

## Salsa bash by Funtopia...passion lives here

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**Pablo Bodini and Jonathan Blanco of Funtopia Entertainment**

Flying over Torino during the 2006 Winter Olympics, I saw banners claiming Italian soil as the place “Where Passion Lives.” I doubted then I’d ever dispute it. But under the Music City skyline in 2009, *Passion not only lives* but also *dances* every other Friday in East Nashville. The Salsa Bash, a Funtopia Entertainment event held at Mad Donna’s, is where people who *work to live* rather than *live to work* kick off the weekend and spin through the night. Here a global culture gathers that chooses to *merengue* rather than *march* through life. Sweeter than the capirinhas Pablo Bodini, founder of Funtopia, concocts is the party atmosphere and sense of community he and his partner, Jonathan Blanco, have created at their Salsa Bash. Latin dancers aged twenty to sixty from countries across five continents have been packing the place since the first couples took the floor on June 12th, 2008.

In the ‘90s Chilean-born Bodini began hosting parties in the US for international students. They were so successful that when the students returned home, he was asked to host a reunion party in Paris in 1996. In 2010 he’ll be hosting another bash abroad in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

As for the salsa stir he has created in Nashville, Bodini explains: “During my life I have been very successful organizing parties. Given that I had the chance to have these events in Latin America, Europe and the United States, I noticed that all cultures truly enjoyed the environment that I provided. I felt then that somehow I had a feeling of what people liked when celebrating.

As I arrived in Nashville, I noticed that there was a need for dancing events around Latin American music. Partnering with Charlemos Spanish (through Elizabeth Worrell) and the Spanish Conversational group from Meetup.com (through Lesley Rose), I hosted a couple of parties.”

I remember them. When my friend Kim returned from the Spanish Conversational group last March with an invitation from two guys to a salsa event, I was skeptical. We had taken lessons at a salsa club the previous fall, but when the instructor opened the floor to the regulars, we were swept off our feet by the A team

dancers and left on bar stools to watch wistfully from the sidelines. I feared I'd be benched for lack of a partner again. Maybe, I thought, knowing two guys on the inside would make a difference.

Did it ever. Pablo and Jonathan hugged us at the door, took our purses to their table, and led us to the dance floor. Instructing that the only rule of salsa is to have fun, they treated us like old friends as we fell into the rhythm of the music and the spirit of the group. Like others, we followed their lead and spent last spring dancing weekly in clubs and homes-- in bungalows and B and Bs, on patios and apartment rooftops. Each time DJ Pablo would open his laptop as carefully as James Bond detonating a bomb, a party would explode. And via Jonathan's iPod, we'd salsa impromptu whether in a restaurant or at a gas station on a road trip.

But when the number of dancers outgrew homes, Pablo asked friends Jonathan and Pedro Canas, to form an event team "to provide an environment that was friendly, safe and geographically accessible." After knocking on a few doors, they found the venue in Mad Donna's, now home to a Salsa Sensation. The vibrant mix of an urban neighborhood bar throbbing with a diverse global scene makes the dancing exciting and comfortable.



**Cindy McCain**

Source: [Nashville Latin Dancing Examiner](#)