearsals of leading groups in local's houses to Yoruban religious ceremonies, ancestral worship celebrations- Bembe's, and a Palo de Muerte where I experienced authentic Afro-Cuban dances in their rawest form, including people entering trance induced states by the Orishas, through dance and music (video 1& 2).

I attended a number of performances by leading Timba bands– Los Van Van, Adalberto Alvarez, Habana de Primera, Maykel Blanco, Azucar Negra where I danced with professional and street salsa dancers and observed how the Afro-Cuban movements are integrated into contemporary freestyle/ Casino Salsa.

At one of the main salsa clubs, I was coerced into taking part in a salsa dance competition with a Cuban street dancer competing against a number of other professional Cuban couples and was awarded joint first place.

In addition to the above, I went to performances of Rumba with Clave y Guanguanco (video 3) , Rumberos de Cuba, and Calle Jon de Hamel as well as performances of contemporary salsa/ Jazz music at the International Jazz festival, including performances by Rolando Luna Carillo (pianist of Buena Vista Social Club) and Chuchu Valdes (photo A).

Learnings

The roots of the Yoruban/ Santeria dances are based in the characters of the Orishas (Afro-Cuban Gods) represented and it was important for me to understand the cultural context, history and characteristics of each of these as the dance is dictated by these personalities in addition to specific steps/ stylistic movement. Facial expressions, interaction/ role playing and taking on a personality are all important factors. The movements in isolation from character/ personality are nonsensical and devoid of life and spirit.

The movements begin deep within the core of the body where the beauty and fluidity of the movements carry through. Through the Key 2 Cuba programme and working with Kerry Ribchester, I was able to explore this inner subtlety of connection. Working with the different 'triangle' relationships within the body;

feet to hands and pelvis, working with internal organs such as the lungs, or from the skeleton as a starting point for initiating movements of different character

As a musician and dancer, it was important for me to understand the relationship between the music/drumming toques (patterns) and the dance. The rhythms that build up the songs and pasos (movements) of the Orishas (Afro-Cuban gods) originate from Yoruba and in Cuba are played on the Bata drums – a set of 3 drums each with a particular role where a call and response conversation is created whilst securing a pulse. The dancer follows the drums and changes pasos (moves) when the rhythm changes. Whilst there are specific steps to each rhythm, some of these are used by several different Orishas and it is the character / personality trait and use of their tools/ movement of them that is drawn from the story of Santeria that defines which character is portrayed, whilst the words and song of the orishas determines which Orisha is being referred to in the music.

Each Orisha has colours and specific items/ tools that are associated with it A few of the principal Orishas specifics are noted below:

Ellegua

Young boy, Owner of all roads, crossroads and doors,
Temperament: Inquisitive, curious, talkative
Colours red and black
Carries a garrabato (hooked stick)

Chango

god of fire and lightening and thunder
Temperament: bombastic, outspoken, assertive, charming
Colours red and white
carries a double headed axe, sword, single headed axe/ thunder stones

Yemaya

Orisha of motherhood, and queen of the sea. She is the mother of all living things and the owner of all waters.
Temperament: Nurturing, loving, direct, frank. Colours blue and white



Orisha dances – Oshun and Yemaya (photo by Key 2 Cuba)

Oshun

Orisha of sweetness, femininity, love and everything that makes life worth living, rivers
Temperament flirtatious, sensual and loving – or – serious, stern and bitter,
Colours gold, yellow, amber carries a fan and mirror

Oya is a fierce and powerful female warrior orisha, She is the owner of the marketplace, and keeps the gates of the cemetery. She is the force of change in nature and in life. She wields lightning and rides the winds into battle, carries a horse tail. Oya owns the cemetery gates and escorts the spirits of the dead to the threshold of the graveyard,
Temperament: fierce, temperamental, protective
Colours: brown or burgundy, plus nine different colors (no black)

Through the one- one training I was able to work on the connection between the rhythms and dances of the Orishas (Afro-Cuban Gods) although I was surprised how difficult it was to find tutors that were able to break down these relationships. Eventually, I worked with Leonel, and Ildolida, lead dancers with Raices Profundos folkloric dance company.

Another principal influence on contemporary salsa is the integration of Rumba. There are 3 different styles of Rumba each with its own distinct movements and rhythms; Yambu usually slower and danced by older couples, Guanguanco - faster couple dance where the aim is to 'Vacuna' a gesture designed to symbolise impregnating the woman through movements of trickery and Colombia – a solo male dance often with competitive nature to demonstrate skills/ technique and flamboyance of dancer.

Rumba is more commonly found in contemporary salsa dance due to the more frequent accompaniment of Rumba rhythms found within a Timba style song. At this point a couple dancing Casino style may break apart and dance Rumba- including all the characteristics, of enticement and playfulness – Vacunao (imitation of impregnation) found in traditional Guanguanco style rumba dance. However, traditionally the partner interaction would not normally start until the music had reached the choro / montuno (Call and response) part of the music (see video 11) , whereas in a modern Timba song, the Rumba rhythm may appear just for a short break in the music and therefore the dancers reflect this by dancing rumba straight away at this point even if it is not a choro/ montuno section in the music.

My particular interest for this research was the influence of Yoruban and folkloric dance within contemporary street salsa. In the west, particularly in France, other parts of Europe and in some parts of the UK, Salsa dancers are integrating more influences of Yoruba into their salsa. As salsa has evolved from integrating different styles of dance / movement including Rumba and Yoruba the most notable influence of Yoruba is the use of body movement from the core and isolation of chest, pelvis through extensions and contractions. As Casino Salsa is essentially a contemporary street dance, it has developed alongside the musical influences and fusions of many traditional dances including Son and Rumba and now into Songo, Timba. It is, therefore, inevitable that new developments will arise within different communities of dancers, each bringing their new identity and influences to it. The integration of Afro-Cuban dance moves within salsa is very popular within modern rueda (a casino salsa danced by a number of couples in a circle and carry out specific movements in response to calls from a leader), as each group strives to develop individual characteristics.

Many new Timba/ Songo songs by leading groups such as Adalberto Alvarez, Los Van Van, include elements of Yoruban song / references to the Orishas. I noticed that when couples in Cuba danced to these songs, they broke away from their partners and started to dance movements of the Orishas being referred to in the song or would form impromptu line ups with people using the steps/ movements of the Orishas being sung.

In the west it is more common to see partners break apart during a song and initiate some movements of the orishas even if the music does not necessarily indicate this and therefore is more of a stylistic interpretation. I noticed that this was not so common with Cuban dance couples and I would be interested to explore this area further especially in relation to 'cultural appropriation'.

Future development

All the knowledge gained will be used in my work as a freelance Salsa dance teacher and performer in order to develop the Cuban Salsa scene in the East Midlands. Since my return, I have recently become involved in two new ventures:

- 1) Axis percussion sessions – exploring the rhythms of Rumba and the Yoruba dances in a group as well as developing a practice network to develop and continue my learning/ disseminating knowledge.
- 2) Developing a shared theme Latin / salsa night to promote 'true' Cuban / Casino salsa in the East Midlands in collaboration with tutors from other styles of Salsa.

Bibliography

Information on Orishas;

<http://santeriachurch.org/?s=elegua>

<http://santeriachurch.org/?s=yemeya>

<http://santeriachurch.org/?s=chango>

<http://santeriachurch.org/?s=oshun>

Artists I studied with;

Kerry Ribchester,

Key 2 Cuba dancers

Lionel + Ildolydia from Raices Profundos/ Juan de Dios

Clave y Guanguanco

Dionisio Paul Palma from Conjunto Folklorico Nacional

Chaugito Santiago Garzon Rill

Jenny Dalmao

Nikki Kemp
March 2103