

What's On

High note

Cezary's Picks

Cuba 'a ballet power'

Ballet or football, a 'sport' of triumph

By Cezary Owerkowicz
Special to the Arab Times

Dance in Cuba is a common sight. People dance 'everywhere', every time and at any place. People dance on the streets, in bars, restaurants, parks, day and night, alone and in groups unlike other countries where people dance only on the stage or in a disco. In Cuba, they dance to enjoy and express their joy in life. Often it is not so easy, but beautiful, because of the beauty of the country, of the people, of the love, friendship, just beauty of life itself. But life and love – it is music and rhythm: So how one cannot dance?

Cubans admire people dancing well. This is the result of a high position of ballet as sublimation of common passion and for people practicing this profession. Ballet is a synonym of success, good luck. Social status of ballet artists is comfortable, guaranteeing a prosperous life. Do you know that the art of dance is equally popular and appreciated among male teenagers just like playing football!

However, Carlos Junior Acosta Quesada (b. 1973) was primarily more interested in playing football. His father had quite the opposite opinion. Now he says that profession of a dancer is more difficult and demanding than a football player. Why? Except for many elements, predispositions necessary for professional football player as well as for a dancer, the power, dexterity or endurance, the latter has to be also very musical and good in acting. When, for example, you dance the Romeo & Juliet ballet you tell the viewers a story. I think also that daily training of the dancer is very demanding and aggravating, physically and psychologically.

Condition

We work not only on our condition. We polish every detail. Every step, gesture has to be performed perfectly. There is no place for mistakes, shortcomings. What matters is elegance and beauty of movement. Such minute details are not needed of a football player. When a dancer is injured, his knees are damaged, and besides his looks have to be perfect. This makes our job more difficult, more demanding. We practice for eight hours daily. I doubt if football players practice so much. Despite this, the dancers' earnings are much lower.

During 17 years the star of The Royal Ballet (Covent Garden Opera, London) who is presently artistic director of The Birmingham Royal Ballet, was also a choreographer, pedagogue and activist. Today he is recognized as the successor of such ballet legends, as Mikhail Baryshnikov and Rudolf Nureyev. Who doesn't attend the ballet spectacle at the Covent Garden? You can see him on the screen in the movie Yuli, based on his real story.

Sometimes father is right. He says everything you see in the movie is true to the minute detail. But why the name... 'Yuli'? His father gave him that name. 'Yuli' was the name of a leader of the Sioux tribe. He said, 'Yuli's spirit will be always with the boy, following him and protecting him'. After his father, all Acosta's neighbors were calling him by that name. They were eleven siblings. His sister danced at a disco and began teaching him dance at a very young age. They were a poor family. The children did not have access to books, and often walked barefoot.

Father was a truck driver. Somewhere in the 1930s or 40s he sneaked into a cinema that time which was 'exclusively for whites'. (Yes, it was also in Cuba.) He watched the Italian movie about ballerina and it dazzled him. Finally the cinema staff discovered him and threw him out but the father remembered very well the amazing images of the dance which reflected in his mind. He claimed he loved it instinctively just that he had it in his blood. Later he often referred to the divine element of his son's talent. (NB: He was a descendant of African slaves and believer of Santeria – a kind of voodoo.)

Carlos aka Yuli as a child danced break dance on the Havana streets and was quite good at it. Father was convinced that he has a predisposition for ballet. When a neighbor recommended to Yuli's parents the ballet school, offering free of charge training plus three meals daily and also said it would keep the boy away from bad company, they had no hesi-

tation. They put him there against his will and at the beginning he really hated it.

Attractive

Nobody asked me what I want to do in my life. Ballet at the beginning is deadly boring. There is a need to practice certain figures with piano accompaniment only. Break dance scene in Havana was attractive, extensive and fashionable. We organized competitions in certain districts. Every rivalry was a source for a fight, because everybody liked to win. It was a danger for a 10 years old child. However risk was very attractive for me that time. Similarly like loud music, percussion, electronic and rush of the street. Seemed for me, ballet is opposite of it all.

In the Caribbean region music is everywhere. Cuba is exceptionally eclectic culturally melting point. It is inhabited largely by descendants of black slaves and Spanish, Chinese, French and so on. People live outside due to hot weather that every activity gets the social aspect and musical reflection. Many characteristics rhythms are born that have now penetrated the world. Dance in Cuba is something natural and at a result Cuba somehow became 'a ballet power'.

My dad pushed me and finally I started working hard, to be a good ballet dancer. I started to like the sporting side of ballet, well-developed muscles. Except for this I liked the applause. When I was on the stage, I've seen admiration in the eyes of the viewers. I was a shy child and the performances made me feel extraordinary. Everybody wants to be noticed, said Carlos.

At Habana ballet school a majority of students come from central city districts, not poor people like I was. I feel among them lonely. At the beginning I missed classes and got into troubles, which made me even more alienated. I deserved a nickname Junior el Desastre (Boy Catastrophe).

He says the first time ever he got his birthday cake was when he was 23. He started his international career in Houston, where he spent five years after he joined The Royal Ballet in 1998. Soon he deserved a special position like a leader and Guest Artist. It allowed him to answer a lot of invitations from theaters around the globe because in the words of a London critic: 'a dancer who slashes across space faster than anyone else, who lacerates the air shapes so clear and sharp they seem to throw off sparks'.

I am lucky to be more frequent at Covent Garden spectacles than at in my native Warsaw (very excellent and impressive!) at the National Grand Theater of Opera. I've seen Carlos in such male leading roles like classics as Swan Lake or Giselle. There are no adequate words to express the mastery he presents in his performance. NB: He was the first Afro-soloist at The Royal Ballet. He was the one who changed the situation.

Now in Great Britain there are many such leading stars. There are several associations fighting for diversity, honesty and access to high art, and the effects are visible. Acosta thinks that there is a need to act from bottom up, seek talents among the poor and the sane, not only among the privileged classes and, of course, to invest in education.

Loneliness

Carlos became a famous figure on the international stage. He became also a rich man. He bought for all members of his large family, houses. He is happy that they are close to him. Loneliness accompanied me for most of my life. When I started traveling, dancing around the world, I always longed for home and my loved ones.

He is involved in many social projects. Among others, the project of rebuilding incomplete Academy of Beauty Arts in native Havana, recognized as the pearl of architecture. It was a ruin. When I became Director of Birmingham Royal Ballet I decided to fight for its rescue. I don't lose the faith. Except that I want to work with the poor people, encourage local societies to join the artistic movement.

It looks that it is possible to grow from 'the bottom up' to the rank of 'Global Artist' and be a global human being or to be fully human or complete human is the same. In spite of common opinion that the great artist (also/or a great personality) is always limited by her/his ego.

Editor's Note: Cezary Owerkowicz is the chairman of the Kuwait Chamber of Philharmonic and talented pianist. He regularly organises concerts by well-known musicians for the benefit of music lovers and to widen the knowledge of music in Kuwait. His email address is: cowerkowicz@yahoo.com and cowerkowicz@hotmail.com.



Owerkowicz



A group photo from the event.

A total of three teams included members from GUST

GUST represented in winning teams at KOC Techathon

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Gulf University for Science & Technology students and a teaching assistant were part of three teams that participated in Kuwait Oil Company's Oil & Gas Techathon last month. This competition saw two of the three teams which included GUST team members secure first and second place in the competition. Out of the 12 teams that participated, 3 included members from GUST, as well as students from various universities around Kuwait or employees from the different local energy companies. The event was organized by KOC in partnership with the RISE Center at AUK.

KOC Oil & Gas Techathon is a three-day technology marathon where

engineers, developers, designers and technologists come together to address challenges faced by the oil & gas sector. During the competition, the participants from Kuwait's energy sector and university students team up to develop innovative solutions to overcome specific challenges in areas of health & safety, drilling, well surveillance, and gas operations in Kuwait.

The participants from GUST were: Ali Kelkawi (TA) – leader of 1st place team; Abdalwahab Al-Saleh – member of 1st place team; Osama Kassem – member of 1st place team; Yehya El-Mokaddem – member of 2nd place team; Ahmed Abdullah – member of 2nd place team; Mostafa Shirin Bab –

member of 2nd place team; Sulaiman Al-Mamari – participant; Hashem Al-Sayegh – participant

Associate Professor and Head of GUST's Computer Science Department, Dr Mahmood Elish, said, "The placement of two teams including GUST at the highest rank of the competition is emblematic of the strong curriculum offered, and the preparedness of students to tackle real-life problems."

This accomplishment comes as part of a series of GUST achievements in the field of computer science. Just recently, a GUST student and a teaching assistant were part of the team that won first place in the local NASA Interna-

tional Space Apps Challenge. Many CS students also participated and were recognized at the Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Informatics Awards. What's more, a team from GUST participated at the 5th Annual 24-Hour Carnegie Mellon University Hackathon and won first place for the Best App Design. Also notable is that GUST's Computer Science team was ranked 3rd at the seventh Kuwait Collegiate Programming Contest (KCPC), where the competitors were able to solve seven programming problems within five hours. The winning team members, officially qualified to advance to the Africa and Arab Collegiate Programming Championship which were held in Sharm El Sheikh.



Members of the AUK community visiting the display.



Representatives of the Kuwait National Assembly in the AUK library.

American university hosts National Assembly

AUK celebrates 57th anniversary of Kuwait's Constitution

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The American University of Kuwait (AUK) Library hosted the Kuwait National Assembly to celebrate the 57th anniversary of Kuwait's Constitution. During their time on campus, representatives from the National Assembly interpreted different articles of the constitution, in addition to explaining the constitutional culture, and the mission of the National Assembly.

As part of their activities, the National Assembly organized the Constitution Day competition which required students to answer a short online quiz to enter the draw for valu-

able prizes. The competition's five winners received various cash prizes.

The director of the library, Ms Asma Al-Kanan, commented, "We try to collaborate with governmental and non-governmental institutions to bring opportunities to our students whereby they learn about Kuwait's history, culture, and government. Students had the opportunity to interact directly with representatives from the National Assembly and ask questions that might help them in their studies." She also recognized the significance of this national anniversary by saying, "The issuance of the constitution was

a significant moment in the history of Kuwait which laid down the system of government and the main principles of liberty, justice, and equality."

One of the National Assembly's representatives, Mohammad Al-Awadh, commented, "It was a really interesting event, we enjoyed being in the library to pass information about Kuwait's constitution and history to faculty, staff, and especially students. It was interesting to explore their knowledge in this area and had a great time discussing what this information can add to their studies." The representative also mentioned that

his favorite part was the interaction with the AUK students and adding to their knowledge in a way that complements their education.

The American University of Kuwait (AUK) is an independent, private, equal opportunity, and coeducational liberal arts institution of higher education. The educational, cultural and administrative structure, methods and standards of AUK are based on the American model of higher learning. The language of instruction is English. More information on the American University of Kuwait can be found at www.auk.edu.kw

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Drinking problem?: Friends of Bill W. are available to help. Totally confidential. Email: rohsecretary@gmail.com

Narcotics Anonymous: NA can help with addiction problems. Totally confidential: 94087800 English/Arabic.

Cancer online support group: If you are Cancer patient or family member fighting with this deadly disease, come join our online support group. Best way of dealing with this disease is providing support and share our experience with each other. There are lot of things which even doctors can't tell so be member of this website and start sharing your experiences which may help others. October is recognized as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM). The primary purpose is to promote self examination and screening mammography as the most effective way to save lives by detecting breast cancer at early stage. For more information visit: <http://fightingwithcancer.webs.com/>

Latest

Dec 13

St Paul's Church events: Welcome and consider being part of our upcoming festivity events at the St Paul's Anglican Church, Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf.

- Friday, Dec 13: The Nativity Play and Christingle at 10.30 am led by Children and Youth & the Ladies Fellowship.
- Sunday, Dec 15: "Christmas Carols by Candlelight" at 6 pm followed by fellowship refreshments. Guest choirs will perform.
- Friday, Dec 20: Dedication of the New Chapel by Archbishop Michael Lewis at 10 am. Celebration and refreshments will follow.
- Tuesday, Dec 24: Christmas Eve service at 6.30 pm.
- Wednesday, Dec 25: Christmas Day service at 6.30 pm.

- Tuesday, Dec 31: New Year's Day Vigil at 11.30 pm.
- Our church is home to Christians from Western Europe, North and South America, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and India. Members from the Protestant, Reformed, Anglican/Episcopal, Evangelical and other traditions make up a warm and dynamic St Paul's Church family.
- Visit our website or contact Revd Michael Mbona (Chaplain and Rector) Mobile: 65960781 or Email: mrm-bona@gmail.com
- Church location: Cnr 9th Ave & 6th St North, Block 14, Ahmadi, Kuwait.

- Dec 16
- Bangladesh Embassy closure:** The Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in Kuwait will remain closed on Monday, Dec 16, on the occasion of Victory Day of Bangladesh.
- The Embassy will arrange the following program on Monday, Dec 16 at the Chancery to observe the Victory Day of Bangladesh:
- Chancery Roof: 09:00am: Ceremonial hoisting of the national flag.
- Multipurpose Hall: 09:15am: Recitation from the Holy Quran.
- 09:20am: Observance of one minute silence.
- 09:21am: Place wreaths at the portrait of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
- 09:25am: Reading out the messages.
- 09:35am: Discussion on the Day.
- 10:35am: Speech by HE the Ambassador.
- This is for the information of all concerned.



Photo shows some of the photographs on display at the 'Alan Villiers and the Sons of Sindbad' photography exhibition at the Amricani Cultural Centre.

Omission/Contrition

The Arab Times erroneously omitted to give photo credit to pictures used with the article 'Exhibits tell Villiers story of Kuwait's rich heritage' on Page 13 in the Sunday, Dec 8 issue of the Arab Times.

The pictures should have carried credit of photos by Rizalde Cayan, courtesy of DAI. Omission regretted.

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