

Hot and Spicy

Cuban, Puerto Rican dance heritage mix together to form popular new salsa craze

BY BETH FOCHT
The Battalion

At the Grammy awards, critics and viewers declared one singer to have stolen the show. From that performance until today, the world has seemed to be enraptured by Ricky Martin. However, it is not just the man who is grabbing attention, it is also the music, sensuality and attitude that brings with him. Namely it is salsa music, which Martin has helped to expose to the public, that is making peo-

ple get up and shake their hips. Salsa dancing is not easily defined nor is it easy to determine who invented this form of partner dancing.

Salsa has a large number of influences, including the main Cuban and Puerto Rican influences, which played a part in the evolution of the dance.

Salsa originally came into the limelight and was popular in clubs in New York during the 1960s. The recent popularity is due to the increase of mainstream Latin music, the revival of dances that use a partner, and the increased integration of Latin influences into the American culture.

Cuba and Puerto Rico's diverse histories and cultures are meshed into salsa. The Latin dancing was first brought to the United States through migration. Integration of cultures in America produced the salsa dancing seen today.

Louis Martinez, a member of Omega Delta Phi, a Latino fraternity, and a senior political science major, said salsa dancing and music involves an interesting mesh of cultures.

"This dance comes from the Caribbean, mainly Cuban and Puerto Rico, and it is very popular in Mexico and it is becoming more popular as these cultures are integrated more into mainstream America," Martinez said. "The salsa music is a cultural mesh of the people of Puerto Rico and Cuba with a lot of African rhythm drums and Latin beats."

Salsa dancing is composed as a variety of movement beginning with a basic rocking step and a transfer of weight between these rocking movements. From this rudimentary step, the dancer's own style and emphasis is added.

Salsa music has an even tempo that is not too fast to dance to. The phrases of the music repeat, making it easy to count and easy to keep the pace and rhythm.

Melissa Hinojosa, a member of the Dance Arts Society and a freshman math major, said salsa and Latin-based dancing are really about moving your body.

"When you salsa dance you want to move your ribs, hips and feet a lot," Hinojosa said. "You can dance with or without a partner because there is generally not aerial work when you salsa, but it is more fun to dance with someone so you can move more and turn."

Hinojosa said she believes one reason salsa dancing has become popular is because the music is so easy to dance to.

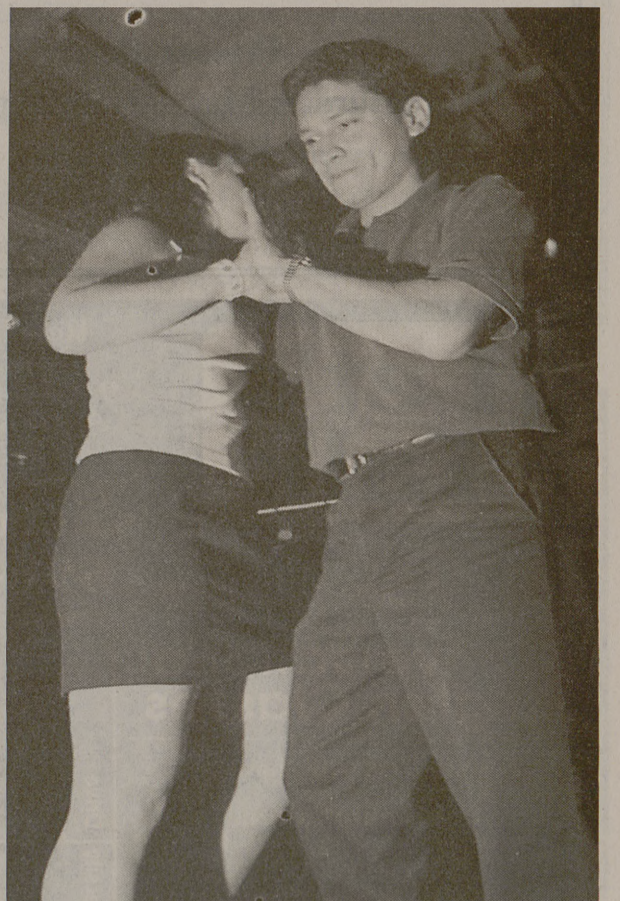
"The music is fast-paced and upbeat, it is not monotonous like techno or real hard-core music, and really has a fun beat to dance to," she said.

"I also think with more Latin beats and rhythms coming into mainstream with Ricky Martin, Gloria Estefan and club songs that feature Latin beats, people are more familiar and interested in learning about this style."

"I also think it was an easy transition with the popularity of swing dancing and partner dancing to this Latin-based dance," Hinojosa said.

Martinez said he believes salsa dancing is coming into the mainstream because of the Hispanic population growth in the United States.

"If you look the Hispanic population is rapidly growing and the culture is integrating into the mainstream culture," he said. "Commercials are using music with Latin rhythms and the culture is now



MIKE FUENTES/THE BATTALION

Luis Cisneros, professor of horticulture at A&M, dances the salsa with Cynthia Campos, a junior international studies and spanish major. Cisneros learned the salsa in his native Peru, while Campos has been dancing the salsa for two years.

catching up with this growth."

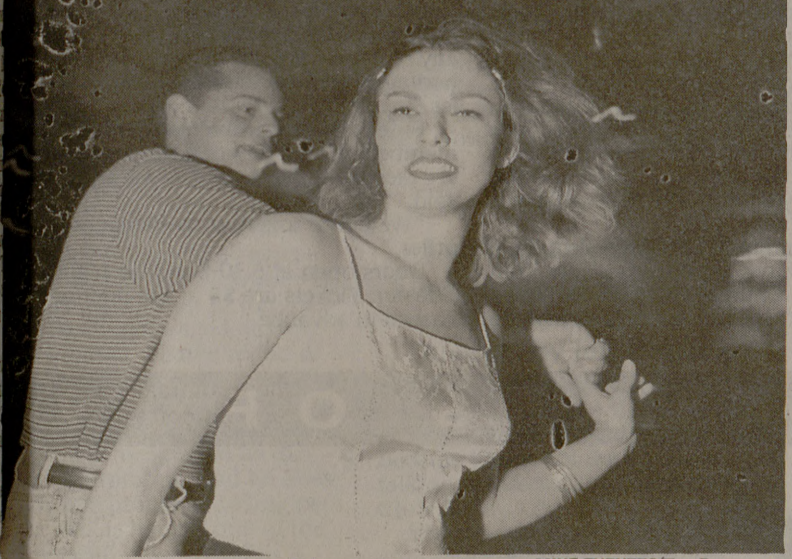
Salsa is a basic dance and is not hard for beginners to learn.

Martinez said he recommends that people who have never tried to salsa before and want to learn should use the resources that are provided within the community.

"There are a lot of Latin student associations on campus and they all have parties that play all of these kinds of music," he said. "If you show up to one of these parties, someone will teach you how to salsa. It is a great way to learn."

Hinojosa said that for people trying this type of dancing for the first time, there are a few things you should remember.

"It is important to let your hair down and get loose when you salsa," she said. "Do not worry what other people think, you should feel the music and go with what your body wants to do and most importantly, have a good time."



MIKE FUENTES/THE BATTALION

time dance instructor, Anna Britain, a senior international studies major, teaches a beginner the salsa, Wednesday night at the Epicenter.

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