



by Trouble Funk on his *Willenium* CD. There are also local record and production companies, including PA Palace, releasing cassette tapes of the ever-popular go-go groups Only 1 Purpose (O1P), Rare Essence, Chuck Brown, and Junkyard. A book documenting go-go will be published by *Billboard* next year.

Iley Brown II is a native Washingtonian and has been a fan of go-go music since its inception. He has worked extensively in the music industry in New York, Los Angeles, and overseas.

“Stepping” Out

by C. Brian Williams

Stepping is a uniquely American, percussive dance genre that grew out of the song and dance rituals performed by historically African-American fraternities and sororities. As discussed by scholar Jaqui A. Malone in her book *Steppin’ on the Blues*, stepping is “one of the most exciting dance forms to evolve in the twentieth century.” The tradition’s “...precise, sharp and complex rhythmical body movements combined with singing, chanting, and verbal play require creativity, wit, and a great deal of physical skill and coordination.” Stepping is, without question, a rising art form with growing popularity among hundreds of thousands of Americans, young and old.

Washington, D.C., more so than any other city in the country, can claim “bragging rights” to this traditional dance form. As home to Howard University, the birthplace of several African-American fraternities and sororities, the city has witnessed the beginnings of the tradition, dating back to 1907, all the way through the first

competitive “step show” at Howard University in 1976. Today stepping can be found on many local campuses, and performances are shared frequently with District residents.

But stepping is no longer just for fraternities and sororities. As stepping has received wider exposure in D.C. and the country, schoolchildren, K–12, are performing the dance with tremendous enthusiasm. Step teams can be found in numerous District high, middle, and elementary schools with teachers using the dance form as a way to foster teamwork, discipline, and community.

D.C.-based churches have also picked up the

form with Gospel step teams found in practically every quadrant of the city.

Stepping is definitely an important part of our city’s daily cultural life.

C. Brian Williams is Director of Step Afrika! USA, and co-founder of the Step Afrika! International Arts & Cultural Festival.

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The Vietnamese Wedding in Washington, D.C.

by Thanh-Thuy Nguyen

Vietnamese Americans are the fastest-growing ethnic group in Washington, D.C. While some Vietnamese, the “boat people,” came after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, most of the District’s Vietnamese community arrived 15 to 20 years after the fall of Saigon. They are a diverse group, mainly ex-military, government officials, and family members who, having associated with the United States during



the war, were freed after re-education camp. Since 1990, 5,000 Vietnamese refugees and legal immigrants have resettled in the District of Columbia. The majority of them are now living in the Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights neighborhoods. Christian churches, Buddhist temples, and non-governmental organizations have helped them make the transition to American life. Yet the community also holds on to many of our traditions and customs, continuing to honor values of family, education, and hard work, celebrating Tet (New Year) and the moon festival at home and community gatherings. The older generation transmits our heritage to future generations. Within the metropolitan Washington, D.C., community, the Vietnamese wedding ceremony is the most beautiful representation of the linkage between past and present.

DAM HOI — ENGAGEMENT CEREMONY

There is a deep sense of continuity that Vietnamese feel between the living and the dead; and the family structure, generational roles, and the network of relationships in which the Vietnamese live is strong. The decision to marry is a family one. When a couple wants to wed, they first ask their parents for permission. Once it is granted from both sides of the family, the couple has an engagement ceremony at the bride's home. Traditionally, this ceremony would permit the couple to start dating and be seen in public together. However, in present-day American society, this tradition is not necessarily followed. The groom leads a procession by foot not far from the bride's house, accumulating family and friends along the way. When they arrive, they present the bride with gifts of clothes, jewelry such as earrings and necklaces, fruits and cakes, foods such as roasted pig,

perfumed tea, fine wine or spirits, and money. All these products are available at the local Vietnamese stores. The couple would be wearing the *ao dai* (traditional Vietnamese costume), a symbol of the country's rich history and culture. The groom's parents formally ask the bride's parents for their daughter's hand in marriage to their son. Next, they share a toast to mark this special occasion. Then the two families join in a feast to celebrate the coming union.

DAM CUOI — WEDDING CEREMONY

Parents traditionally pick a date for the wedding based on the horoscopes of the couple's birthdays, delivered by a monk or a fortuneteller; however, couples have more freedom to choose their special day in America. For Buddhist couples, the wedding usually takes place in the bride's home. The groom and his family again go to the bride's home to *ruoc giao*

(escort the bride), bearing gifts. Next, the parents and elders of both families and the couple share tea. The couple will then ask for their parents' blessing and will proceed to the ancestral altar to pay respects and receive a blessing from the ancestors. Then both families enjoy a light buffet. Christian couples may have an afternoon ceremony at Sacred Heart parish in Mount Pleasant. Later in the evening, a reception at a restaurant with a nine-course meal will celebrate the union of two families.

Thanh-Thuy is a member of the D.C. Mayor's Asian Pacific Islander Affairs Commission, and past president of the Vietnamese American Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Vietnamese culture, fostering better business relations between Vietnam and the United States, and serving the Vietnamese community in the United States.

She came to the United States with her father and two

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younger brothers in December 1981, at the age of eight, as a boat refugee. Her mother escaped eight years later. She is presently pursuing an M.S. in behavioral science at Johns Hopkins University.

The Circolo della Briscola

by Enrico Dàvoli

In March 1991, an old friend telephoned me because his wife had left him. He said he merely wanted to talk with me, to have someone listen to him, to have a sounding board. Rejecting my “macho” offer to get drunk together, or to “get together with the boys,” or even for “just the two of us” to have dinner at a quiet restaurant, my final suggestion — a game of *briscola* — was slowly, deliberately accepted with a very happy, “Hey, Enrico, that’s not a bad idea. I used to play with my Sicilian grandmother, who told me the only way to win was to cheat! Let’s do it! But I haven’t played for 25 years!” Well, I hadn’t played for 30 years, but I recall having played the game of *briscola* with my *nonno* (grandfather) Bruno from Calabria, who always taught me that to win consistently one had to remember all the cards which had been played. We set a date; we would see whose grandparent was correct!

I learned how to play *briscola* during my family’s frequent visits to my grandparents’ very modest, cold-water flat on Hester Street in New York City’s “Little Italy.” In that tiny flat, the kitchen was the center of family activities during my youth in the 1930s and 1940s. Everyone in that large family — our grandparents had six children

and fifteen grandchildren — tried to congregate there at least monthly. I recall much laughter and shouting, lots of hot food — pasta, *ragù*, *brasciola*, *caffè espresso*, *pizzelle*, and the like, good southern Italian peasant fare — and the inevitable *briscola* card games which followed all those eating “orgies.” *Briscola* is one of several traditional Italian card games which we, the sons and daughters of immigrant families, learned from our fathers and grandfathers, part of what I like to refer to as an oral tradition. We played with decks of American poker cards, but we always removed all the eights, nines, and tens, leaving a deck with

40 cards, the number necessary for playing *briscola*. The “picture cards” — queens, jacks, and kings — were then assigned the numerical values eight, nine, and ten, respectively. I would not learn of the existence of those classical, beautifully decorated, tarot-like Italian playing cards — *carte da gioco* — until my first trip to Italy in 1970, where I witnessed a street-corner game



outside a small *caffè* in Piazza San Marco in Venezia. I have never again played *briscola* with a poker deck. Throughout Italy, the game of *briscola* is played with words more than it is with cards. Partners resort to figurative language, cunning, and enigmatic signals to dupe their opponents into believing that the hand of cards they hold is exactly the opposite of what they have been dealt. It is a battle of wits.

From that low-key, somewhat inauspicious beginning precipitated by my friend’s wife leaving him, we proceeded to play sporadically, usually once every two to four months that first year. Today, we have grown to 44 dedicated, impassioned members — *soci* — who meet to play monthly, dine informally, almost always “family-style,” at players’ homes or at one of the many