

Ooh La La!

The Magazine of Retro Club Culture

ISSUE 2

cluboohlala.com



The
International
Adventures of
**DJ JAY
STRONGMAN**

Swingin' Soul
**Retro
Bars &
Clubs**

Space Happy
**Retro
Cocktail**

STEVE SAYER
Swing Dance and
Motown Ambassador

DANCING
Solo versus Partner

Club Ooh La La!



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to a New Experience

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Letter from the Editor

The idea for Club Ooh La La first came to me back in 2017. I can't point to any exact moment of decision or single influence of inspiration. Generally, it arose from my fascination with the club and music culture of the 1960s and 1970s, and my love of the movies and television shows of that era, including the Elvis movies, the stylish spy films (the Italian knockoffs as much as James Bond), British TV shows like *The Avengers*, romance and erotic films (the best by Jess Franco and Mario Bava), just about everything coming out of Italy, and even the goofy Beach Party movies.

The title phrase "Ooh La La," seemed indicative of the celebratory and flirtatious nature of that era, and gave the slight nod to Euro culture by which I was fascinated since I was a child. Speaking of being a child, the Elvis movies captivated me far more at that young age than anything created by Walt Disney. I wanted to live that life of romance, music and adventure, where, at any moment, someone (preferably me) might just start singing in the middle of a situation and turn the entire world into a fun, sexy dance party. We spend much of our lives, either consciously or unconsciously, trying to recreate the happy moments of our childhood and adolescence. And at a deeper level, we are seeking to create that fantastic world that, as children, we sensed really somehow existed at the edge of our vision, and sadly, somehow lose touch with as we grow into adulthood in a prosaic culture that mocks dreams and ideals (and often, fun) and demands a joyless approach to living, with only a weekend or vacation in which you are allowed to live your dreams without being dismissed as a dreamer or foolish idealist. As a lifelong artist, every part of me rebelled against this so-called pragmatism, and against the sole pursuit of financial gain and accolades from a culture that measures everything by money and material success. I wanted to be Elvis. I wanted to be Hugh Hefner. After decades of chasing after rock and roll stardom, I slowly moved into a life of multi-disciplined, full artistic devotion. Making money wasn't easy, but I managed in various ways (illustration, design, placements of my music on film and TV, radio shows, books, comic books, etc.). After decades, I found myself with all of the skills to create and run my own media company. And slowly, my desire for that original youthful dream of a romantic, fun world of music and dancing returned.

That world has manifested itself in the form of Club Ooh La La. It's a world of fun, music, dancing, and partying with wonderful people. It's an adult fantasy playground. And you're invited!

Robert Zoltan
Editor in Chief/Producer

INTERNATIONAL ADVENTURES OF DJ JAY STRONGMAN

by Jay Strongman

chapter 2

BERLIN. 1988

It was all under control until Berlin. Yeah, Berlin, the divided city, where East-meets-West, boy-meets-girl, good-meets-evil. That's where it all started to get really crazy. As I sat at that table in the club with three strangers who smiled knowingly at each other, little did I know that I was about to make a pact with the devil. And little did I realize that the devil was already lurking inside me just waiting for me to slip up.

I'd been DJ'ing for almost six years and was doing well—at the top of my game, as they say. I had residencies at three of London's hippest clubs. I'd spun the tunes at parties for the likes of Sade, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Spandau Ballet and Whitney Houston, and had played at nightclubs across the world. I had my own weekly show on KISS FM, the best pirate radio station in the smoke, and wrote dance music columns for a couple of painfully trendy style magazines. The money was good, I had a beautiful, supportive girlfriend, a big flat in Chelsea and the very occasional one night stand. Sex, drugs and dance music. It was all there for me, and I suppose I enjoyed it. And I thought I was doing it all in moderation and with a certain detached nonchalance. I thought I could take it or leave it, any of it, even the coke. Maybe especially the coke, because it was everywhere. If it was on offer and I



was in the mood, I'd do a line or two. It made me feel great, but luckily I never had to pay for it, and I'd never craved it or needed it. Not like one DJ I knew, who was so nervous before he started work that he actually became physically sick. To overcome his nerves he did coke to boost his confidence. It worked, but over time, a couple of white lines became three or four every night. After a while he was snorting the stuff just to get through the day. Pretty soon he was DJ'ing just to earn enough money to support his drug habit. I wasn't that dumb, and I'd always been ambivalent about coke. Yeah, it could be fun, but I'd met too many arseholes in clubland who were serious coke heads. Coked-up club promoters and club managers were a pain to work with. They'd praise my music one night and then bitch about it the next, merely because some drunken model they were chopping out lines for complained I hadn't played any Whitney Houston in the middle of a house or hip-hop set. In fact, with one or two notable exceptions, most club owners and promoters were clueless egotists who knew very little about music, and yet, these were the people that paid my wages. So, I still figured I was in control, still being myself, not letting it affect me. But that all changed after Berlin.

It was October 1988 when I flew out to the city for a two night stint of DJ'ing for a German promoter I'd worked for a few times before. I liked playing in Berlin. The city had a special feeling to it. I guess there was too much dramatic history there for the place not to have a unique atmosphere. West Berlin itself was a melancholy outpost of the capitalist West surrounded by the sullen menace of the communist East and haunted by the horrors of the Nazi past. The city being at the epicenter of the Cold War conflict was both unnerving and exciting. The first time I'd worked there, back in '85, I'd driven out to the Wall at the Brandenburg Gate after I'd finished my DJ set at a place called the Beehive Club. It was four in the morning. The streets were slick with dew and a patchy mist hung across the city. The slightly acrid smell of the cheap coal they used in the East pervaded the air, reinforcing the sense of being somewhere very different. I parked on a deserted side street off the Unter den Linden and strolled up to the barrier nearest the Wall. Over in the East, the Brandenburg Gate itself loomed in the mist like an oversized entrance to a mausoleum. As I stood there lost in the atmosphere of the place, my breath visible in the chill air, I noticed a lone figure in a dark raincoat standing off to one side by a clump of trees. In my mind I was suddenly an extra in a 1960s Michael Caine spy movie and the jukebox in my brain selected something moody and memorable by John Barry—the theme to *The Ipcress File*. Then, from somewhere on the Eastern side of the wall, a world away in the DDR, came a whistle. It was the most poignant whistle I'd ever heard. There was a brief eerie silence and then the figure by the trees whistled back. I froze to the spot. I didn't want to become an intruder in someone else's hopeless romance or tragic misery, and I hoped the rain-coated figure wouldn't notice me. As I watched and waited, the whistling continued. I don't know if the plaintive sounds meant anything or how the two whistlers were related, whether they were family members separated by the Wall or lost lovers torn asunder by the Cold War. Whoever they were, that part-tragic, part-sad, part-romantic incident was the image of Berlin that I'd always carried with me from then on. Finally, as I decided to return to my car and leave the two whistlers to continue their unspoken rendezvous, my cerebral jukebox switched to David Bowie's "Heroes." And that song was never the same for me ever again.

But on this particular trip I was too tired to worry about the Brandenburg Gate and the tragedy of the East-West divide. The first night back at the Beehive, I played from midnight until five in the morning. With the usual German club combination of high decibel levels and dense cigarette smoke, I was pretty frazzled by the end of my set and just wanted to get back to the hotel and crash out. So far, so usual—this was just another well paying gig abroad. No girls I was interested in or vice versa, no drunken after-parties and no drugs. I played an okay set of rare groove and hip-hop for the Friday night theme of “Rap Soul Power” but the crowd wasn’t really happening and I didn’t feel that inspired. I was just doing a job, a job I had to get through. So I kept the dancers on the floor, dropped the happening tunes by Public Enemy and Big Daddy Kane, and told the trainspotters the titles of the rarer 7-inch funk tracks that I played. All-in-all I spun a pretty good set, but the hours dragged and I tried not to look at my watch too many times. Bang on five, the house lights came up and the head bouncer gave me the hand across the throat gesture, meaning “kill the music.” I was more than happy to oblige. I packed my records away, then the manager paid me in cash and sorted me out a cab. I dumped my record boxes in the trunk of the taxi and away we went. And as I slumped back in the rear passenger seat my mind automatically cued up the theme music from *Taxi Driver*. Once again I was a stranger in a strange land, sitting in the back of a cab driving too fast through the dead, early-morning, unfamiliar streets of a foreign city. Back at the hotel, I got in the shower to wash away the cigarette smoke stench and then hit the sack.

I woke around eleven on Saturday morning, ordered some breakfast from room service and then called Louise. She and I had been together for almost two years; my longest relationship. We’d met at



a club I was DJing at down in Kingston and after five months of heavy dating, we moved in together. Louise was good for me. She kept me grounded, and reminded me that there was more to life than dance music and clubbing. She wasn't mad about my working abroad but she understood why I had to do it. The mortgage on our flat, our designer clothes and eating out didn't come cheap, and gigging overseas usually meant triple the money I could make working in the UK. Even so, I think she still worried about the kind of temptations that lay in wait for me when I worked away from home.

To be honest there were plenty of temptations back in London too but I'd managed to pretty much stay a faithful boyfriend. It had been tough, though. I loved Louise and didn't want to hurt her, but when you're working five nights a week in nightclubs and you're surrounded by cute, barely dressed, teenage girls dancing in front of you, requesting records and flirting with you, it's hard to be a saint. The problem was, that for better or worse, the DJ box is usually the focal point of most clubs. So being the headlining DJ in a trendy club, I couldn't help being the centre of attention. I liked to think that being vaguely good-looking and six foot two inches tall had something to do with my popularity but it was probably more to do with being a "name" DJ in a booming club scene. Once people see you written up in style magazines and newspapers they think of you as somehow "special." It was kind of stupid, but I wasn't complaining. If fame was an aphrodisiac then I was all for it. Back in my rockabilly rebel days in 1980/81 before my DJ career began, I'd read a biography of the late, lamented country singer Hank Williams. Before he became famous as a singer, Hank didn't do too well with women. Fame changed all that. Being an honest, down-to-earth, good ole boy from the Deep South, Hank understood his newfound desirability.

"When I was just an ordinary joe, women wouldn't give me the time of day, they looked at me like I was dirt. But once my records were on all the jukeboxes and folks knew my name, them same women would scream while I was on stage and wait outside the dressing room for me."

Well, as my DJ career took off, no one actually screamed my name (at least not in the club), but girls were always giving me their phone numbers or dancing provocatively just in front of the DJ box. And sometimes, the right combination of flashing eyes, pouting mouth, curvy body, revealing clothes, tantalizing perfume and horny chat-up lines overwhelmed any resistance I might have imagined I had. And then, after the club, I'd find myself in a strange car or on a strange couch, and I'd be on top of some cute girl who would have her skirt up around her waist. And as we had sex, I'd be formulating the excuse I was going to give to whichever girlfriend it was I was dating at that time when I got in at five in the morning.

For the last couple of years before Berlin though, I'd managed to stay out of trouble, even during a couple of very hedonistic weekends in Italy and a crazy, drunken New Year's Eve party in Stockholm. I'd been tempted but I hadn't succumbed. I thought I was becoming a responsible adult, finally growing up. I'd even thought about marriage. So my conscience was clear that Saturday morning in Berlin as I called home. Louise answered after three rings, her voice husky from just waking

up. Husky and very sexy. While we made small talk about our respective Friday nights, the image of her, naked and curled up snug and warm in our bed filled me with a longing to be back home. The thought of staying in Berlin for another couple of nights was suddenly really depressing. Still, there was a job to be done and money to be earned, and I'd be home soon enough. We didn't have too much to say to each other, so after ten minutes I promised her I'd call the next morning and we said our goodbyes. Now the day stretched before me, twelve long hours to kill before I was due at the Beehive for the big Friday night party. All West Berlin's clubland movers and shakers were supposed to be there for this event. This was the main reason the club had flown me in, so I had to be in top form.

I got dressed, took a taxi down to the Ku'dam, West Berlin's main shopping street, and wandered aimlessly amongst the badly dressed Saturday afternoon crowds. I had to hand it to the Germans: they were undoubtedly the worst dressed people in the whole of Western Europe. It was like the hippie 1970s had never ended. After a couple of overpriced cappuccinos in a supposedly trendy cafe, I found a phone box and decided to call Lee, the Beehive's American general manager, and see what he was up to. Lee was a larger-than-life gay guy from Alabama who had worked as a contractor at a US Military base in Berlin before somehow becoming involved in the running of the club. He had a cruel wit, a great camp Southern accent (y'all!), and seemed to know most of the more eccentric of West Berlin's "cafe society."

Sure enough, Lee was organizing a cocktail afternoon at Ruby's, a chintzy bar just up the street from where I was. It was kind of a warm-up party for the club night and Lee insisted I come over "to meet the gang." I killed some time at a local record store and bought a couple of imported Italian House tunes I hadn't heard in London before heading over to Ruby's. The place was just off the Ku'dam and looked like a relic from the decadent days of the Weimar Republic. Huge red drapes blocked out most of the natural light, while the red-flocked wall paper, red leather booths and pink lamp shades gave the interior a slightly demonic rosy hue. Lee and his "gang" were seated around a couple of tables and were already well into their second round of Martinis and Manhattans. A quick glance told me I was the youngest of those present and also the most casually dressed. Lee's friends looked like they'd all been big fans of David Bowie in the mid-1970s. The guys had slicked back hair and wore very tailored suits while the women sported 1940s retro dresses and fairly severe hair styles. Lee, dressed in his regulation black leather jeans and black polo neck sweater, introduced me to everyone. They were friendly and, out of politeness to me, spoke to each other mostly in English. A couple of them asked me what kind of music I was going to be playing at the club that night, but I got the impression that they weren't really that interested. In dance music at least, popular culture was fast leaving them behind. They spoke about art galleries, theatre openings and cocktail parties. The contemporary club world of hardcore hip-hop, acid house and sweaty kids dropping 'E' and dancing until the early hours was an alien culture to them. So, after the initial interest in the "London DJ," their attention gradually switched back to their own circle of friends, gossip and cultural certainties. I was an observer, on the outside looking in, nodding occasionally when someone tried to bring me into the conversation, laughing when someone made a joke, but mainly just listening and watching. It was an

occupational hazard when I DJ'ed abroad, hanging out with strangers, but a bearable one. It passed a couple more hours and then I was back at the hotel. After a quick nap, I ordered dinner from room service, showered and got ready for the party. My day certainly had a symmetry to it. Ten o'clock and Lee picked me up in his 1960s Merc for the trip over to Kreuzberg, the district where the Beehive was situated. Kreuzberg was the roughest part of West Berlin, home not only to a large immigrant population but also to most of the city's anarchists. Their particular form of anarchy was ensuring that Kreuzberg stayed poor and "oppressed." A couple of weeks into the new year, a trendy restaurant had opened around the corner from the Beehive. The anarchists decided that new restaurants meant yuppies, so, on the opening night, a bunch of unwashed thugs had stormed into the place and thrown human feces at the diners. Not surprisingly, the place shut for good the next day. Luckily, the Beehive could afford a good security firm to keep the scumbags out, but even so, they'd had many letters threatening action—including petrol bombs—against their evil "capitalist disco whorehouse." That was kind of typical of the dead-end, dated attitudes of the Berlin anarchists. Whereas kids in Britain saw club culture as a chance to be creative, expressive, even mildly rebellious, the German anarcho-nuts saw clubland as yet another conspiracy dreamed up by global capitalism. In their world I was probably just another yuppie collaborator working against "the people" by playing them the latest dance tracks from New York and London.

So, Lee parked his car in the security guarded, fenced-in courtyard back of the club, and we lugged my record boxes through the fire exit into the den of decadent, bourgeois imperialism. The warm-up DJ was already on and the club was slowly filling up. I sat at the owner's table and knocked back a couple of B-52 shooters to calm my nerves. Soon I was primed and ready to inflict more suffering on the downtrodden masses of West Berlin's night life.



By midnight the place was heaving. The disco lights struggled to cut through the blueish clouds of cigarette smoke and the crush round the bar was several people deep. The warm-up DJ had done a good job in slowly building up the musical atmosphere. People were on the dance floor and in the mood to really cut loose. It was time for me to earn my keep. The club was open until five on Saturdays, so I tried to pace myself. If I got the dancers too crazy, too early, it would be hard to sustain that level of excitement for five solid hours. So I played some good, brand new tunes that I hoped the crowd didn't know and then started dropping in some of the really big, popular tunes of the moment. After just an hour of DJ'ing, I knew it was going to be a great night. The dance floor was full and people were even dancing on the low-slung seating that ran around the bar area. Once a place is rocking like that, it was a question of building them up, letting everyone go crazy for a few tunes, and then gently bringing them down for a while before letting it rip again.

Unlike the Friday night, the time flew by, and I hadn't looked at my watch once until around 4:30 in the morning when the owner decided it was time to wind things down. The club was still busy, but Lee came over to the DJ booth and insisted I put on a cassette of background music and join him over at the owner's table. If I'd known then what that short walk over to that table would lead to, I would have walked straight out of the club and headed back to my hotel.

But instead, I innocently sat down as Lee poured me a glass of champagne and introduced me to a couple of serious-looking guys in their early 30s.

"Jay, baby, this is Ralf and Gunter. They're good friends of mine and I think they have a proposition for you. Hey, don't look so worried, it's strictly business."

We shook hands and I sat down to hear what their proposition was going to be. Ralf, who, with his close-cropped bleached blonde hair and beat-up leather jacket, looked more music biz than Gunter, started the conversation.

"You were very good tonight. I liked the way you mixed different musical styles. Is this what you play in London?"

I was too tired for what I thought was going to be a press interview, so I was fairly curt with my reply.

"Yeah, it's what I play in London. I'm glad you like it."

Ralf suddenly leaned forward in his seat and gripped my arm.

"This London club thing is really big now. Here in Germany, but also everywhere. I read about you in the Face Magazine, about how the London club sound is leading the world. Well, I want to tie that London cool thing in with a brand new band from here in Germany."

I shrugged. I couldn't see how a German band tied into me and the London club scene, unless maybe they wanted me to do a dance remix for them. Or, more likely, they were about to give me a promotional dance mix of the band's new single and they expected me to play it for them back in London. The idea of some bland Euro-pop concoction didn't exactly fill me with joy. I guess my face showed I wasn't impressed with what I thought they were about to ask me because Gunter chipped in to the conversation. He got straight to the point.

"Jay, Ralf is the manager of a wonderful new band called Static Boy. I'm their label manager at Polydor Germany. We think Static Boy are going to be massive. Their album is finished and we want

to do a promotional tour with launch parties and we want you to be the DJ for those parties.”

Again, my response was less than enthusiastic. The thought of touring around Germany for a couple of weeks, playing warm-up for some rock band, didn't appeal to me.

“Okay, I can call you next week when I'm back in London and let you know what my schedule is ...”

“Look Jay, we really want a London DJ to create a club atmosphere at these parties. We'll pay you well, we'll cover your travel and accommodations, but we really need to know by Monday morning if you will do it.”

He soundly slightly exasperated with me. I was too drunk to care but tried to be more businesslike.

“Well, I really need to know more about the trip, the dates and how long I'll be away ...”

My attention was momentarily distracted by a passing drunk balancing a full beer glass on his head. While I paused, Gunter returned to the attack.

“Okay, if you don't want to come with us to New York, Tokyo, Paris, Rio de Janeiro and Moscow, we'll just have to see if we will find another DJ for the tour.”

And just like that, I was all ears. I didn't want to suddenly sound too interested because we hadn't talked money yet, but the tour now had real potential. I tried to recover lost ground.

“Look, I didn't say I wasn't interested. I just need to know more information about the tour. You know, how many nights do I work, how many hours I'll play for. Do the band want me to play backing tracks while they're performing?”

Sensing my barely concealed change of heart, Ralf grabbed my arm again. I hoped this wasn't a sign of any intentions on his part.

“Nein, this is the great thing. The band won't actually play at the parties. They'll be there to talk to the press while you play their album and then, once you've done that, you just make party as you've done here tonight. So it will be just like a club night. This is the way to do things in the music business now. Dance and clubs are the big fashion. Static Boy are kind of dance and pop, like your Depeche Mode or Pet Shop Boys. And we will pay you very well!”

I mentally groaned at the thought of a German Depeche Mode, but I had to admit that in other ways the tour was sounding better and better.

“When are you thinking of starting the parties?” I asked.

Ralf and Gunter exchanged a quick glance before Ralf smiled and patted my arm yet again.

“The tour starts in Moscow in three weeks. It will take us at least two weeks to sort out the visas for the trip, which is why we need your answer straightaway. From Moscow, we come back to do a club night here in Berlin. After Berlin we make party in London. Then Tokyo, then Rio and New York and Toronto and finally, a small trip around West Germany to celebrate the LP's release here.”

If the money was right this could be amazing. I tried not to let my growing excitement show.

“Sounds pretty good. Two things though, guys: how long will I be away for, and how much am I getting paid for this? I mean, the tour sounds great, but I have a lot of regular club nights in London that I'll miss out on while I'm away.”

Ralf, Gunter and Lee all exchanged knowing looks and smiles. They knew I was hooked. My inner demons stirred.

* * * * *

STEVE SAYER

Pro Swing Dance and Motown
Ambassador by Robert Zoltan



Stephen Sayer is a dancer/instructor from Los Angeles who specializes in LA Style Lindy and Collegiate Shag. While having a love for all things swing his primary influences come from the LA Jitterbugs of the 40s and 50s. He has won many 1st place awards in Lindy Hop and Collegiate Shag competitions as well as being inducted into the California Swing Dance Hall of Fame and Camp Hollywood Hall of Fame. His first love is LA Style Lindy and he enjoys sharing that love with dancers around the world. He runs the monthly Motown Era dance club, Swingin' Soul, at the Mayflower Club in North Hollywood.

RZ: Welcome to Club Ooh La La Magazine, Steve! Great to have you. We've known each other, as dance friends, for about 10 years, 12 years, maybe?

STEVE: I've been around for a long time.

RZ: First of all, where were you born?

STEVE: I was born in Beaver Creek, Ohio, which is a suburb of Dayton, Ohio. I moved to L.A. in 2004.

RZ: I moved here in 2006. I lived in Cincinnati for a few years, a long time before that.

STEVE: Did you dance in Cincinnati at all?

RZ: No, I didn't start dancing until I moved to L.A. I started really late. I was so caught up in my music career and art, mainly music. I was so ambitious, you know, I had tunnel vision. But I used to jog around the Academy of Sciences over there, and they were swing dancing every Sunday on the outdoor stage. And I was always thinking: I gotta learn to do that! So finally I moved to LA, and I just sent a check to 3rd Street Dance Studios. That changed my life. So when did you first start dancing and how did you first get interested in it?

STEVE: I was about 15. It was around 1998 because I got into the music pretty young. I think I was around 11 or 12 when I got into the tunes, like Dean Martin and Bobby Darin and so on. I was going to the record stores every day after school collecting CDs and records. I was also watching the old movies. I saw swing dancing in a movie and I asked my parents for dance lessons for my birthday and they got me ballroom lessons. So I started off doing ballroom in the basement of a church somewhere there in Ohio. And then I saw a flyer for swing dance lessons at a record store. So I started taking swing dance lessons at the Rosewood Arts Center in Beaver Creek, Ohio. The guy who was teaching was Dave Stewart. He lives in L.A. now. He moved L.A. a year or two before I did. He ran the whole swing scene in Dayton, Ohio. This was back, you know, when swing was really trendy.

RZ: Yeah, wasn't there a big commercial?

STEVE: There was the Gap commercial. And some movies.

RZ: It was a big renaissance of swing dancing really, wasn't it?

STEVE: And you had all the new bands, like Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, Brian Setzer, and Royal Crown of View.

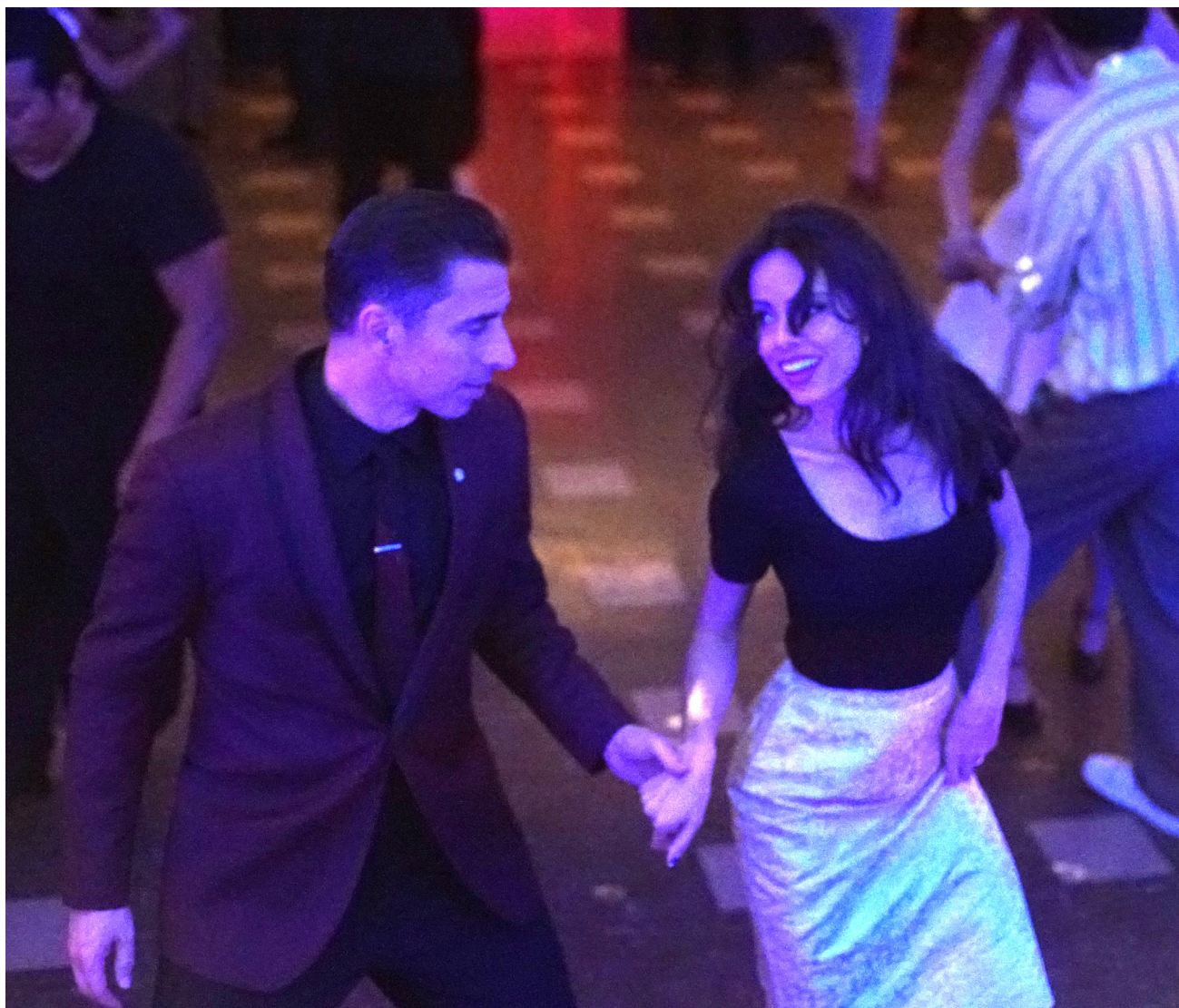
RZ: Before that, partner dancing had kind of disappeared. The hustle, Disco, was the last era of partner dancing.

STEVE: Yeah.

RZ: And people, I think subconsciously, missed it so much. That's why swing came back.

And everything came back a little bit because of swing. And PBS would show those big ballroom dance competitions, before they had *Dancing With The Stars* or anything. That was early to mid nineties. So that's interesting that you got into it really because of the music. But why would a 14-year-old kid be interested in Dean Martin and all like that kind of stuff? Cause that's way before your time. Was your dad into that kind of music?

STEVE: No, I grew up in the church. I went to church three times a week. And I liked the song leaders in church. I always loved gospel. It's still my favorite music, like hymns and spirituals. The song leaders in that church were like my rock stars. And I started singing at church some on Wednesday nights when I was like 15. So I was always really into, you know, the vocals. When I first heard Dean Martin, that like, whoa, changed my life. And then that got me into Sinatra and Bobby Darren and Nat King Cole. And I just went down that rabbit hole, started going to the record stores. Mostly it was all about the singers at first. And then, from there, it just went everywhere, into swing and jazz music. And rock and roll. Elvis became huge with me because he was such an amazing gospel singer also. And I got into blues music. So I really got into all genres of music from the 30s through



the 60s. And when I started taking swing dance lessons, this guy Dave Stewart who ran the scene, taught everywhere, DJed everywhere. He organized all the events. And he soon found out that I had a bigger collection of music than him. So when I was like 15, 16, I started DJing pretty much all the events, all the swing nights. In downtown Dayton, El Diablo Lounge opened up. There was a swing club like three nights a week, and a Latin club, three nights a week. So on the swing nights, I was the DJ. And then on the salsa nights, I was the door man, getting the cover charge, carding people, as a 16, 17-year-old doing that. It's pretty funny. I always got a lot of shit.

RZ: So, in between 16 and coming here in 2004, what happened? Did you start getting interested in competition or was it more just to have fun all this time? And did you have some other dream or career that you were pursuing?

STEVE: Well, I was in high school and I was playing baseball and soccer. I grew up playing sports my whole life and once I started dancing, that really took the focus away from sports. And my first three or four years of getting into dancing, I was obsessed. And living in Ohio, I didn't really have a lot of access to learning. So I traveled all the time. I came out to LA. I went out to D.C., Chicago, New York. I was going to the American Lindy Hop Championships every year. And I was competing there in the junior divisions and stuff. And I was traveling like, I don't know, seemed like almost every weekend to learn and going all over the United States. and also bringing instructors, great dancers to Ohio to teach. And then I kind of got burned out after doing that for four years. So I kind of stopped dancing for a few years until 2004. I moved to LA and started getting back into it. I started going to Paladino's. Joe's Bar and Grill opened up and had its first swing night when I first moved to LA in like 2004 or 2005. And I was the very first swing dancer to go there on that first night. It was just me and a bunch of older country dancers. And Mark Tortorici, it was his first night having a swing night there. And he asked me to teach a lesson there before the band every week. So I started doing that almost right after I moved to LA. And teaching at Joe's every week, I started getting a following. And then they wanted more than just that one lesson I was teaching every week. So I started teaching at Madilyn Clark studios. That's maybe a mile from Joe's. I started teaching a progressive weekly there once a week. And I did that for years where I would teach at Madilyn Clark studios. And I would teach at Joe's once a week. And then soon after that, I started teaching at Lindy Groove on Thursdays as well. It was all just a part time job, you know, a little extra money. Well, mostly I was working in construction or I worked in film for a few years doing camera lighting work. But I was just, you know, I had no goals of really doing swing dancing full time, making it my career or anything. But I was making extra money doing it and loving getting back into it.

RZ: Right. That's interesting about getting burned out. I find that with anything. I stopped drawing for about a week and a half, two weeks because I have a comic company by which I make my living. And I was pushing so hard for two straight years that I was like, man, I'm just so sick of drawing. And I'm not drawing all the time. I'm drawing or I'm inking or I'm coloring or I'm writing for the other artists I have or whatever. Your brain has to have a pattern change because it really will take your joy away. And once you take that break, I think that you can really come back to it and you can really love it again. I took a break from swing dancing for about seven months not long ago. I got a little disillusioned with it, the dance scene here in general, mainly the swing scene. As you get older, hope-

fully, you become more mature. And then you realize that there are a lot of things going on that aren't very mature in certain scenes. Then I got back into dancing in my own way. I've been dancing solo, as I wrote about in issue 1 of Ooh La La Magazine, in the first letter to the editor. Oh, and this issue too, I talk about solo versus partner dancing. And I was never really comfortable dancing by myself. I know I'm a good dancer, but unless you've done something for a really long time, there's always this kind of self-judgment. So maybe I would occasionally dance a little by myself. But especially in the swing scene, most people don't dance solo. When I came back to dancing, I just started going to Shoo Shoo Baby and later to The Stowaway, and I was like, fuck it. I just started dancing by myself two, three straight hours. Nobody else dancing. I realized how repressed people were. I'm used to dancing alone now. I found out that I'm as good a solo dancer as a partner dancer. That's what I talk about in this issue's article, that there's a freedom with solo dancing that you can't have when you're partner dancing. And then with partner dancing, there's a synchronicity and connection that you can't have when solo. But I really came to appreciate and enjoy dancing by myself and I never thought I'd feel that way. And I really like your event, Swingin' Soul, because that's my era of music too, though I tend to go about five or ten years later, like the early 60s to late 70s. So when I go to your event, there are a few women there who just, you know, are very free. And we dance solo together half the time. I'll tell you, it's really changed things for me. But how about you? Do you do much solo dancing?

STEVE: I love dancing by myself to soul and R&B music. I got into solo jazz dancing when I was younger. And now I don't really like doing it, you know, like solo Charleston, solo jazz stuff anymore. For me, it's not that fun. But hell yeah, I love dancing by myself to, say, put on some Jackie Wilson or something.

RZ: That's what I mean! I don't dance by myself to swing. I don't find that very interesting. I'll do some fake tap dancing. But R&B and Soul of the 60s is my favorite. And I like the hustle, but really, my favorite is old R&B. And then, funk, like Chic. Chic is probably my favorite group of that era. That music is, man, I realized that that's just ... I don't know if I was, you know, if there are past lives. But when I hear that, even as a little kid, I danced all the time. I was crazy about dancing. When I hear swing, I love it too. But mainly it's that era that we're talking about. When I hear Soul and R&B and that funk music, something happens. I'm totally connected to that. Soul-wise, something hits me. And I just feel like a little kid. I get up and, like, I just don't care. I don't see how people can stay in their chairs when they hear that. They have to be forcing themselves to stay seated and still.

STEVE: Yeah, for me, it's impossible. Cause it's just the best dance music there is.

RZ: So, shifting gears back again, I was kind of surprised that you didn't really think of doing it as a living. So do you still work another job, or are you making a living as a swing dancer?

STEVE: The only job I have now is swing dancing.

RZ: That's fantastic!

STEVE: Since 2011, I've just been doing that. I didn't expect I would be doing it for this long. I think I'm going to keep doing it a lot longer.

RZ: Well, I mean, it's difficult to be an artist of any kind. Being in entertainment or the arts in the United States is so incredibly difficult. So anybody that's able to navigate a career, even if you're also tangentially doing things related, is a great accomplishment. People always have this big dream, they want to



be a big pop star or whatever. And the reality of being a professional musician or professional artist is not like that for most people. Being a professional artist is a huge amount of compromises, it's a huge amount of shifting what you do, having various forms of income that are all connected to your vocation and your skills and talent. And I suppose you make most of your money from teaching, right?

STEVE: Yeah, teaching is definitely my bread and butter, my steady income, but I also make good amount of money on performance jobs and also throwing events.

RZ: Yeah, I saw that you'd been in a couple of movies, you'd done some dancing in movies?

STEVE: So I did, I think, *Gangster Squad* was one of the first ones I did. And more recently, what was that called? It was a Brad Pitt movie, it was really long, *Babylon*. I've done so much over the years, but I don't do it that often. *A League of Their Own*, the TV series. We did the first episode of that. And I've done music videos for Adele and Leon Rimes. And I was on *Dancing With The Stars* and a bunch of other TV shows and commercials.

RZ: I'll bet the pay on those things varies a lot, right?

STEVE: Yeah, I don't love it. It's not something I pursue because I've never enjoyed it. Because it's always really, really long hours. And the majority of the time, we're just sitting around. And not actually dancing. And then I know when I first did *Gangster Squad*, I had it in my mind, this is going to be amazing! I'm going to have this sweet scene, you know, like in all the old movies where they really highlighted the dancing. But like everything I've done, it's just basically, it's just background, you know. And even then, sometimes they cut the scene.

RZ: You've probably heard what Fred Astaire said when they wanted him to dance in movies. He told them either the camera's going to dance or I'm going to dance. So when you watch his dance scenes, it's usually one camera take. There was no editing going on. That's what he didn't want. He didn't want, he just wanted the camera there shooting the dancers. So, going back to Swingin' Soul. I know you did other events before that. One was on a Sunday night with blues music.

STEVE: Yeah, that was me and Mark. When I started working with him at Joe's, we just started doing more and more stuff together. Started with just one night a week. And then the next thing we opened up was the Sundays at the Moose Lodge, which we called the Lowdown. And we did it at the Moose Lodge for a while and then we eventually moved that to Joe's. And it was the same thing, Sundays, blues at Joe's. And then I think after that, we started doing Wednesdays down at West Hollywood. I did so many events with Mark. And then we started doing more nights at Joe's. From the start, when I moved here, I built my whole life pretty much around Joe's. So I've always lived close to Joe's. I've always taught at Madilyn Clark studios, which is around the corner from Joe's. So sad that it's not around anymore.

RZ: I wasn't as connected to Clifton's as you were to Joe's, obviously, because of the time you spent there, but that was heartbreaking for me when it closed. And for a lot of bands. Two swing bands a week were being hired there, you know, every Friday and Saturday night. And so that's that's been sad. But The Stowaway is a great new live music scene, and I'm excited that Club Ooh La La has its opening night there on May 9th of 2024. So you said you're gonna keep Swingin' Soul going as long as you can. And that's in North Hollywood at the Mayflower Club.

STEVE: Right.

RZ: So I guess the last thing I want to ask you is, how did you meet your wife, Karine, who is also a marvelous dancer? She's from Brazil, I know.

STEVE: Yeah, I met her at Joe's, man!

RZ: How did she move here, and was she out dancing when you met?

STEVE: She was living in Sao Paulo, Brazil and she quit her job and was just going to travel Europe and the United States for however long, I can't remember, months or something and then go back to Brazil. And LA was her last stop before going back home. Yeah, and I met her at Joe's, just social dancing.

RZ: That's crazy.

STEVE: And she was about to go back to Brazil. And I was about to leave to Europe for three months. And we met and we hit it off right away. And yeah, like a year later we got married at Joe's.

RZ: Wow, did you still go to Europe?

STEVE: Yeah. That was back when I was doing dance residencies and I was doing a three month residency in Barcelona teaching there. And on the weekends, I taught in other countries. And she came out to Barcelona after she went back to Brazil to see me. That's where we really fell in love, really dated and courted. And in Barcelona and after Barcelona, she came back to LA with me. And yeah, then we kept it going.

RZ: That's fantastic.

STEVE: Yeah, we got married in 2017, and we had our baby shower a year after that at Joe's.

RZ: What a story! So many people, they try to chase after things. And like, you know, these guys, they're reading books on how to meet women and all that stuff. And I'm thinking, do what you love and be there. When I met my former wife, I was on tour as an actor. When I met my last girlfriend, I met her dancing. When I met the woman that was previously really the love of my life, I met her while I was touring as a singer-songwriter on the West Coast. And she was in the audience because she loved the band after me. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. I was always doing something I loved and I was good at, and that was my place to be. And I think that the two things I would tell people, is that you have to come to a level of self acceptance. It's not really about confidence. It's about accepting yourself as you are. That's much deeper than confidence. And the second one is just go and follow your bliss, like Joseph Campbell said. Do what you love. And while you're doing what you love, you'll meet someone who shares that love in some way, that is a kindred spirit. So anyway, now you guys have a young daughter.

STEVE: Yeah, she's four.

RZ: And that's changed your life, I'm sure.

STEVE: Oh, yeah, 100%. Everything's about her now. So everything revolves around her.

RZ: And is she dancing yet?

STEVE: She loves to dance. She has dance classes in school every week. And she comes home and she shows us the routines because they put on shows. And she practices her routines almost every day after school. But she's really into gymnastics right now. That's her favorite thing.

RZ: Well, especially when they're young, I mean, that's all really good for them. Well, Steve, thanks a lot for your time, man. In the dance community, you talk to somebody and five minutes later, or more likely five seconds later, somebody comes by and asks them to dance. So it's been great to talk at length. And I hope to see you and Karine at Club Ooh La La!

STEVE: Yeah, man! Thanks!

* * * * *

To Contact Steve for dance lessons, visit his Facebook teaching page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/591819794360215/>

For more info on the Swingin' Soul club, see the article in this issue on Swingin' Soul.

SOLO VERSUS PARTNER DANCING

by Robert Zoltan

When I lived in San Francisco back in the early 2000's, I used to go jogging in Golden Gate park. On Sundays around lunchtime, I would see the swing dancers dancing up on the stage near the De Young Museum and the Academy of Sciences. I longed to be able to dance like that, but I was so caught up in my career as a singer/songwriter/producer that I thought I could not spare the time and energy. When I moved to Los Angeles in the fall of 2006, I forced myself to send in a check to 3rd Street Dance Studios for a four-week swing class. The first class, I felt as nervous as a teenager. But after the class was over, I was completely hooked. I kept going and never looked back.

That first year was so difficult at times. As much as it was a new joy in my life, there was the frustration of my limited knowledge and ability, and the shame of sucking at something—which is required for just about anyone learning to do anything (unless you are a prodigy). I remember going to a dance that first year and struggling through only two or three dances before driving home in self-loathing and despair. But I always bounced back because the desire and love for it was so strong, and the challenge was so invigorating and healthy. I enjoyed more excitement, joy, and growth than negative emotions. I am exaggerating in no way when I say that dancing changed my life. It's hard to imagine that I went through decades without it being a regular part of my existence.

Since 2007, I've devoted myself to various styles of partner dancing, including Lindy Hop, West Coast Swing, Blues, Hustle, Cha-Cha, Salsa and Bachatta. Nothing can match the feeling of moving in synchronicity with a partner to music, especially when there is actual physical contact, as there is a majority of the time during a partner dance. But in the last few years, I've discovered an equal joy in solo dancing. Partly due to my frustration of not finding a suitable dance partner to learn and go out dancing to various styles of music, I began dancing by myself at various bars and clubs. And when I say by myself, I mean just that. Much of the time, no one else is even on the dance floor. When it comes to dancing, apart from Puritan America, I don't know if there's ever been such a repressed culture as this

one. There were times in the 20th Century where almost everyone knew how to dance. It was simply a healthy and expected part of social interaction. In the 1950s and 1960s, young people began to dance apart from each other. Something was gained, and something was lost. A freedom of expression was gained, but connection and technical skill suffered. I've used the word "versus" in the title of this article because it creates a provocative headline. But one kind of dancing is not better than the other.

It took me a few nights out to become comfortable with dancing solo, and to dance without much self-consciousness or from a desire to impress anyone (both amount to about the same thing). Some self-consciousness and people-pleasing still remains at times (and that's when I enjoy myself the least), but mostly, I feel a freedom of expression that I was seldom able to attain while dancing with a partner. With a partner, one can enjoy a oneness with another human being that is unique, and the two of you can be surprised in pleasant ways. With solo dancing, one is not encumbered by the necessity of moving in tandem with another partner, either leading or following, and free from expectations. One is also completely free of prescribed moves or steps. And while dancing alone, I try to completely lose myself in the music, and thereby, occasionally even surprise myself.

There are two main ways to learn either partner or solo dancing.

The first is to watch others. "Aping" behavior is one of the main ways in which humans learn to do things—by inheriting and passing them on to others. I learned much from various teachers and other dancers. The first few years that I danced, I took group classes, private lessons, attended events and the complimentary lessons that were offered at the start of the night, and went out dancing as much as I could—observing, copying, and asking questions of others that were more experienced than I. I also learned by watching recordings of great dancers: everyone from Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire to Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson and dancers on Soul Train.

The second way to learn is to listen to your body as it responds to the music. Thinking is your enemy. Thinking will slow you down, interfere with coordination, and make you self-conscious about what you're doing. It is very similar to playing an instrument. You may think occasionally while you are taking lessons, gaining new information, learning something specific. But while engaged in the activity, thinking will encumber you the same way that thinking would encumber a classical or jazz piano player. A musician plays much faster than the waking mind is able to think. By the time the thinking mind would calculate, "play that note, that note, then that note" the body is able to play that sequence of notes at least three or four times. Sometimes, this is referred to as muscle memory. And that's the only way to get better. You've just got to do it.

Although you might not make dance moves as fast as a pianist's fingers along a keyboard (though some tap dancers seem to come close), your body knows where and how to move much earlier, much faster, and in a much more naturally agile manner than is possible to think yourself into doing it. Thinking freezes up the natural instincts. I've experienced this firsthand.

Before the pandemic, Cliftons's Republic in downtown Los Angeles used to have swing bands in the ballroom every Friday and Saturday night (They stopped having swing bands regularly after the pandemic for unknown reasons, and a wonderful era came to an end. They are now closed for renovations.). One reason that I loved Clifton's was because, on any given night, there might be far more non-dancers there than dancers. I've always much more enjoyed a diverse crowd that is not stifled by a closed-community feeling. On some nights, I danced much more with non-swing dancers than with trained dancers. My lead was strong enough that I was able to lead the women I danced with through the dance, and make them feel as if they could dance. Most of them could, but they didn't believe it at first. If they were reluctant, but I could tell that they really wanted to dance but were simply shy or afraid, I would ensure them that I could lead them, and they didn't need to know anything. Most of these women had been watching me dance and saw this was true, and thus, usually accepted the offer. Some were naturally quite good. But others, once they were on the dance floor, suffered a kind of brain freeze. They were convinced everyone was watching them, that they might look stupid, and that they didn't know how to dance. Thinking in this way, thinking at all, they suddenly found they had even forgotten how to walk! I literally just tried to walk them across the floor and they struggled with that. So I usually told them something one of my first dance teachers, the excellent Danny Ponickly, once told me. "Dancing is just walking to music." So I would ask these women, "You know how to walk, right?" They would say yes. I would then tell them that we were just going to walk across the floor in time to the music. Usually, that helped a great deal. Then I would walk a bit forward, then backward, and back and forth a bit. Suddenly, we were doing a simple version of the Charleston! I would then quickly show them how to connect with me by offering a soft resistance to my push or pull, and we were off! If they had any proficiency at all, by the end of three or four minutes, I was turning them and moving them about the floor. Most were thrilled. I had several tell me how amazing it felt. I even had one woman say, "That was the most amazing experience of my life!" The joy that I felt from being able to help her experience that was as rewarding as any "advanced" dancing I had ever done with a trained and talented partner.

And that's really the goal, isn't it? We want to feel joy in whatever we're doing. Or if it's unpleasant, we hope to be able to accept it. Learning anything can be difficult at times, but that must be accepted. A baby has to learn how to walk. Learning to dance as an adult is much easier, especially if you have any coordination or sense of timing and rhythm. The joys you will experience are great, and the rewards you will receive in the areas of emotional and mental health and physical fitness and well-being are numerous and priceless.

This is why we'll be offering short dance lessons at the beginning of each Club Ooh La La night, in a variety of forms: solo and partner dancing in various styles. These short lessons won't make you an expert, but it will help you get started, and hopefully encourage you, and show you that you too can dance. You don't have to be a professional. You don't even have to dance really well. You just have to dance as you are able and as you feel the music. Kick your feet! Bob your head! Shake your booty! This is a dance club for you. This is a dance club for everyone. This is Club Ooh La La.

SWINGIN' SOUL AT THE MAYFLOWER

RETRO BARS AND CLUBS

The Mayflower Club is an British-American Social Club founded in 1965. Considering that Motown was most popular in the United States and Great Britain, perhaps it's an appropriate location for Steve Sayer's monthly Friday night Swingin' Soul Club. How many places, even in the supposedly diverse culture of the Los Angeles area, can one go out to dance to artists like Aretha Franklin, The Jackson Five, and Otis Redding? That's the kind of music you'll hear at Swingin' Soul. Steve Sayer and guest DJs spin tunes from 9 PM till midnight for your dancing pleasure.

Don't know how to partner dance? Not a problem. Handsome and sharply-dressed Steve Sayer and



his lovely and equally talented wife, Karine, offer dance lessons at 8:15 to help you get started. The lesson is included in the cover price (usually \$15 for advance tickets), and the lesson alone is worth the cost. The doors open at 7:30 PM and there's a full bar with Guinness on draft and low drink prices (hard to find now in LA).



As a partner dancer, Steve's event is probably my favorite, because he and I vibe to a very similar music, although Club Ooh La La covers more the era from the early 1960s to late 1970s instead of the 50s through early 60s. And it's a welcoming crowd, with a minimum of neurotic snobby cliques, which one often encounters with any sub-cultures. The hosts of an event set the mood, and Steve and Karine are both friendly, fun-loving, generous people who will dance with anyone, whatever your level of ability.

Although it's not exactly a club vibe at the Mayflower, the full bar (and low prices), the music, the people, and the hosts of the event compensate for any lack of nightclub atmosphere. I highly recom-



mend it to anyone who loves this era of music and loves to dance, or wants to learn. And I guarantee you'll be seeing Steve and Karine at Club Ooh La La. For that matter, you'll see me, Robert Zoltan, at Swingin' Soul every month! So come on out! And if you're a "follow" (as opposed to a lead), please ask me for a dance. Even if you've never danced before, I'll be happy to lead you through a fun, safe dance, as will Steve and Karine, and several of the other talented and friendly dancers at Swingin' Soul. See you on the dance floor!

Steve's Motown Era dance club, Swingin' Soul, is held once a month on Friday nights at the Mayflower Club: 11110 Victory Blvd, North Hollywood, CA 91606, United States. For more information, check out Steve's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/LAJitterbug> or the Mayflower website: <https://mayflowerclub.com/events/steve-sayers-swingin-soul-night/>



SPACE HAPPY

RETRO COCKTAILS

One Starry Night, Robert Zoltan walked into Shoo Shoo Baby bar and asked Fernando Garcia to create something special for him involving gin. Fernando went to work, and within a space of two minutes, poured out a luscious pink-orange libation that thrilled Robert's senses. Robert suggested Fernando name it after his retro science fiction comic book published by Sexy Fantastic Comics. And so, the Space Happy cocktail was born!

Fernando is such a generous guy, he's revealing the recipe to the rest of the cosmos!

2oz Gin (preferably Barr Hill for its honey infusion)
.75oz lime
.75oz simple syrup
4-6 mint leaves
2 sliced cucumbers
2 dashes angostura bitters

Shake all contents and strain into a coupe glass
Garnish with a mint leaf

Fernando Garcia is co-creator of The Industry Perspective Podcast. You can find him tending Bar Friday-Sunday at Shoo Shoo Baby in Downtown LA. If you give him a winning smile and ask him real nice-like, he might even make you a Space Happy.



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