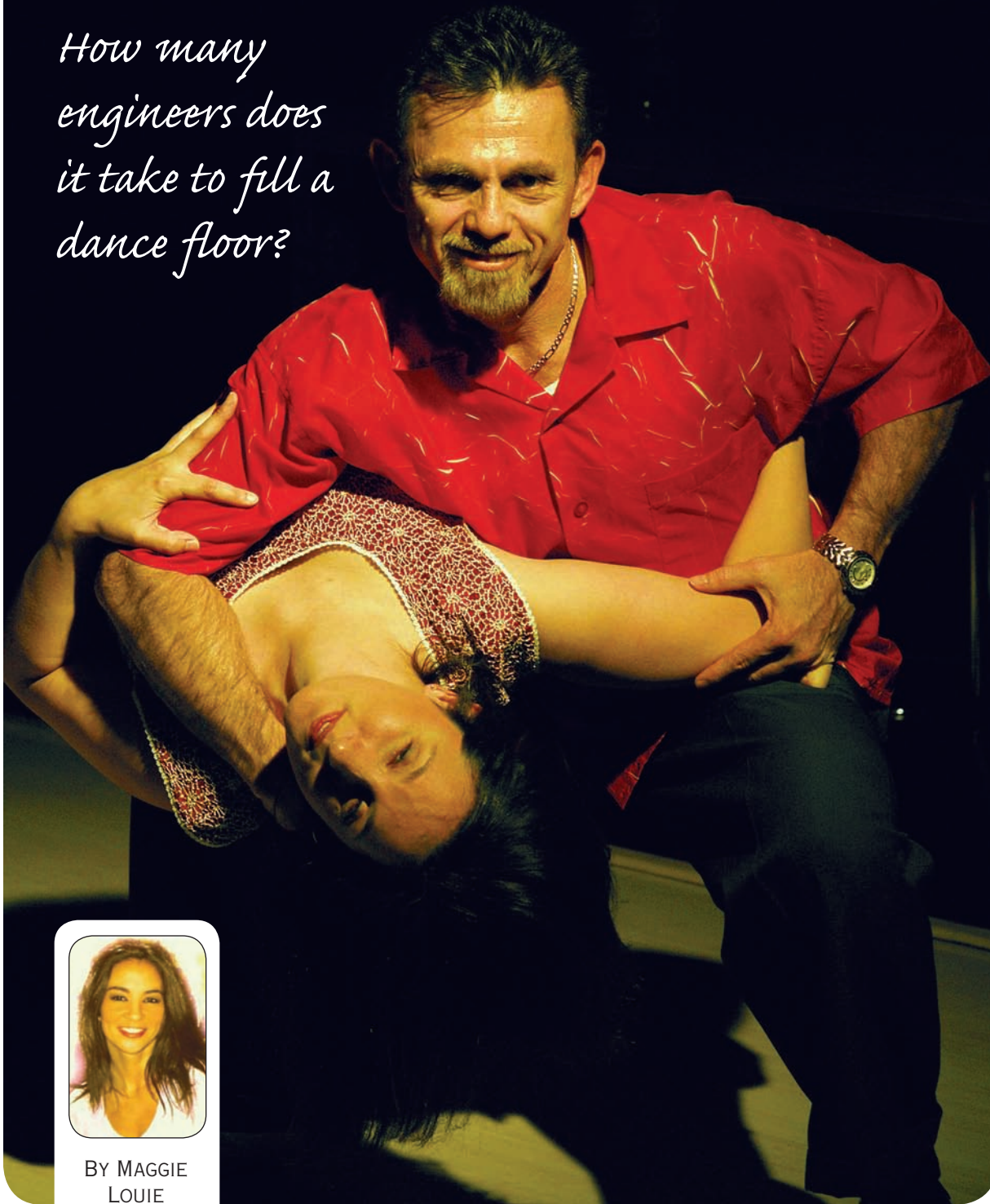


FROM DESK TO DANCE

How many engineers does it take to fill a dance floor?



BY MAGGIE LOUIE



You may know salsa and swing but have you ever heard of Zoomba or Bachata? In an unusual e-mail I received I was caught off guard by a series of bizarre photographs that motivated me to want, no, NEED, to solve the Bachata enigma and other mysteries like: What is a "Flying Squid Battalion"? And who is this dancer they call "Edie the Salsa Freak"? So on a Wednesday night I climbed into my car and made the so-far-from-midtown pilgrimage to *Cordova* in search of **The Celeste Dance Studio!**

I arrived around 8:30 p.m. expecting to find women dressed up like Charo and men in sombreros. Why sombreros? I don't know, but I was disappointed to find a club full of normal people wearing what they went to work in, shuffling around the stage learning how to dance.

I was ready to pack up and leave when owner and salsa instructor John Morey asked me to dance. I was uncomfortable at first, not having ever been much of a dancer, and a bit intimidated, but within five minutes he'd shown me the basic steps to Salsa, and I was having a blast.

The dance studio and club turns out to be not so much the hip trendy dance joint I had imagined, but more an escape for over-worked middle-aged desk jockeys who want to get their drink on and maybe learn a few moves. I personally enjoyed it 100 times more than the typical overcrowded, *thumpy*, meat markets of Downtown.

The music was loud enough to enjoy but soft enough to carry on conversation. I also like that you can bring your own alcohol. There was a bar that serves beer and mixers, but drinking hardly dominated the atmosphere. It truly felt like a place for real live "grown-ups."

Despite the sexy nature of the dances, it was very couple-oriented. One pair I watched dancing looked as if they'd stolen a naughty treat from the kitchen. There's no denying Latin dance is extremely erotic. So hot, in fact, I drove home thumbing through my phone for old lovers' numbers.

The thing that seemed so devious is how tremendously conservative they all were. In fact most of the students and instructors at Celeste Studio are some breed of engineer. Ah, the paradoxical life of a cog. For whatever reasons, these mild-mannered paper slaves come alive the minute they hit the floor.

Candice Gustine & Jaredan Braal **RED HOT LINDY HOP**

Red Hot Lindy Hop is just one of many dance groups using Celeste studio and club for rehearsals and lessons.

Dance group member Jaredan Braal, like most of the men I interviewed, is an engineer. Candice Gustine is a graphic designer by day and uses her background to do all of the design work for red Hot Lindy Hop.

They looked like they should be on skates doing a production of **Swing Kids on Ice** and I mean that as a compliment. They were just so squeaky clean and wholesome, even doing their "Dirty Dancing" moves and bopping around the floor. Are white-bread middle class folks "Bringin' Sexy Back?"

I asked Braal and Gustine to explain their groove:

Q: So what is the difference between Lindy Hop and West Coast Swing?

A: Lindy Hop evolved in the clubs of New York in the late 20s and is based in jazz, tap, breakaway

and Charleston.

West Coast Swing evolved from Lindy Hop and Jitterbug much later and has similarities to line dances.

Q. So do you make your living as a dance instructor?

A. No. It's a passion really. I just love it. I work as a medical engineer at Medtronics.

The Red Hot Lindy Hop dance group travels up to three times a month to **Lindy Exchanges**, a gathering where they get a chance to dance with other Lindy Hop dancers who share their passion.



Club Celeste aims to be THE PLACE for Hot Salsa in Memphis. Located near the corner of Germantown Parkway and Macon Road (behind O'Charlie's restaurant), the club has a strict dress code and offers dance lessons regularly.



John Morey OWNER & INSTRUCTOR

John's career in avionics engineering did not present many thrills, and he'd long searched for an outlet to reignite his flame. Passion had begun to fade into dreams of a bigger cubicle and perhaps a more reasonably priced fuel-efficient car. That is, until, one fateful night when John's life was forever changed by the pounding sound of... **LATINO DRUMS!**

"I noticed right away this guy on the floor. He had serious moves. He looked so cool. Then I saw the line of girls waiting to dance with him just because he could Salsa. That was it. I pulled the guy off to the side, got his number, and started taking lessons that week."

After several years of dancing, including appearances at the largest salsa gathering, the 2004 "The West coast Salsa Congress," Morey's passion for Salsa began to take over his life and finally in Nov. 2006 he opened Celeste Dance Studio and Club.

Q. What's the difference between Merengue and Salsa?

A. Merengue originated in the Dominican Republic – evolving from ballroom dancing and is more suggestive. Salsa is an Afro- Caribbean dance but there are Puerto Rican styles, Cuban styles, and all different veins.

Q. What is the difference between Zumba and Bachata?

A. Zumba is like an aerobics work out to Latin dance and Bachata is a Latin dance performed in accompaniment with Bachata music.

Q. Do you have to be coordinated or have any dance background to learn Latin dances?

A. No, Not at all. Men typically take longer to learn than women but anyone can learn these steps.

Q. In teaching Latin dances do you find it helpful to seduce your students first?

A. No, no, no, no! All of my instructors are very professional. Yes, Salsa can be a very dangerous dance if a man cannot control himself but we do not want any more Salsa related divorces.

So there you have it- Latin; Swing; Jitterbug; Zumba: safe, good fun. Oh, and as for Edie

the Salsa Freak, she is a guest instructor offering workshops at Celeste Studio on June 9th & 10th. A beginner's boot camp will be included. The Flying Squid Battalion is an eight-piece ensemble band that appears alternating Thursdays at Club Celeste.

For more information on classes and clubbing call 901-755-8860 or visit www.celestedancestudio.com. Club Celeste is a 21-and-over club that has a dress code of "business casual" with no T-shirts or shorts allowed. Salsa lessons for beginners are offered at various times, including a Salsa Boot camp for beginners on May 5.