

SHAG: A THING OF BEAUTY AND A JOY FOREVER

In all my dancing days I have never seen anything like this dance. It gave me goose bumps the first time I saw it and it still does today.

It is so smooth, so seductive, and so sexy, that it is no small wonder it hooks so many people instantly. If there were ever a more captivating, more beautiful sight in all the world than a man and a woman shuffling up and back on the hardwood to the hypnotic beat of rhythm and blues; spinning like a top in slow motion in the pivot; or touching head to toe in a sultry, twisting bellyroll, I do not know what that sight is. Surely Shag is the "Queen of Dances."

The beauty of this magical dance spans a broad spectrum of styles. That beauty is as splendid on one end of the spectrum as it is on the other. On one end we have the Hall of Famers and Living Legends, to whom all who love the Shag owe so much. The grace and style of these dancers is sometimes not to be believed, but always to be imitated as best one can. On the other hand, we have the beginners where beauty lies in their sudden addiction and seemingly insatiable desire to learn it all--at once! We have the competition Shaggers whose talents are so awe inspiring and who do so much to publicize the dance. The complexity of their steps is often mind-boggling; their Shagging, nothing short of a rhythm and blues ballet.

Somewhere in the midst of all these Shaggers are my favorites--the multitude of no-names--veterans of the dance from the burgs and hamlets of the Carolinas that most of us have never heard of. These are the foot soldiers of Shag, who use only a few mirrors or fancy leads, but whose styles can be so unique and intriguing. A pause here, a shift there, a soft touch, and a certain look make their shagging eternally interesting to the old-timers and instantly captivating to the newcomers. Comfortable in their own abilities, these no-names already know what it takes us new Shaggers years to learn: the basic beauty of this dance is not so much in fancy, complex steps and turns, but in smoothness and style, the ability to lead and follow well, and using the right move at the right time in the right music.

Reduced to its very essence, the real fun in all this is in the beauty of the people who do it. Shagging would have sufficient rewards all by itself. However, there is so much more to Shag than just dancing. Shagging is a fellowship--a fellowship of the best friends one could ever have. I know of no other endeavor where so many people can come together and simply enjoy to their hearts content what they have in common.

When you think about it, that is so unlike what happens in the rest of our harsh, sometimes dog-eat-dog world where it seems we focus on our differences and even exploit them. In the fellowship of Shagging it really does not matter where you live, what you do for a living, who you know, or how much power you have. The only things that matter are that you love this dance, the people who dance it, and the music they dance to.

Keats said, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Keats must have been a Shagger, because this dance is beautiful and it is indeed a joy forever!

I do not know how long "forever" will be for me, but I do know that as long as I am able to Shag, or merely able to watch others do it, I will forever be

young in my heart--meaning simply that a part of me, indeed my spirit and my very soul, will never grow old.

Birmingham

John Harper, Beach Shaggers of