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Pedro “Cuban Pete” Aguilar, the “King of the Latin Beat,” is a legendary dancer known worldwide for his talent and passion for the mambo genre. His signature style made him an icon on the dance floor and continues to confirm his title, “Maestro of Mambo,” which he first earned in the 1950s. Also regarded as “Mr. Mambo” and “The Prince of the Palladium,” Cuban Pete won close to 100 prizes at New York’s premier Latin dance palace during the mambo era, and became one of its weekly performers. He invented scores of dance movements and hand embellishments now seen as standards of Latin dance, and is credited with introducing the guajira (which he calls half bolero, half beguine) to North American fans.

Modern audiences may know Pete best for the work he did behind the scenes, as choreographer and consultant for the hit movie *Mambo Kings*, whose stars – actors Armand Assante and Antonio Banderas – were his willing pupils. Cuban Pete’s thorough understanding of the era depicted in the film influenced everything from the dance style to the clothes to the interior look of the Palladium, and ensured the movie’s feel of authenticity.

Referred to as the “greatest mambo dancer ever,” by LIFE magazine, Tito Puente and George Goldner of TICO Records, Cuban Pete does not rest on his laurels but continues to make significant contributions to the Latin dance culture. He continues to dance professionally, coach teams for competition, and has served as an adjudicator for many prestigious Latin dance events, including the 2005 Mambo King Latin Dance Competition, and the 2005 Fiestas Patronales Dance Competition, among others. Pete has accreditation from the National Dance Teachers of America, the National Dance Council of America, and the International Dance Organization. With dance partner, Barbara Craddock, he helped make history in the preservation of clave (the rhythmic structure of Latin music; its “metronome”), by serving as choreographic consultant and instructor for Miami City Ballet’s unprecedented work, “Mambo No. 2 a.m.,” and was choreographer for “Latin Magic,” an original mambo ballet for the University of the Arts School of Dance.

Pedro Aguilar grew up in New York’s “El Barrio,” and credits his success to his mother, Nellie Trujillo Masdeu, his first dance teacher. His second teacher was the great modern choreographer and dancer, Katherine Dunham, with whom he studied for two years. The Palladium’s master of ceremonies conferred his famous nickname, “Cuban Pete,” on him in 1949 following a string of successes in dance contests at the club. The name became his forever when bandleader Desi Arnaz, who had written the mambo classic “Cuban Pete,” publicly announced it.

After many award-winning performances, he created magic by choreographing a sensual breakthrough, the guajira danced to “Love for Sale,” which made him the most sought-after dancer in the ‘50s. When Cuban Pete appeared in the first U.S. film about mambo, titled “Mambo Madness,” his big screen debut prompted a LIFE magazine article and led to performances at Carnegie Hall, The RKO Palace, The Waldorf Astoria, and the Apollo. That also led to a request by Nat King Cole for Pete to dance his sensational guajira as an encore on the nationally televised Cerebral Palsy Telethon, hosted by Cole. In addition to LIFE, he has been chronicled in the Miami Herald, Sun Sentinel, LA Times, NY Times, Nuevos Ecos, El Diario Las Americas, El Nuevo Dia, El Nuevo Herald, Village Voice, Rolling Stone, and magazines Dancer, Dance, Dance Teacher, Latin Beat, Dance Spirit, and Dancing USA, to name a few.

His illustrious career includes two White House performances, for Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson, a command performance for Queen Elizabeth of England, and a performance at Madison Square Garden for Prime Minister Ben Gurion of Israel. He worked both coasts with major Latin bands: Machito, Tito Puente, Jose Alberto, Eddie Palmieri, and Tito Rodriguez -- at the Palladium on the East Coast and Virginia's on the West Coast. Just as he had been a regular weekly performer in New York's Palladium, Cuban Pete had Thursday nights at Virginia's, where proprietor Jackie Thorne was responsible for the expansion of Latin music in Los Angeles in the 1960s.

During his time in Los Angeles, Pete studied with Lee Strasburg and made his stage debut in the drama, "One Last Look," in which he played the troubled son of a character portrayed by the great Esther Rolle. He also began his association with the movie studios, first with bit roles in films starring Charles Bronson ("Stone Killers") and Elliott Gould ("Busting"), and eventually as a choreographic consultant and actor at Warner Brothers Studios. For the record, his cinema debut came in the flick, "Slime People."

Bilingual, Cuban Pete has appeared on local, national and international television and radio programs, then and now, including *The Jackie Gleason Show*, *the Paul Whiteman Show*, *Pasos Latinos - A Mambo-Mentary* (BET Jazz), *Faking It* (TLC), *Razas de Campeones* (Chan. 22), *Images/Imagines* (NJN-TV), *A Las Siete Con Fernando* (Chan. 41), *Carlton TV* (Great Britain), *Primer Impacto and Despierta America* (Univision), *America* (Miavision), *History of the Mambo Kings and Palladium Days - Where Mambo Was King* (Bravo), *They Call Him Cuban Pete* (WPBT New Florida), *Newsmakers* (Comcast TV), *Puerto Rican Panorama* (WPVI-Philadelphia), Travel Channel, CNN, NBC, ABC, CBS, and Fox. He participated in a Palladium Era panel discussion on WDNA-FM 88.9, and was a guest on WKAT, WFDU, WPFW, etc.

Notable live appearances include: March of Dimes, Rhythm Foundation, First Annual Holiday Salsa & Mambo Showcase, International Latin Dance Competition at South Street Seaport - NY, RAICES Museum and Archive, dedication of Tito Puente Way in New York, Tito Puente Tribute, 2nd Annual West Coast Congress All-Star Entertainment, Hollywood Palladium, Congreso Mundial de la Salsa in Puerto Rico & New York, halftime for the NBA development league's Florida Flames, and most recently Palladium Memories at Jazz at Lincoln Center. Pete was in the documentary, "Tito Puente: King of Latin Music," produced by George Rivera, featuring Armand Assante, Marc Anthony, Bill Cosby and Jimmy Smits, among others. The film, seen nationally on the NBC network, included early footage of Pete dancing plus an impromptu performance, and gave Pete a forum to reminisce and share personal anecdotes about the great Latin musician who had so influenced his own career. He co-produced, performed, and emceed North Beach Development's successful Mambo Mania series. He produces, choreographs, directs, emcees and performs Latin dance revues for public and private events.

Pete is a skilled lecturer on the history of Latin dance, and with Barbara, hosts sold-out, SRO lectures and workshops worldwide. For a full listing of topics and events, please visit www.salsapower.com/cubanpete.

Pete is the recipient of many awards and citations: **Lifetime Achievement Award – Casita Maria – 5/19/06**, **The 2005 Fiestas Patronales Lifetime Achievement Award**, **The Key to the City of Fort Myers, FL – 2004**, **International Latin Music Hall of Fame Special Recognition Award – 2003**, **The 2nd Annual Norwegian Salsa Congress – 9/20/03**, **Cultural Expressions**

Productions & 2003 Chicago Salsa Congress - 2/13/03, The Council of the City of New York - 6/14/02; International Hustle and Salsa Competition - 4/6/01; NJN-TV - 4/25/01; Side Street Kids - 3/17/01; City of New York - 3/17/01; World Latin Dance Council - 6/10/00; 2nd Annual West Coast Bacardi Salsa Congreso - 5/26/00; City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department- 5/25/00; Congreso Mundial de la Salsa - 5/14/99, and more.

In his honor, the International Hustle and Salsa Competition established its annual "Cuban Pete Award," in 2001, to recognize the salsa dancer(s) of the year. Casita Maria, the oldest Latin settlement house in New York, honored him on January 27, 2004, at the Apollo Theater. On June 14, 2002, Councilman Phil Reed (D-NY) issued a proclamation marking June 14 as Cuban Pete Day in New York.

Pete is the only Latin dancer recognized in the Latin Jazz exhibit at the Smithsonian Institute, and a reproduction of his first costume is on display at RAICES Latin Music Museum in New York. The International Latin Music Hall of Fame commissioned resident artist, Erich Padilla, to capture Pete's footprints on canvas as part of the Hall's permanent collection, while Florida-based photographer, Joe Gato, featured him in the exhibition, "Pieces of Three," on permanent display at the Wallflower Gallery in Miami Beach.

What many people do not know about Pete is that he is diabetic and that he and Barbara have developed innovative dance programs designed to improve quality of life for chronically ill patients. Their programs set dance as a form of exercise to help control blood sugar levels, raise endorphin levels (to battle depression), and maintain muscle strength and endurance. They have taught this program in Florida and California.

Cuban Pete does not rest on his laurels but continues to make significant contributions to the Latin dance culture, and 50 plus years later, still dances a sizzling mambo that brings audiences to their feet.

05/25/06