



SHAG RAG

Shag Dancer Newsletter



Dedicated to the Preservation of the Carolina Shag and Beach Music

Vol. II, No. 7

Keep on Shaggin'

July 1995

From the President - By Charlie Price

As many of you know by now, our June workshop with Susie Beaver was an unqualified success! Many thanks to those of you who came out to support this important workshop, and to Susie and her most able assistants who did their best to give us some style.

Our first Sunday Social, on the other hand, was a fair to middling success, at least in terms of member support. Hopefully, it was the afternoon and evening of dancing the day before that tired many of you out and kept you away. For those who did turn out, several of us learned some terrific new footwork (the "Scully") from Joan, and Janis and Yours Truly taught the short back-walk and the 1 1/2 out of a back-walk. (One of our principal purposes for holding the Sunday Social is to provide floor time for members to learn new intermediate and advanced steps.) At least for now, we will only be holding one Sunday Social each month, and one of the cruel facts of life is that we will not be able to hold onto this floor without your support. I don't know how many of you are aware of it, but good dance floors are at a premium generally in the DC area, and particularly in Virginia. There is a lot of competition for floor time between the various dance groups. Cool Hands Cafe is a really nice place, it has a great new wood floor, very good food, and we've got Bert spinning the tunes. It's the second Sunday of each month, and the next Social will be on July 9th -- soooooo, mark your calendars and join us for a great time!

On a final note, I think it is time to remind everyone that the principal purpose of our Club is to promote and preserve Carolina Shag dancing. We all need to work on our steps and our styling. Our older members need to show our new members and prospective members how to do our dance, and our new members need to dance what they are taught in the lesson, rather than reverting to whatever kind of swing they came in with as soon as the lesson is over and open dancing begins.

See you at Deja Vu and Cool Hands Cafe!

NOTICE

SUNDAY SOCIAL

When: July 9th
Where: Cool Hands Cafe*
Time: 5-9 p.m.
Cost: \$2.00
* Great Dance Floor!!!

Directions: from Beltway in VA, take Exit 8, Rt. 50 Arlington Blvd. East to 7 Corners; Wilston Shopping Ctr is on the left; Cool Hands Cafe is located right next to Boston Chicken, 6196 Arl. Blvd., Falls Church, 703-241-7511



HOT • HOT • HOT

EASTER SEALS 1995

CONCERTS in the PARK

JULY Schedule*

- 6th - The Catalinas
- 13th - Fat Ammon's
- 20th - Band of Oz
- 27th - The Embers

* TENTATIVE

Call Sam Lewis for info: 1-703-775-5341

Yes, Shaggers, BEACH MUSIC is coming to Fredericksburg! *Directions: 95 S. to Exit 45 West; behind Fredericksburg Sheraton*

NEWS / INFO -- Contact: Janis Grimes, 202-737-2824; or 703-536-7362 - leave message.



Road Trips With Gypsies . . .

Memorial Day weekend in Atlanta was history in the making. Dancers from all over the country (Shaggers and "Swing Dancers") attended the SOS Grand Nationals, hosted by Jackie McGee and Charlie Womble.

Several NVSC members were in attendance, and we had the best time. Everyone was impressed with the caliber of the dancing, the facilities and all of the arrangements. The Swing Dancers I talked to were totally impressed by the junior Shaggers and by the fun level of the weekend. Everything was First Class, including the trophies and the program.

This event promises to be the Premier Competition and Party Weekend of the dance community. It is a wonderful thing to see Shaggers and dancers from other parts of the country mixing, mingling, and learning from each other.

One interesting note: The Juniors (Shag and Swing) were the main attraction of the entire weekend, and everyone was impressed and in awe of each other!

You might want to mark off next Memorial Day weekend on your calendar and save that date for next year's SOS GRAND NATIONALS! It was awesome, and so worth it!!!

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New Members in June

Welcome, new members!! Pete Campbell, Alberta Hutchinson, Chuck Jenkins, Lynn Lowery, William McGhee, Sandy Manoogian, Mark Rollins, Jean Sellers

Treasurer's Report - By John Belt

Thanks to each of you -- your support for NVSC t-shirts and our 50-50 Drawings has helped to increase our treasury. IDEAS for FUNDRAISING, anyone, anyone?? Contact John - 703-914-8744.

NOTICE! Members Only!! NVSC Shag Video Library SHAG VIDEOS NOW AVAILABLE

Instructional Shag videos are now available ON LOAN to members only wanting to brush up on their Shag steps. The Club will loan you a video for one week, FREE OF CHARGE. A refundable \$10 deposit permits you to view the tape for one week. A small charge of \$5 for each additional week is required.

LARRY CAMP has generously agreed to be the Keeper of the Tapes. Larry is available at Deja Vu on Wednesday nights, or call him at 703-823-0282.



Speaking of Parties . . . Presenting the Carolina Shag !!

On June 6th, the D.C. Hand Dance Preservation Society hosted a "demo night" at Malibu's.

Spotlighted were three local dance styles: D.C. Hand Dance, West Coast Swing, and Carolina Shag. Virginia State Champions Rick & Libby Hendrix, and Bill Hopkins & Chris Pax presented the Carolina Shag to a very enthusiastic crowd, and were filmed for the Hand Dancers archives.

The D.C. Hand Dancers dance at Malibu's every Tuesday night to BEACH MUSIC!! It's a fun crowd, and we had a ball.

Alas -- Alack! of Shag . . . By Dick White

Today was one of those days. I was in the court nouse with my daughter (speeding). I took a call from my secretary, and she was saying how her day had been. First of all, she'd been sneezing, coughing, just feeling kind of blue, and she said all of that happened after I walked into her office this morning, and she wondered if she caught something from me. And I was thinking, well, I was feeling the same way. I told her I knew what the problem was. She said "What?" I said, "It's because of lack of shag."

I don't know what caused me to think of that, I guess it was because I was thinking about Magic May Days coming up, and how I haven't been shagging. I've been country-western dancing for the past several months, which is great, but I'm just tired of stomping. I want to slide on the floor a little more, and do what I like to do. I've been trying to convert the people around here that do the western dancing, and it's like one person against 200, so you know who's winning out. But, it's not an easy win for them, because I sort of grin and bear it all the way, although I have had some success.

So anyway, I was just thinking of lack of shag, and how I need to change that around, and how I really miss having a place to go shag every week. You don't know how lucky you have it in that you can zip down to Fredericksburg, Richmond or Virginia Beach easily, and you have so many clubs that are close at hand. Well, I'm stuck on the Eastern Shore, and it's not that easy. There's only a couple people that know how to shag half-way, and it's only because of what I've learned and have passed on. So, I've got a couple of converts, but not many. So, if you're having that blue feeling, or you're having that sort of sniffing, sneezing, whatever, watch out -- it could be because of Lack of Shag. *Dick is our eastern-most member, residing near Ocean City, MD.*

AND THE WINNER IS . . .

CONGRATULATIONS -- AGAIN -- to Jim Notta, VA State D.C. Hand Dance Champion, who won the 50-50 Drawing last month for the **SECOND TIME IN A ROW!!** *Well, he must be buying a lot of tickets, or else he's the luckiest guy we've ever seen!*

The 50-50 Drawing will be held the **FIRST WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH.**

Shagger Profile -- Doreen Martin

Nickname: D.

Occupation: Manager

Birthday: April 2

Hometown: Fort Washington, MD

Marital Status: Single

Self-Portrait: Good friend

Motto: One day at a time

Dream: To watch the sunset on the ocean every night with good friends

Inspiration: Tennis, reading, traveling

Favorite Dance Tune: Any rock 'n roll song

Bad Habit: My temper

Hobby: Tennis, reading, traveling

Luxury defined: Not have to work, be on the beach and drink margaritas all day without getting a hangover.

Drink or Wine: Margarita

TV Program: X-Files

Books at bedside: The Weather Book

Last words: See ya!



Happy, Happy Birthday . . . 

July Birthday Babies:

- 1 - Fred Whitman
- 2 - Donna Kris
- 6 - James Baird
- 10 - Larry Boyer
- 13 - Joan Salvadore
- 15 - Jean Sellers
- 18 - Gwen Sigda
- 18 - Mary Taylor
- 26 - Jerry Crews
- 28 - Dickie Gee
- 29 - Karen Hiatt
- 29 - Gary Salpini
- 29 - Karen Wagley
- 31 - Jean Griffis

"SHAG!" --A "Kissing Cousin" of Ballroom Dancing



National Shag Dance Championships--the look, the style, the grace, the enjoyment of the SHAG as it is practiced along the Middle East coast.

If you are a dancer who enjoys style, grace and intricate movement you owe it to yourself to experience that delightful hit of southland Americana, the dance called "Shag."

Member of the Swing Family

Like the Lindy, East and West Coast swing, Bop, Jitterbug, Texas Push, and Whip, The Carolina Shag is a member of the swing family. Dancers will recognize it a triple swing, but rather than being done with the usual swing side to side movement, the shag is done in a forward and back manner standing in an erect position with most movement from the knees down.

One Handed and Gazing Casually

The Carolina Shag dates from a time when being "cool" was an important part of a young man's style. Fundamental to traditional Shag is that the man lets his gaze roam casually about the room rather than looking directly at his partner. Shag is a one handed dance. The man's right hand hangs straight to his side, his left hand holds the woman's right hand with a light touch and his index finger extends parallel to her little finger. It is considered gauche for the man to use two hands simultaneously. The feet stay close to the floor and are employed in short, economical steps.

So Where Did Shag Come From?

Research has not revealed a satisfactory source for the basis of this dance being called "Shag." In the United Kingdom in the 1930's a frenetic dance that some thought appeared like copulation was called shag after a then British slang word for the act, but there is nothing vulgar or frenetic about the Carolina Shag.

Our Shag was born on the Grand Strand of South Carolina, a sixty mile stretch of beach

The Carolina Shag

Article and photographs by Bob Black,
Writer, traveler, observer, and above all,
Ballroom Dancer

and dune that extends from Calabash up near the North Carolina border to historic Georgetown down in the low country of South Carolina. The Grand Strand is busy. Hundreds of thousands of tourists come now for the beaches, golf and fishing, but back in the late 40's the area was coastal, rural and very representative of the quiet life.

Had to Tame the Jitterbug

To local boys such as Harold Bessant, son of a coastman boat captain, the jitterbug, the most popular dance of the time seemed too wild and out of control. The late 40's was a time when looking cool and unruffled and being a good dancer was important. Southern college kids began to frequent the Grand Strand and came in contact with local youth. Together, they began an experiment in developing a new dance.

The desire was there, but the music had to be right. It had to be slow and easy. Fortunately



National Shag Dance Championships, Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, 1200 N. N. Oak St, Myrtle Beach SC 295777

ly the rhythm and blues of black musicians was equal to the task. This union of black musicians and young white dancers produced a dance that quickly began to spread along the beach communities.

It Takes a Certain Kind of Music

A song called "60 Minute Man" a brag by an unabashed stud recorded by the Domino's, would become the national anthem of shag. "Blueberry Hill," "Stagger Lee," and "Everybody's Shagging," are among other Shag classics.

Shifting the Show-Off Part of the Couple

In social ballroom dancing the man leads and the woman follows, but the man exists to show off the woman. Dance instructors often say, "The man is the frame, the woman is the picture." In its beginnings, the Shag reversed this process. The man was the picture, doing intricate steps while the woman contented herself with basic steps. Times have changed and both partners are involved in the intricate, flowing movements of the graceful shag.

Bessant Renaissance

The shag may have passed into oblivion if it were not for people like Harold Bessant. After a stint in the Marines and studies at Princeton, Bessant came back to the Grand Strand and in 1955 opened a beach club called "The Pad." Recalling his youthful passion for shag, Bessant put in a dance floor and a juke box. The cool kids of shag began to beat a path to his door.

Harold Hung Heavy

There were rough years ahead, the mood of the young was changing. When chubby Checkers introduced "The Twist" other dances followed that required no instruction and no contact or teamwork between the dancers. Ballroom dance instructors and dance emporiums

The SHAG-- "Read All About It!"

Shaggers are a free-spirited bunch, not taking themselves overly serious. Their premium magazine, "Shagger", is excellently put together, with a fresh and independent attitude. It carries a wealth of information for this section of the dance world. The easiest way to get information is to contact Editor's Mickey Reeves and James Stratton at 800.SHAGGER. Tell'em the AD sent you.

Their delightful, playful magazine is packed with the surprising and semi-outrageous--to wit: in the Rhythm 'N Beach Top 40, there are entries such as--"If I Could Reach Out" by Otis Clay on the Blind Pig label. There are organizational events such as "Inland Throwdown in the Pines"; and every kind and type of promotional paraphernalia imaginable--T-shirts, mugs, caps, etc., etc. (Wonder if Kimena's Boutique carries this kind of material--she carries everything else you may need.)

Another point of interest, the Shagger magazine reports activity from 12 Regions and two separate States, Alabama and Tennessee. The 12 regions are: Western and Eastern Virginia; Eastern, Central and Western North Carolina; Western, Central and Eastern South Carolina; Northern and Southern Georgia; and Northern and Southern Florida.

Catch the "Shagger" and read all about it.

SHAG, A Kissing Cousin...

> Continued from page 3

around the nation began to close their doors. A handful of beach clubs remained bastions for Shag. The genial giant Harold Bessant was in and out of business, but he hung in there until he, Shag and updated beach music were back in fashion. In the meantime Bessant ate well and gained the nickname "Fat Harold."

The Spread of Shaggers

The shagging youngsters of the 40's and 50's had spread geographically as well as physically. Throughout the South, in cities such as Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina, and Charlotte, North Carolina, the Shag began to rise again and the youngsters of the late 60's and 70's began their struggle to learn steps with exotic names like "The Flying Sugar Foot" the "The Belly Roll."

Then The Avalanche in the 80's

By the early 80's the Shag became a dance avalanche. There are annual gatherings all over the south. An organization known as S.O.S., "The Society of Strangers," meets the second week in September each year at Myrtle Beach. Over 10,000 people crowd into Fat Harold's, Ducks Ducks Too, Galleon and a dozen more clubs. There are dance competitions, but many choose to go for the atmosphere. They dance and lounge about as a beach bum should. Many still wear their "Weejuns" without socks, sip a beer and talk in low tones about steps like the studder, the flyback, and the lean.

The Mecca for Shaggers and Shaggees

Fat Harold's is Mecca for shaggers. To say that it is unpretentious is to define overstatement. This is a beach club, bland, faded and weathered. There is a bar, nondescript tables and chairs, fans on the ceiling and dance floors scattered about. An old red, green and yellow Rock-ola Juke Box will give you five plays for a quarter to music such as "Ain't it a Shame," by Fats Domino, "White Christmas" sung by Bing Crosby or "Swanee" by Al Jolson. On the walls to each side of the Juke Box is a line of door knobs, a device used by many a beginning shagger who wrapped a towel around the wrist tied it to the door knob and began to hone the steps. The walls are crowded with action pictures of shagging greats, awards to Harold Bessant and white discs with blue lettering showing the names of various shag clubs, such as the "Atlanta Shag Club, Stone Mountain GA." There are over 100 shag clubs now. Most are in North and South Carolina, Virginia, Florida and Georgia, but they are found in Ohio and Missouri and one exists in Paragonah, Utah. The popularity of this dance was so great that in 1984 the State of South Carolina designated Shag as the official dance of the state.

Shagging, Coolness, and Loyalty

To shag at Fat Harold's At The Pad, Ocean Drive, Myrtle Beach gives one the kind of belonging that comes with getting the wedding ring or the Combat Infantry Badge. When you've shagged at Fat Harold's, you're cool. His devotees are noted for their loyalty. When Harold Bessant was engaged in a leasing dispute, his supporters wore black armbands reading "Where Fat Harold goes, we go also."

Teens, Octogenarians and a Turkey

In Myrtle Beach I watched dancers ranging in age from the teens to the 80's occupy the same dance floor, a rare sight in dancing these days. After the success of the film Dirty Dancing it appeared that a movie on shag would give this dance nationwide acceptance. Though choreographed by Kenny Ortega of Dirty Dancing fame, the movie "Shag" was a turkey and contributed nothing to a dance that deserves better.

Hey, Look Up! It's Shag!

As Shag belongs to the American swing family, it should be given the attention it deserves by the United States Amateur Dancers Association. This is a dance that should be taught at our chapter dances and included in the musical agenda.

Wise Words on the Wall

On Fat Harold's wall is a poem which American dancers could emulate. It reads, "Fire the cannon and raise the flag, at long, long last, I've learned to Shag."

For information on the Society of Strangers contact the Chairman of the Association of Carolina Shag Clubs: Joe Magee, 19029 Brigadoon Place, Huntersville, NC 28078. Telephone (704) 892-1683.

For information on their newspaper write S.O.S., P.O. Box 4688 Columbia, SC 29204.

Several excellent instructional tapes are available featuring champions Sy Creed and Dana Brown, Sonny and Judy Carver and 9 time national champions Charlie Womble and Donna Magee. Again, for information contact The Society of Strangers.

WHY NOT??

When a USABDA chapter travels to another chapter and "invades" them with dancers, comradie, bonding and enjoyment, many good things happen.

Why not take Bob Black's suggestion: Call the Shaggers, find the group in your location, then swap dance invitations and do some rhythmic cross-pollination. Try it, you'll like it!

.....Editor East



