Garden Party at the Panamonte!

by Aaralyn Sabriel

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March 1 dawned an ordinary Thursday in Boquete, Panama. The morning unfolded with ordinariness. People shopping, working, tourists wandering about, a few people gathered in the central park to pass the time, others having lunch at one of the outdoor cafes around the square. Nothing special (except that EVERY day in Boquete is special!). A bit after lunch time, the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, all is quiet.

But wait...what's that? Music? Coming from across the bridge? Wait. Not just ANY music. Toe tapping, defy-you-to-stand-still, hip shakin' boogie woogie New Orleans street music! In Boquete? OMG. Yes.

And, where there is music, there is bound to be a parade, right? Yes! Here they come!

A motley gang of a hundred or so sequined, feathered, masked, painted, bead-draped and brightly costumed folks prancing down the street behind high steppin' jive dancers, a slide trombone, a tuba. drums and a clarinet.

What is happening? Carnival and Mardi Gras were LAST week, dudes!

Never mind the calendar. Pay attention. Here comes the parade. The lead off banner borne by Boquete Community Players, followed by Buenos Vecinos, and then a line of gaily festooned golf carts from Valle Escondido and a multitude of tripping-the-light-fantastic dancers!

NO ordinary Thursday, this! THIS is the kick-off to the 2012 Boquete Blues and Jazz Festival, an international extravaganza of talent gathered in the Panama highlands for 4 days of world class music and merriment.

Weaving their way through traffic, tossing candy to children (and adults), dancing their way up Avenida Central, the band leads the merry paraders to the afternoon's destination, The Panamonte Inn & Spa. Since 1914 The Panamonte has often been the center of this highland village's cultural and entertainment activities, and never more than on this, March 1, 2012, where the entire town has been invited to an old-fashioned Garden Party.

What a day for a party in the garden! Perfect temperature, cloudless skies, and every flower in full bloom. The Panamonte Garden welcomes it's odd looking guests and proceeds to serve up spicy jambalaya and frosty, potent hurricanes to the musical accompaniment and jitterbug antics of the Smoking Time Jazz Club, a smoking hot 8 piece street band, flown in from New Orleans just for the occasion. Giselle Anguizole, the Smoking Time Jazz Club's vocal diva, is a native of Chiriquiâ€”and in addition to being sultry hot on the vocals, she is the essence of boogie-woogie on the dance floor.

â€œAre you coming back next year?â€•

â€œOh! I hope so!â€• Giselle exclaimed, post-party. â€œIt's been amazing!â€•

When you realize that there are only somewhat over 100 international Blues & Jazz Festivals held each year, world-wide, it is amazing that one of themâ€”one of the most up & coming of themâ€”is being held here, in the tiny, cloud forest hamlet of Boquete, Panama. Wow.

Event organizer, Hans Lebuser, has now put away his King of Carnival costume, taken a few days

off at the beach to catch his breath, and is already planning for the 2013 Boquete Blues and Jazz Festival.

â€œAmazing is the right word,â€• he agrees. â€œOver 600 tickets were sold for the weekend concerts hel different restaurants and in the Valle Escondido amphitheatre. I'm still counting, but I think we even made a small profit this year, which is in itself amazing. Next year we'll be even more organized, have ticket outlets in Panama City, more local venues, get more blues and jazz players from New Orleans, Cuba and Colombia.â€•

â€œBut,â€• and this is the burning question, â€œwill there be a parade to the Panamonte and another Panamonte Garden Party?â€•

â€œYou can count on it,â€• Hans grins. â€œIt was a rocking hot good time.â€•

DoÃ±a Inga Collins, Panamonte grande dame, and the Inn's General Manager, Sandra Naranjo, both concur. â€œWe will definitely do it again,â€• states Sandra. â€œ

In fact,â€• smiles DoÃ±a Inga, with a naughty twinkle, â€œI think we need more parades, more music, mor dancing! And we shouldn't wait a whole year to do it!â€•

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