
Cuban Dance Festival getting Rotorua hips swinging

10/03/2019



One upstairs, inner-city room was hot and steamy this afternoon as percussion drums vibrated, seemingly moving people with it.

The Lakes Performing Arts Company studio on Hinemoa St has been pumping as it housed three days of intensive Cuban dance workshops which nearly 200 people signed up to.

The workshops formed part of the sixth annual New Zealand Cuban Festival to be hosted in Rotorua.

New Zealand Cuban Festival Trust chairwoman Kate Maguire said it was one of the best festivals they had had.

The paid workshops began on Friday afternoon, catering to all skill levels and offering a variety of Cuban dance styles.

Maguire said Saturday night was a "spectacular event that came together so beautifully," as international and local professional Cuban dancers performed.

She said the 100 per cent Cuban Flavour Party which followed was well received as people partied away until 2am, before their 10am class.

"Not everyone made it to class the next day. Even the teachers struggled," she laughed.

Australian dance instructors, Adrian Medina, and Christina Monneron, taught the Explore Afro Cuba class today.



Vibrations of the drums filling the studio. Photo / Stephen Parker

Monneron explained to the class the importance of "allowing the rhythm to move through us".

The class was taught dances from the Bantu people from Central/West Africa: Palo, preparing for war, and Yuka, the sensual celebration of life on return from war.

With a love of New Zealand in general, Monneron said Rotorua was her favourite.

"I find it's the central part of Māori culture. It feels right to play here (Rotorua)."

Sidney Morehu was a local who got his hips moving at his first Cuban dance class.

Not only did he feel good leaving the class but he said it was important for mental health.

"As a Māori, the Māori men need a lift," Morehu said, and he believed Cuban dance was a vehicle to do it.

"And I've got more friends too."

The fortnight of spice began on February 28 at the Thursday Night Market with free Cuban dance taster for the public.

This was followed by seven free events of salsa classes, partner work, and the finale of the Cuban Street Party at the Night Market this past Thursday.