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REVIEW: BOSTON BRAZILIAN DANCE FESTIVAL 2016



Post Views 150

Two weeks ago I attended the 3rd Annual Boston Brazilian Dance Festival(<http://www.brazildancefest.net>), put on by Moves & Vibes(<http://movesandvibes.com>).

This festival caught my interest when it started back in 2014. I had never seen a festival advertised with quite that mix of dances: Brazilian dances alongside kizomba and bachata. When Inna(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh88cn_rtLo), one of the directors, brought me to Boston for a kizomba workshop, I became more convinced that this was a festival that would suit me. I got to wear the t-shirt, but it wasn't until this year that my international travels allowed me to check out the festival for myself.

The Venues

Boston Brazilian Dance Festival teams up with West Coast Swing event Swingin' New England to rent out all the ballrooms and huge blocks of rooms at the Boston Marriott



Newton(<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/bosnt-boston-marriott-newton/>). It's not the easiest place to reach without a car, being so far outside Boston, but when you're going to spend three days never leaving the hotel it's manageable. It was a treat to see the New England autumnal glory all around, although the cold was pretty biting for most of the weekend.

The hotel is clean and comfortable, with all the modern facilities you'd hope for and impressively effective sound-dampening walls. The configuration did catch me out in confusion a few times. The lobby was on the 4th floor, Swingin' New England happened on the 3rd floor, we were dancing on the 2nd floor, and my room was on the 1st floor. It sounds silly, but how often do you go downstairs from the ballroom to find your bedroom?



Partitions were used to create four rooms for us to dance in on the 2nd floor. There were concurrent classes all day on Saturday and Sunday, usually one Brazilian zouk, one forro or samba, one kizomba, and one bachata. At night the social dancing was divided similarly. As far as I could tell, the floors held together well, the climate control was well regulated,

and the vendors managed to use the limited hall space effectively. Basically, things were set up quite well for the weekend, a credit to the organization.

Sunday night's after party was at the Boston Ballroom, much closer to the city. At first I was surprised to see an additional venue right at the end of the weekend, but it

proved wonderfully convenient. Anybody with a late flight was already back in town near transportation, and I got to visit a couple of Boston-based friends.

The Schedule

The color-coded schedule available on BBDF’s website was everything I could have hoped for. Left to right, the columns matched up with the arrangement of the rooms.

Time blocks were clearly marked with start and end times. Each dance style was assigned one distinct color, so you could quickly scan for what you were most interested in. Master’s classes that came at an additional cost were also clearly marked and enforced with separately purchased wristbands.

Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel
Friday Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4
17:00 Book your private class	Book your private class	Book your private class	Book your private class
18:00 Larissa Ladies Styling choreo challenge 8-Spm Extra Cost	Flashmob training with Celny	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm
19:00-20:30 Larissa Ladies Styling choreo challenge 8-Spm Extra Cost	Special Rehearsal with Larissa and Irena	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm
20:20-21:30 Larissa Ladies Styling choreo challenge 8-Spm Extra Cost	Walter Faria Pe De Sacaio all levels	Preparing the room for performance	Preparing the room for performance
21:00-22:00 Performance warm up (artistic room)	Track Stage rehearsal/Meal break down (Dinner break)	Performances	Performances
22:00-23:30 Performances	Performances	Performances	Performances
23:30-00:00 Party time - food and drinks - until 2am	Party time - drink	Party time Kizomba	Party time Bachata
Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel
Saturday Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4
10:00-11:00 Introduction Forró Bootcamp with Carlos Dias	Party Style Daily making bachata	Break and 1 Lata Intro to Zouk for bachateros	David & Gisela Kizomba Bootcamp
11:20-12:30 Leo and Catherine Samba de Gafurra Intro	Sarah Zaccaro & Jorge Bachatruck Fusion	Irena and Edwin Zouk Dips and Tricks	Isabelle and Felician Kizomba Flow
13:00-14:00 Kudu & Larissa Zouk Master Workshop - Extra Cost	Walter Faria Pe De Sacaio Intermediate Class	Manoel & Irena Kizomba Ska Variations	Break & Zouk Communication through Frame
14:00-15:00 (Break) - Book your private class	(Break) - Book your private class	(Break) - Book your private class	(Break) Book your private class
15:00-16:30 Faria - Samba Carnaval	Andria and Shila Samba Musicality	Kudu and Larissa Zouk Flow Technique	Candice Kizomba Ska! Ladies only!
16:20-17:30 Andria and Shila Bachata Master Class - Extra Cost	Manoel Faria Pe De Sacaio Advanced Class	Manoel & Felicia Kizomba Advanced	April and Jessica Zouk Air Play
17:40-18:30 Isabelle and Felician Kizomba Master Class - Extra Cost	Walter Faria - Zouk Connection for Advanced Only	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm
18:00-20:00 Book your private class	Book your private class	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm	Track Stage rehearsal from 8 to 8pm
20:00-21:00 Book your private class	Book your private class	Preparing the room for performance	Preparing the room for performance
21:00-22:00 Performance warm up (artistic room)	Track Stage rehearsal/Meal break down (Dinner break)	Performances	Performances
22:00-23:30 Performances	Performances	Performances	Performances
23:30-00:00 Party Bachata	Party time - drink	Party time - from 10:00 until 2:00am	Party time Kizomba
Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel	Marriott Hotel
Sunday Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4
10:00-11:00 Roberto Wake up Bootcamp Manoel D Santos	Walter Faria head movement for bachata Book	Leo and Catherine Zouk Musicality	Craig & Sana Kizomba Connection
11:20-12:30 Roberto Samba Rio Pe Fundamentos	Jana Ska Modern Bachata	Paul and Larissa Family Zouk Control	David & Gisela Kizomba Ska Tricks
12:30-13:30 (Break) - Book your private class	(Break) - Book your private class	(Break) - Book your private class	(Break) - Book your private class
13:30-14:40 Pe De Sacaio Forró Tricks with Walter	Andria and Shila Sensual Bachata	Kudu and Larissa - create stage presence	Isabelle and Felician Kizomba Footwork
14:40-16:00 (Break and Getinto Zouk Level 1 follow	Andria and Shila Advanced Bachata Combination	Paul/High Heels class - all genders	Isabelle and Felician Advanced Kizomba

The festival actually spanned four nights, but I missed out on Thursday’s workshop and pre-party. Friday evening offered a few class choices, including a Ladies Styling Choreography Challenge with Larissa. I passed that up but really enjoyed the results as performed on Sunday night! Saturday and Sunday were chock full of options starting at 10:00am. It was impressive to see how many people made it to those first classes, in spite of how full the ballrooms stayed into the wee hours of the night.

Each evening there was an hour of shows followed by social dancing starting as late as 11:30pm. That might be shocking to some of you who are used to things starting at 8:00 or 9:00, but I found it was very true to the cultures represented in the festival’s dance forms. Plus it meant we all had time for showers, meals, and naps before coming to the party! I also appreciated that I could count on finding a majority of people in the ballrooms within an hour of the social beginning, whereas at most festivals the party attendance is quite unevenly distributed throughout the night.

The Learning Experience

As a member of the media team, I got to float through all the different classrooms at various times taking photos and asking people about their experiences. A local dancer named Krista said, “I was here last year. I was one of the ones asking when tickets would go on sale this year. It’s the instructors, really, for me. They are fantastic.”



Inna spoke to me about Moves & Vibes' vision for the event: "We're the only school in the Boston area that offers all of those dance styles in one place. So we wanted to create an event that brings all those styles in one place and invite people from different cities to create awareness among the salsa community and others about these dances – zouk, samba, forro, and kizomba – by bringing all these international artists."

When it came time for me to attend class, I opted to immerse myself in the Brazilian side of the festival. And it wasn't just Brazilian dances being taught – the majority of the teachers were also originally from Brazil. I took classes with Kadu & Larissa, Leo & Catherine, Hisako & Getulio, and Ry'el & Jessica.

I took advantage of the opportunity to speak with Leo and Catherine about what it's like to teach to us here in the United States. "It's more about the culture to say the truth. Because Brazilians don't have any problem to connect with touch. 'I don't know you but hey!'" Leo explained, miming an embrace. "And then most of the Brazilian dances are based on that. We need to connect and feel because it's something natural. When we teach we also try to bring culture and not just steps. I think if you know how to touch and connect, you learn much, much more."

(And now every one of us who teaches a close embrace dance is thinking about the many times we've started our classes by having people go around and hug each other as an opening exercise.)

Catherine followed up his comments by saying: "As instructors, we have a huge responsibility. As Leo was saying, it's not just the steps. 'Step, step, hands up and turn.' It's all about the culture and connection. Different rhythms and styles have different connections. We need to know and pass to our students what it means and why we do one thing and not



something else. We are always trying to study and keep up to date to bring the best to teach for our students.”

I had the opportunity to take classes in both Rio-style Brazilian zouk and samba de gafieira with them. They were quite clear about some of the differences in posture, connection, and steps between these dances. Also, when Catherine offered styling options, she showed how tango elements could be introduced without disrupting the connection.

I was really pleased by how accepting everyone was of those of us who spent time dancing the role opposite to our traditionally gender-assigned one. In the kizomba



world, Portuguese instructors are among the most stringently opposed to role reversal, so I wasn't sure what to expect from the Brazilian instructors. While they mostly stuck to gendered vocabulary in class, no one ever made a joke about my leading or the men who wanted to follow. I had a ball switch dancing in both kizomba and zouk with Zan, a

friend from Durham. Ryel also taught a High Heels class that was specifically labeled on the schedule as being for all genders.

The People

There was a wonderful variety of people in attendance at the Boston Brazilian Dance Festival this year. I saw white-haired heads and fresh faces. There were lots of dancers from the immediate area and many more who had flown from distant states. What I especially liked was how the majority of people were making the most of this opportunity to explore the other dance styles on offer. I heard someone exclaim, “I’ve never seen so many zouk people in a kizomba room!” and another respond, “And then there’s so many kizomba people in the zouk room!”

For me that was the whole point. I obviously identify mostly as a “kizomba person” but I’ve really been enjoying [learning zouk](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNnQEPAoct3eyhsQbGmlqOKbCXSnmSMA&disable_polymer=true) (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNnQEPAoct3eyhsQbGmlqOKbCXSnmSMA&disable_polymer=true) over the last year or so. It was a pleasure to dance in the kizomba room with people at every level, then go next door and play with some Brazilian zouk. I wasn't quite brave enough to try to put my one class of forro or samba de gafieira into practice, but maybe next time!

In asking people why they chose this festival in particular to attend, I found I wasn't the only one making an effort to focus on new things. Peter from NYC told

me: “I’m actually coming from the ballroom scene. I’m interested in going outside my sphere, trying some new things like zouk to try to see if I can incorporate them into my American Rhythm or Smooth dancing.”



Others appreciated having something familiar to fall back on as well. “I had heard about the festival and hadn’t really thought I would go all that way,” Marcos from Miami shared. “But I started to going to more congresses, IM Zouk, DC Zouk, NY Zouk...And I heard from Inna at NY Zouk that there would be a bachata room here, and that was attractive for me. I’m just learning zouk, so at NY Zouk when it was all zouk it was kind of overwhelming.”

I found the people at the festival to be generally enthusiastic and friendly. This wasn’t a cliquish or elitist event. Sure, there were followers queued up to dance with the top male instructors. But I was in zouk class more than once with world-famous kizomba instructor Felicien, and within ten minutes of entering the zouk room on Friday night I was asked to dance by Moves & Vibes instructor Edwin. Plus overall there was a spirit of helping those who were just starting or or crossing over from other dances. Maybe some of that was down to size – this wasn’t a huge event like my [last write-up](http://socialdancecommunity.com/review-the-dc-bachata-congress-2016/), so we got a chance to see some of the same faces and build relationships over the event.



To be honest, there were a lot features of this festival that perfectly suited me. The organization was spot-on, and Moves & Vibes even managed to get together a strong enough crew that I saw their directors and instructors out enjoying social dancing. The national and international instructors brought awesome material and were present

to dance with attendees in the evenings. The performances were great fun and didn’t interrupt the flow of the parties. The DJs played excellent music, it was easy to move among the various social rooms, and I made new friends. All in all, I was sorry to see the event come to an end!

Sound good to you? Like the Annual Boston Brazilian Dance Festival(<https://www.facebook.com/BostonBrazilDanceFest/>) page on Facebook to get all the news about 2017.
