

Hello everybody,

in 1998 we visited the 22. Universal Round Dance Council Convention, URDC, held in San Jose, CA. We published an experience report in one of our local club news. This year we went again and since we had a good respond on our writing three years ago we like to use this larger means to share our experience. Not everybody of you might know what URDC is about and so we like to start with some basic information.

A. URDC

The Universal Round Dance Council (<http://www.siu.edu/~ecology/urdc.htm>) was founded in 1976, to promote High Level RD and provide education for both, High Level Round Teacher and Dancer. To accomplish these goals there is a convention held in July every year where the members can visit education seminars and workshops from Phase IV to VI. Some of the most beautiful choreographies that swept to Europe and being taught at Cham or during the European RD Week made their debut at this event. Especially those recently adapted rhythms like Lindy Hop, Salsa and Merengue and even the little older Bolero rose from there or found a fertile soil to grow. URDC is visited by 300 to 400 couples!!! and is held at three different alternating places in the states. Hence, for this years 25th Anniversary we had been back to San Jose, CA.

B. The preparation

In July 1998 we came as newcomers to San Jose and had some success by teaching a Rumba that was written by Richard Lamberty. In a kind of high mood we agreed to come back to the 25th Anniversary. To raise tension, we additionally made the commitment for bringing our own choreography.

The next 18 month flew by and in January 2000 on the base of our definite decision to teach, our preparation for July 2001 started. An appropriate choreography had to be written and we decided to do a Waltz. An already existing „figure collection” was modified a hundred times and had to stand two workshop tests. A cued version on MD, the detailed cuesheet and a RD resume of us had to be with the program chaircouple two month ahead of the event. Further a record had to be pressed since the music we decided to use was not available on vinyl.

We planned two weeks of vacation. The first week we spent touring around exploring northern California with San Francisco as starting point to get used to language and climate.

C. The „Prelude“

Due to the weakness of EURO we tried to reimburse ourselves by getting featured for a Special Dance. Richard Lamberty set up a Pre-URDC weekend, conveniently located in San Jose, where we were supposed to clinic and workshop together with him and his partner Alise Halbert. For this occasion we prepared a Cha Cha which went quite well.

Being exposed to American media for a full week of vacation the „language barrier“ has already been melted to a tiny hill and was totally eliminated by the joy of meeting old acquaintances and the warm and friendly atmosphere we found ourselves surrounded when entering the hall. Further support was applied by the dancers from the Susie Qs (Stuttgart) and Butterflies (Hamburg) who joined us at this pre-event spreading a tender breeze of home. Nervousness did not rise at all. Prepared like this we would face any convention in the world.

As last prelude before the big event the so called „Trail End Dance“ was held at the evening before the official opening day of URDC. It was my honour to cue some rounds invited by the hosting couple Kenji & Nobuko Shibata. Their origin is Japan and since Kenji's retirement they live in California and teach RD thruout US.

D. The Convention

The event started on Thursday with the education seminars. Here are the “significant” titles 1. Making and adapting ballroom lines, 2. Swing & Jive: Is there a difference?, 3. Improve your chasses advance your Cha Chas and 4. Body mechanics.

All seminars had surely been excellent but our favourite was definitely the Swing & Jive held by Bill & Carol Goss. It is probably a little easier to create a relaxed and gay atmosphere using such a joyful rhythm. But Bill and Carol Goss are unbeatable in combining that with teaching. If you ever have a chance to join one of their workshops, do not hesitate at all.

From Friday to Sunday there were four workshops each day followed by the evening program with loads of dancing. Before the evening dance starts there is a showcase session where every dance to be taught next day is presented by the couple who is supposed to teach it. Therefore all participants (appr. 740 people this year) gather in a huge basketball-hall with a nice wooden floor. Our workshop was scheduled for Sunday morning 8.30 am. Unfortunately the lady of a teacher-couple, who were supposed to teach on Saturday, had to see a doctor at short notice.

So Friday afternoon we were asked to jump in and do the showcase in the evening being prepared to teach our dance at one of the favourite time slots on Saturday afternoon. But coming to the workshop it turned out that our Waltz could not beat the attractiveness of the parallel running Argentine Tango. So we had 40 couples participating. We had hoped for more but never really expected. We already assumed that most of the participants could dance our choreography to cues. This assumption met the truth in the evening program where I had to cue our dance. After my announcement, that probably everybody could join the floor for this dance even when they had not attended the workshop, 300 couples danced the routine!

In the first place one is getting a little nervous when the time schedule is torn to pieces. Considering the whole event the change turned out very positive. The solo-presentation of the choreography in front of an technically skilled auditorium is the biggest hurdle you have to take at URDC. So the “panic” increases every second the evening of showcase approaches. Since we were informed at the afternoon to do the showcase in the evening we had less than half a day to get nervous.

But the biggest advantage was that we had been rid of all commitments by the end of Saturday afternoon. So we could enjoy the Staff-Party which was scheduled Saturday 10.30 pm.

From our 1998 participation we knew that this Staff-Party is just the launch of a big afterparty-night which we continued at the chaircouple-suite on the 17th floor of the Hilton & Towers, the official host hotel for the convention. At this place the decoration committee invited to a more or less intimate party where only “Die Hards” have access.

The after-afterparty lasted til appr. 2.30 am. We had many interesting conversations and loads of fun. Besides we intensified our acquaintanceship with the members of the organisational committee and get some unexpected views behind the curtains of the event.

Due to the short amount of breaks and the fact that we were not staying at the host hotel there were almost no chances to cultivate our relationships to some of the dancers and teachers. So we used every opportunity to do so during the evening program. This reduced our dancing once more intensively, since we knew only 30% of the evening dances by their names anyway. Nevertheless we refreshed some good old choreos and learned some new figures just by watching the other couples. Purely Round Dancing, isn't it?

E. Epilog and Thanks

Looking back we had a successful vacation with many new intense experiences within and outside the RD scene. This would not have been possible without the heroic engagement of our recent Grandparents who fought the battle of diapers and carrot pap with our little Tim at home.

A special thanks goes to the German group. With them we survived an unforgettable Motel-6-Afterparty a Mongolian-Barbecue and several „Picnic Lunches“ under the shaded trees in front of the Convention Center.

The American party should be represented by Richard Lamberty. Without his support and trust we would never be that far.

But our particular recognition goes to Sandy und Jerry Adams. They had been responsible for the program and syllabus. Besides that they held the co-chair of the convention committee itself and have probably been the most busiest couple keeping the project on the track. They invited us to live at their house and we really enjoyed their company. In three years they will be responsible again and asked us if we like to join the staff once more.

We made no commitments yet, but who knows!/? Perhaps this was not our last trip to San Jose

.....

Michael & Regina Schmidt