Report of TCA’s participation in the 2020 San Diego Tango Festival

By Michael Holcomb

Lead by Albuquerque’s Mayor of tango, Simona Faro, and Tango Club of Albuquerque’s unofficial festival outreach rep Khondeh Mirshek , TCA hit a new high with our SDTF participation. TCA folks covered the dance floor for 5 days building up to the annual explosion of celebration, but I am getting ahead of myself.

Festivals are a challenge because, as my friend put it, you are on a treasure hunt, looking for those one or two treasures that overwhelm your life. Khondeh found her treasure, as she told me and everyone, over and over, in the person of Louisville festival copromoter Mara‘s Colombian Husband. Mara told me she rented her husband to Khondeh for the weekend! I’ve never seen Khondeh so animated! Way to go, Khondeh! Mara is a dancer’s gem herself. I think we might try Louisville this year.

Queen Simona’s footwork dazzled the crowd as usual. She ruled every floor, resplendent in one of numerous her shimmering tango gowns. All the best leads (and some not so best) stalked her, barely letting her get a drink of water!

I missed the first three nights due to a superbug which flattened me bedridden, but did get out of bed to hear Derek Tang’s wonderful, creative, Saturday afternoon set, which was stunning. Derek led off with Jueves and El Mortero Del Globito by Orquesta Tipica Victor , a really great beginning, followed by a Fresedo tando of Buscandote and Mas alla. Then he upped the energy with a live recording by our favorites, our Orchestra Romantica Milonguera, playing Poema, Invierno and 2 others. The floor was sizzling! After some D’arienzos including Por que Razon and La Payanca, Derek put us into a dream state with Pescadores de Perlas by Sasson. What a song to dance to! Pescadores de Perlas! It was all a blur after that for me, as Tanturi, Donato and all the rest kept us dancing non-stop. Not many “greatest hits” at all. Just perfect strong beats, and very strong melodies. Way to go, Derek. You are another young master DJ.

Monday, I rested in the afternoon, to arrive ready for my favorite top top top DJ, the well known, young Olga Bogatova from San Francisco. She started very strong out of the gate at Albuquerque fest last November, but at SD, her milonga was from 9:30pm to 3am! Practically no one was there but me at 9:30 pm, since you had to arrive late to be able to even have a chance to make it til 3am. But I wanted to hear her opening. So what did she play as people drifted in? Believe it or not, she opened with Di Sarli Lullabyes! Yes, Di Sarli lullabyes! Who would think di Sarli composed such gentle songs over his perfect beat? She led out with Cicatirces followed by ‘Una Noche de Garufa!’ What awesome sensitivity and intelligence to welcome people like this. SDTF is where to go if you love smart thinking, emotionally connecting tango music. The few couples there floated around the floor in a dream state.

 I was soon too busy dancing myself to have time to Shazam much of her incredible set, so the song list went into the either, but it was a spectacular, exhausting set, believe me.

Final day: New year’s eve afternoon DJ was the Tijuana native, Aaron Quetzal Diaz. America, the festival promoter, really knows her music and her DJs, and this was no exception. Aarron opened very, very strong with Gitana Russa by Malerba followed by Tanturi, Orchestra Tipica, Biagi and so on, including a very nice Roberto Rufino set with ‘Tristeza Marina”. Dancing continuously from 3pm to 7pm for the 5th day in a row produced some pretty sore feet, but no one was complaining, certainly not Simona, as she walked off the floor at 7pm, shoes in hand. No one could sit still while Arron was playing.

After a food and nap break, we were back at 9:30, ready for the Hyperion Ensemble Orchestra, featuring a silver flute, double bassist, piano, violin, guitar and really great singers. What a sound! What a delight, with 5 rows of dancers crowding both floors.

Midnight approached. Hundreds of glasses of champagne appeared to the delight of the dehydrated crowd. After stunning teacher performances, and endless table toasts, the room energy swelled with the countdown to midnight. At the stroke of of 12, balloons rained down on us everywhere, so we began making wishes to stomp and pop balloons by. Forget Old Lang Syne. DJ Vincent played Abba’s huge 1976 disco hit, Dancing Queen at full volume, so tall Deborah I knew from Las Puertas and I rushed onto the floor to sing along and ecstatically dance the Hustle. There was west coast, east coast, latin, free form, you name it. We did it all, to the beat of Abba at 100 plus decibels.

This song faded, so I expected a D’arienzo to clam us down. But what did Vincent do. Calm? Forget about it! Chacadera! Wow! My friend and I sat out to watch the long wavy lines form up, shoulder to shoulder, dancers barely squeezing past on each change of place. What a great chaotic chacadera! This faded finally.

 And next…guess what: Vicent went with another chacadera version! Wow. This time the dancers were more organized and again finished with a flourish!

Now time to calm down and do some dancing, right?. But no, no, no, no, no! Calming down is not what Vincent had in mind. Immediately on came a loud fast milonga set! Holy macaroni. The crowd was hysterical! I grabbed my friend and we climbed onto the fourth inside row to join the drunken mahem, spinning deliriously. We had just enough space to move, so I tried a molinete carefully. My friend frowned as we turned, worried that we might collide, but we had room. They were giving us room.

On the second molinete turn, I leaned into it with a super strong double impulse to the sacada like Maxi does with Paloma, and my friend’s leg flew up almost waist high, and she laughed out loud! She was having so much fun, she laughed out loud! I have never had a dance partner laugh out loud due to fun overload. Whoo weeee!

Drenched in sweat after three fast milongas, we sat down to catch our breath and watch (the weekend was always 4T, 4T, 3V, 4T, 4T, 3M….. 4 Tangos, 4 Tangos, 3 Vals, 4 tangos, 4 tangos, 3 milongas.). After two tango sets, Vincent upped the ante again! playing one of the fasted Valses anywhere. I grabbed my other friend, who had by that time had changed into tennis shoes, assured her those would work for Vals and we were off. In a flash Miss step-cautiously goody goody high heel two shoes turned into Miss large springing steps tango dominator, as our spin rotation energy quadrupled. Shoes do make a difference, not just the champagne!

After that, Vincent carried on as strong as ever, but this reporter and friends faded out by 1:30 and left the scene, wasted. But what a scene it was. What energetic music. What dancing! What dancers! What music! What set lists! Unforgettable! And we have the pictures to prove it! See facebook. (…and the memories too. I wish I could remember and list the names of so many TCA members there, My apologies)(and by the way, I’m saving the story of my princess treasure for another time….)

PS. So Please, please join us next year……or, as Warren Miller says, you’ll just be another year older if you don’t…☺