

Benefiting the Neighborhood Longhorn Program

# Mardi Gras on steroids: Drums, dance and ???

**Carnaval: "Better than Halloween. Better than a rave. Way more fun than a concert. We left wanting more, more, more," says one party vet.**

**IT'S THE BIG BEAT:** RELENTLESSLY RHYTHMIC and sinuously seductive, rising up through your feet until it frees your mind from daily cares and concerns. It's the costumes, both flamboyantly disguising and frankly revealing, that dazzle and delight the eye with color and creativity. It's the atmosphere, electric with pulsating energy and excitement, and the audience, intoxicated by movement and glowing with its own inner electricity. It's **Carnaval Brasileiro**, and it's not to be missed, this year revving up on **Saturday, February 5.**

For 27 years Carnaval Brasileiro, essentially an authentic Brazilian-style Mardi Gras with a unique Austin attitude, has been the city's most colorful indoor extravaganza. Described succinctly, if incompletely, in the *Austin American-Statesman* as "a festival of flesh, pounding drums and sensual abandon" Carnaval Brasileiro was attracting audiences in adventurous attire to spend the night indulging in dance floor revelry bordering on hysteria and/or ecstasy long before *Keep Austin Weird* bumper stickers were around.

The nature and intensity of the Carnaval experience is totally up to each individual participant. You can be either a spectator or a spectacle if you so desire. Costumes, whether elaborate constructions or mere

body paint and not-much-more, are always amazing. Part of the reason is the air of freedom emanating from the fans fully exploring and enjoying the joys of public masquerade. "It's fun to get dressed up and be somebody else for a night," 12-year Carnaval Brasileiro veteran Alice Cannon explains. "You can disguise yourself or turn yourself into a new person altogether. Then you just lose yourself in the music and the dancing. There's nothing like it."

Carnaval Brasileiro is such an embedded aspect of Austin entertainment culture that it's hard to believe it hasn't always been in existence. An informal coalition of homesick Brazilian students and music fans staged the first edition of Carnaval in 1975 as two hundred samba fans gathered at the Unitarian Church. Carnaval remained a low profile campus area event for a couple of years but the buzz was too big to be confined to just a university audience. In 1978 Carnaval Brasileiro was reconfigured to become a genuine city-wide event with public presentations at major music venues, including the legendary Armadillo World Headquarters. Two years later the event moved to the City Coliseum, its homebase for the next two decades, where it evolved into an internationally recognized Austin institution.



**Grupo Saveiro, a 10-piece Brazilian drum group from NYC, blasts the roof off the Palmer Center with throbbing, body-grabbing rhythms—it's impossible not to dance to their non-stop grooves**



**Carnaval, a Brazilian-style Mardi Gras, can make angels out of devils and devils out of angels**

Organizers are dedicated to synchronizing the sensibilities of the Austin Carnaval with its Rio de Janeiro counterpart through the music, the fuel for the festivities. After years of upgrading the event's musical quality through experimentation with everything from local groups to flying in a band from Brazil, they seem to have at last found the perfect Carnaval Brasileiro band.

**Grupo Saveiro**, the exhilarating New York City samba unit awarded the "Best Brazilian Band in the USA" prize by the Brazilian International Press Association, will be back on stage for Carnaval Brasileiro, pumping out propulsive rhythms with flash and finesse. It's the third Carnaval appearance for the Brazilian-born band, which features singer Kenia's authoritative and authentic vocals above its big beat. Saveiro, battle-tested in the heat of Rio's carnival parades, is undeniably the real deal and its repertoire ranges far beyond the core samba sound to include expert renditions of more exotic Brazilian carnival rhythms. **Acadêmicos da Opera**, an assemblage of two dozen local drummers specializing in seminal street samba sounds, will also perform.

D.K. Boyd, a die-hard Carnaval fan who has created her own Carnaval-fan Web pages ([www.only-zuul.com/04\\_carnaval\\_intro.htm](http://www.only-zuul.com/04_carnaval_intro.htm)), sums it all up: "Carnaval is some of the safest, best fun I have all year, one of the HEALTHIEST things I do for myself all year, an opportunity to dance and laugh with some of the nicest total strangers I could ever hope to meet, one of the biggest creative outlets I have on ALL KINDS of levels. I feel FREE at Carnaval."

"You don't need a costume, you don't need to drink...I guarantee you'll leave there with a happy heart and enough stored-up mojo to get you through another month or so of winter...Personally, Carnaval juice carries me through all kinds of rough times all year long," Boyd says.

All those drums will tell you to forget about the fact you've got to go to work Monday, that exams are coming, that the election didn't go your way or that your girlfriend did go away. So, just surrender body and soul to the sound and focus on fun, in all its multi-hued merriment and gaiety. Join a conga line bouncing to the beat as it snakes through the costumed crowd. Tomorrow may never come. Give it up! Leave your world outside the door—lose yourself in Carnaval Brasileiro!

A portion of Carnaval proceeds benefits the Neighborhood Longhorn Program which helps tutor academically challenged students in AISD Title-One schools. Carnaval's sponsors include KTBC-FOX 7, KOOP, KGSR, 101X, TVGlobo International/DishNetwork, *Study Breaks* and Holiday Inn-Town Lake which is offering a special Carnaval discount so revelers can overnight more safely near the event!

**Carnaval Brasileiro: Saturday., Feb. 5, 9:00 pm; Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd. at S. First**  
**Tickets: Half Price Books, Waterloo Records, Sampaio's Restaurant, Saccone's Pizza and online at [www.CarnavalAustin.com](http://www.CarnavalAustin.com). Non-smoking event. For information, visit [www.CarnavalAustin.com](http://www.CarnavalAustin.com)**

© matthew mahon 2004

© matthew mahon 2004