

Tam O'Shanter Dancers

'Amazing' dance adventure in Cuba

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What happens when a Canadian group of Scottish Country-style dancers goes to Cuba to perform at a festival?

Pure cross-cultural harmony, apparently.

"It was so amazing," raved Cheryl Jorgensen, a 10-year member of White Rock-based Tam O'Shanter Dancers, about the troupe's 10-day adventure in Old Havana last month.

"We didn't know what to expect, but it was fantastic. The people are so warm, wonderful and humble, and hospitable."

Fifteen dancers with the local company showcased Scottish jigs, reels and other moves at a festival that featured groups from around the world.

The Tam O'Shanter dancers have performed internationally since forming in 1986, and rehearse twice weekly for a couple dozen shows yearly.

Prior to their trip to Cuba, Jorgensen sent requests to medical and musical groups in White

Rock and Surrey for items to donate to people living in the communist country.

"The response was overwhelming," Jorgensen said, who packed along donated dental products, soap, school supplies and musical gear — clarinets, drum sticks, music books, guitar strings and more.

Cuba is a country of many contradictions, she said, and is on the edge of many changes.

"Investing countries such as Canada, Mexico, Venezuela and Argentina are knocking at Cuba's door," Jorgensen said. "We saw many good things, bad things, many happy things, sad things, people who live without a dream but have found happiness and some hope in a way of life so difficult but uncomplicated. It was a humbling experience when compared to some of our values. But through our medium — music and dance — we found no borders, no politics, only a shared love for (the) joy of dancing."

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White Rock-based Tam O'Shanter Dancers perform in Plaza de Armas in Havana, Cuba (above). At left, instructor and group co-founder Maureen Lyon in the square with a young Cuban girl. (Photos: SUBMITTED)

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