



Award Winning Dancer Comments on Artistic Expression, Vintage Heritage of Dance

For most artists, there is a clear separation between themselves and their medium – the painter and canvas, the potter and clay, the sculptor and the stone, the musician and the instrument. But there is one exception, dance, in which the artist and the medium are one. No one appreciates this connection more than Brandi Tobias, an award winning dancer, teacher, coach and choreographer who specializes in a dance known as West Coast Swing.

“Dance is the only artistic outlet in which the artist is not only the artist but also the medium, which means that what you wear becomes part of your art,” Tobias said. “When we dance in competition what we put on our bodies is part of the presentation and you cannot separate that. What you wear is part of the artistic expression.”

Because of this close connection between dance and fashion, Tobias recently participated in a video and photo collaboration with world renown vintage car photographer Royce Rumsey and Topazery, a leading Internet resource for vintage and antique jewelry. The goal of the project was to illustrate the close connections among partner dance, fashion, jewelry and vintage lifestyles.

“Brandi is known all around the world for her success in making West Coast Swing increasingly popular as a beautiful artistic expression,” said Jan Walden, founder of Topazery. “Our work with Brandi is part of an effort to communicate how art in many different forms, from dance to vintage jewelry, can enhance the lives of everyone.”



During her growing up years, beginning at age 5, Tobias' focus was on softball, not dance, and she was good at it. Not only was she awarded a full athletic scholarship to pitch for Marshall University, she also made it to the final round of trials for the U.S. Olympic team.



After her Olympic success, Tobias was at a crossroads of where next to pursue her natural athletic gifts, and she found inspiration in an unlikely place. She had moved to Las Vegas to be closer to her sister, who took her to a country

and western bar one evening. After experiencing the country two-step on the dance floor, Tobias set her sights on a career in dance. She moved to Michigan, formed her first professional dance partnership and within two years had won the first of many world championships.

While Tobias holds titles in country/western and international 10 dance, West Coast Swing is her passion. An active competitor, she travels the globe teaching, judging, and performing. She is known as one of the top technicians, and her website, www.branditobias.com, serves as a hub for dancers at all levels who share a love of West Coast Swing.

“Partner dancing has a long vintage heritage and is a true conversation between two people,” she said. “I like to think that every dance is a moment in time that never happened before and will never happen again. We create something new every time we dance.”

The origins of West Coast Swing are often traced as far back as the late 1930s through early 1950s when many other forms of swing dancing had their start. West Coast Swing is often associated with the swing era of music and the Lindy Hop, a classic dance of that era.

As its name implies, West Coast Swing is a regional expression of swing dance on the West Coast, and is today the official dance of California. It's considered a smoother, sexier, more versatile form of swing, danced to blues, R&B and contemporary music. West Coast Swing owes much of its popularity to the way it allows partners to improvise steps. While improvisation is an essential of West Coast Swing, it includes guidelines that define the dance, and there are choreographed competitions in which Tobias also excels.

“My many years of dancing West Coast Swing are an advantage because I can draw from a wide variety of movements based on my experience,” she said. “In competition, my dance style is



more sophisticated, which shows on the floor. Unlike ballroom or Latin dancing, West Coast Swing emphasizes more fluid movements and allows for more creativity. For me, dance is about expressing my uniqueness as a human being, and West Coast Swing gives me more freedom of expression.”

Just as West Coast Swing allows for considerable flexibility in movement by the dancers, it also allows for a great variety of dancewear and jewelry, from retro to contemporary. Fashion selections are highly personal, and within this range there is an appreciation for vintage clothes and jewelry.

“Every human being has a unique desire to connect to where they came from and to understand where they are going, and we do this in part through the things we own,” Tobias said. “The love of partner dance and an appreciation for vintage cars, clothes and jewelry are all part of a basic human desire to understand where we have been as individuals and as a culture and where we are headed next.”

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