

SALSA ARTICLE

READ THE ARTICLE AND WRITE YOUR RESPONSE ON THIS PIECE OF PAPER

ANSWER THESE THERE QUESTIONS IN 3 PARAGRAPHS.... 5 SENTENCES IN EACH PARAGRAPH

- 1) WHAT WAS THIS ARTICLE ABOUT
- 2) WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS ARTICLE
- 3) WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS ARTICLE AND SALSA DANCING

YOUR NAME _____

One Two Three, Five Six Seven: My Salsa Experience

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PHEW! FOUR hours of salsa leaves me breathless, clothes sticking to me, cotton-mouthed, toe-cramped, but still wanting to be twirled ever more and ever faster. The liveliness that seeps into my hips, feet, arms, and shoulders from all that rhythm makes me wanna salsa till my legs fall off - if only the DJ could last that long.

Well, OK - I get excited enough to think I could dance all night, but that tends not to be the real-world occurrence. I do enjoy taking time out to quench my thirst and rest my dear feet. Also, as I'm still a learner, and as this type of dancing requires a partner by default, whacking my lead in the face or stomping on their toes tends to dampen the excitement, but only a little (and mostly for them). However, I have come a stretch from my days of learning the basic step.

My first experience with salsa was in a ballroom dance class I took as part of a study abroad program in Guadalajara, Mexico. Ricardo, the instructor, was a bald, squat, vivacious, 40-something who didn't let his height of 4'6" stop him from dancing with gals who were 6'6". He was a fun, loud personality, but his dancing style was a bit overpowering, so any follow dancing with him had to be on guard. Hence, I learned to dance a cautious salsa, holding onto my lead for dear life to avoid being flung to the wall during a turn or smacked with flailing arms.

In Guadalajara, I made it out to a salsa club ONCE to put my skills to the test. And who was the featured band that night but Merenglas, a merengue group. Ricardo did teach us a few merengue steps (introducing the dance with "if you know how to do the potty dance, you know how to do the merenge"), so I did a little potty dancing on the dance floor, enjoying the time with my amigos, sipping my cubita (rum and coke), and laughing at the booty-shaking routines of the band members.

Since Mexico, I've come to learn and practice a more relaxed version of salsa. I like not being as cautious and tense, because it gives me and the lead more freedom of movement, allowing for more agility and creativity.

There are really so many aspects that excite me about this dance. Besides the music and basic movement, much of my excitement comes from achieving the impossible: the step-turn-twirl-arm-twist thing that leads into another twirly-step-turn-twisty-spin, which I've been struggling to perfect for a month and which I seem to have FINALLY executed with grace, style, and on perfect count. I feel something like a queen in that moment.

Also, there's the watching. When I get those rare moments of sit-down (half a song per ten), I scan the dance floor for a couple to watch. When I find the right one, I study their steps while I follow the twirly skirt and sparkling pumps with my big, admiring eyes.

This brings me back to one time in my life, fantasizing about myself as a pink tu-tu'd, music-box, ballerina princess. I don't much see that happening now-a-days, but maybe that young dream is related to my more recent fantasy: performance! With the assumption that performance-level salsa takes a bit of preparation, it will be a while yet, but I am taking classes - another piece of my salsa experience I'll share.

Classes:

One-on-One: Intermediate

This is the first salsa class I took in Eugene, post Mexico, and in the first five minutes, I noticed my hips didn't move quite as smoothly as I once remembered. But, over the next few classes as I kept practicing and learning more complex steps, my body began to remember that beautiful salsa language.

The class was great at teaching both ladies (follows) styling with more complex footwork. It was hard for me to integrate the two, however, b/c it seems like the most important thing is paying attention to your lead and the footwork you do as the follow. The extra movement of a head turn or hand-through-the-hair or hip-dip-and-twist remains a sexy-styling task to be conquered.

A bit of a tangent: I've come to the opinion that a skilled lead is KEY to the level of smooooothness of the dance. The tension and motion the lead holds in their arms are like red lights and green lights for the follows. Some leads I've danced with are always flashing green or yellow, meaning loose arms and inconsistent signals, making it hard for the follow to know what's coming, when to hesitate, when to tap or turn. I've come to appreciate that stronger guidance oh-so much. Having said that, and to avoid being hunted down by the leads out there who know me, I must include that the follow's skill-level is also a factor regarding the level of gracefulness that comes out of a dance.

Casino Rueda, aka: Rueda

The Gist: salsa-in-a-circle.

The Details: A spontaneous, social, version of salsa. A group of at least four are paired off and the "caller" calls out and signals what the next move will be for the bunch.

You are constantly changing partners and twirling and doing moves and steps that everyone has pre-learned. This version tends to be great for the leads, who usually have to think a lot in one-on-one salsa, such as what moves they're going to do next, what the follow knows/doesn't know and how they should lead accordingly, what they've already done, and how to keep it exciting. Exception - as the caller, ya do have to use your noggin a bit.

This style has been a ball to learn, because I find myself always looking forward to what's coming next. On the contrary, in one-on-one salsa, there's a higher chance that you'll get stuck with someone who hasn't learned much past the basic step (if that's all you know, too, then fabulous!) and you find yourself staring at the blank wall behind them and wondering what piece of art should replace the blankness, so you'd be a little more mentally stimulated while staring at that particular spot.

So, I very much appreciate the small bit of diversity added in that circle - the different style of the leads, doing a dozen or so different steps. Less pressure, always fun and spontaneous.

The music, the movement, the proud accomplishment of executing a complex move, the watching and admiration of others that creates such inspiration, and the classes have all made me want to turn this lifestyle into my second profession.

After I asked a friend the other day how he got into salsa, he said that he watched some really great salsa dancers a while back, and it was seeing something like perfection. I suppose I feel similarly. Perfection as a kind of artistic creation. The music provides the inspiration; the beauty of movement, style, and grace creates the masterpiece.