

# Shared experience bridges cultures

## Strictly Street Salsa puts passion back into Latin American dance

By **DAPHNE ROZEN**  
Chronicle correspondent

This month, Raul Orlando Edwards has every reason to be dancing in the streets as he and fellow dance instructor, Joan Bishop, pair up to celebrate their fifth anniversary of teaching Houstonians how to put the "passion" back into Latin American dance.

Appropriately named, Strictly Street Salsa, a dance company based at the River Oaks Community Center, 3600 Locke Lane, teaches Latin America dance the way it was originally intended to be done — anywhere

and on any surface without adjustment — and offers a class that combines street salsa, merengue, bachata, cha-cha-cha, Afro-Latin movement and Argentine tango.

"(These dances are meant) to bring (all) people of the community together, not alienate (them)," Edwards said.

"Through the shared experience of music and interpretative dance, Strictly Street Salsa not only teaches students how to have an appreciation and love for authentic music and movement, it seeks to build bridges between people of different cultures and

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Kim Christensen photo

Raul Orlando Edwards leads a Strictly Street Salsa class at the River Oaks Community Center. Strictly Street Salsa is celebrating its fifth anniversary.

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# Salsa

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ethnic backgrounds," Bishop added.

Edwards, who actually founded Strictly Street Salsa (formerly Unlimited Talent) in 1998, did so in response to the "shock" he experienced after living in Panama for 26 years before moving to Houston, where he eventually discovered many area dance companies teach Latin American dances without "regard to the music and culture behind them."

"A desire to transmit 'sabor,' or the taste of an authentic Latin American dance experience, which I had not seen on the social dance floors of Houston, inspired the teaching techniques practiced in all Strictly Street Salsa classes," he said.

Without this musical and cultural background, he said, the dances not only lack authenticity but also passion, which he believes is vital to all Latin American dances.

"Passion is what's lacking today," Edwards said. "It's not the steps. It's not what you're wearing. It's how one feels and that comes with the connection you have with the music."

Helping students feel that connection, he said, is his greatest reward.

"That you can see the joy reflected on their faces and on their body," Edwards said, "that is the biggest joy."

Bishop agreed.

"It's such a joy for students to take this non-verbal form of communication everywhere they travel and be able to communi-



Kim Christensen photo

Students practice their moves during a recent class. Instructors Raul Orlando Edwards and Joan Bishop say they teach Latin America dance the way it was originally intended to be done — anywhere and on any surface without adjustment.

cate to people of other cultures through dance," she said.

Like their instructors, students also seem to know the value of the "real" thing.

"It's very authentic, not like the stylized stuff that other studios teach," said Tracy Russell, who lived in Colombia for five years and takes classes with her Colombian-born husband, Bernardo. "Raul has a very charismatic personality and he makes it fun."

"He teaches you the authentic way to dance salsa," said Steve

Marzuke, who has been taking classes for the past two years with girlfriend, Nadia Gonzalez.

"We love it!" Gonzalez said. "(The difficulty of the dances) motivates you to keep learning."

### Open house

Strictly Street Salsa will host an open house Sept. 29 through Oct. 4 from 6:15 to 7:45 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. For reservations, call 713-524-3936. For more information on Strictly Street Salsa, go to [www.strictlystreetsalsa.com](http://www.strictlystreetsalsa.com).

# Flooding

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Yet politicians are unwilling to do anything to increase building regulations because of developers' power, Dower said.

"The bottom line is the candidates need to tell developers 'You will mitigate this site. You will observe the guidelines.'"

The group contends that the large amount of building in Houston dramatically increases the flooding potential, as paving with concrete dramatically increases the downstream flow of water into the bayous. This particularly affects downstream areas like her own Woodland Heights neighborhood, she said.

"That is why the old timers, especially in the Heights, said we didn't have flooding like this in the past."

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