



Larrys Corner

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This is called Larrys Corner because when I teach I stand in the corner so I can see everyone.

If you want to read dance stories they are under Headlines or Larrys Corner.

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Larry L Ablin : 612-599-7856
lablin@charter.net

Barb Johnson : 612-599-9915
westcoast1@charter.net

Do you have any likes or dislikes, stories, or helpful hints for dancing? If so, write it down and give to Larry Ablin or Barb Johnson. We will add it to one of the future News letters.

If you would like to tell us how you became interested in dancing, write it down and give to Larry or Barb, we will add your picture with it and put it in one of the future Newsletters. If you have anything you would like to write about, just write it up and give to Barb or Larry. I enjoy writing something for you.

Come Dance With Us

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Tango History

In the late 19th century, Buenos Aires was filled with immigrants and transients from Europe and Africa, many of whom found themselves lonely and looking for companionship in their new foreign habitat. Naturally, these people found their way to the bars, seeking drinks to drown their sorrows, temporary friendship, and any entertainment to help distract their depressed feelings. The variety of cultures combined to bring about a new style of music, formed from African beats, Indian rhythms, Latin influences, and the popular music of the flatlands in Argentina.

As you may guess, this new music was dubbed Tango. Historians argue the name comes from the African Candombe drum beat known as "tan-go", or possibly from Latin word tangere (to touch). The dance began as a mime of communication between prostitute and pimp. The improvisation was filled with emotional outpouring and suggestive gyration. This sexual choreography was accented by the melancholy drone of the Bandoneon, a German instrument very similar to the accordion.

These crude beginnings developed into less obscene styles that symbolized the lower class of Argentina through the turn of the century. Throughout the tango's evolution, two things remained constant: the background music of the Bandoneon, and the passionate translation of emotions into dance.

International Style

As they did with many other dances, the English adopted the Tango and made it their own. A very powerful dance was the result, with big movements, dramatic gestures, and quick snaps of the head from one position to another. Grouped together in competitive events with the smooth ballroom dances, the International Tango incorporated many of the patterns characteristics of Waltz and Foxtrot. But it still maintains a very unique character which sets it apart from all of the other ballroom dances.

The dance originated in lower-class districts of Bue-

nos Aires and Montevideo. The music derived from the fusion of music from Europe, the South American Milonga, and African rhythms. Jorge Luis Borges in "El idioma de los argentinos" writes: "Tango belongs to the Rio de la Plata and it is the son of Uruguayan "Milonga" and grandson of the "Habanera". The word Tango seems to have first been used in connection with the dance in the 1890s. Initially it was just one of the many dances, but it soon became popular throughout society, as theatres and street barrel organs spread it from the suburbs to the working-class slums, which were packed with hundreds of thousands of European immigrants.

In the early years of the twentieth century, dancers and orchestras from Buenos Aires traveled to Europe, and the first European tango craze took place in Paris, soon followed by London, Berlin, and other capitals. Towards the end of 1913 it hit New York in the USA, and Finland. In the USA around 1911 the name "Tango" was often applied to dances in a 2/4 or 4/4 rhythm such as the one-step. The term was fashionable and did not indicate that tango steps would be used in the dance, although they might be. Tango music was sometimes played, but at a rather fast tempo. Instructors of the period would sometimes refer to this as a "North American Tango", versus the "Rio de la Plata tango" also called "Argentine Tango". By 1914 more authentic tango styling were soon developed, along with some variations like Albert Newman's "Minuet" Tango.

In Argentina, the onset in 1929 of the Great Depression, and restrictions introduced after the overthrow of the Hipólito Yrigoyen government in 1930 caused Tango to decline. Its fortunes were reversed as tango again became widely fashionable and a matter of national pride under the government of Juan Perón. Tango declined again in the 1950s with economic depression and as the military dictatorships banned public gatherings, followed by the popularity of Rock and Roll. The dance lived on in smaller venues until its revival in the 1980s following the opening in Paris of the show *Tango Argentino* and the Broadway musical *Forever Tango*.

Tango Styles

There are a number of styles of tango:

Argentine Tango (Tango Argentino)

Within Argentine Tango, there are many distinct styles.

The "Milonguero" style is characterized by a very close embrace, small steps, and syncopated rhythmic footwork. It is based on the style of the crowded downtown clubs of the '50s.

In contrast, the tango that originated in the family clubs of the suburban neighborhoods emphasizes long elegant steps, and complex figures. In this case the embrace may be allowed to open briefly, to permit execution of the complicated footwork.

The complex figures of this style became the basis for a theatrical performance style of Tango seen in the touring stage shows. For stage purposes, the embrace is often very open, and the complex footwork is augmented with gymnastic lifts, kicks, and drops.

A newer style sometimes called "Nuevo Tango" has been popularized in recent years by a younger generation of dancers. The embrace is often quite open and very elastic, permitting the leader to lead a large variety of very complex figures. This style is often associated with those who enjoy dancing to jazz- and techno-tinged "alternative Tango" music, in addition to traditional Tango compositions.

Argentine Tango consists of a variety of styles that developed in different regions and eras of Argentina and Uruguay. The dance developed in response to many cultural elements, such as the crowding of the venue and even the fashions in clothing. The Argentine Tango styles are mostly danced in either open embrace, where lead and follow connect at arms length, or close embrace, where the lead and follow connect chest-to-chest.

Different styles of Argentine Tango are: Canyengue, Liso, Salon, Orillero, Milonguero, Apilado, Nuevo, Show (also known as Fantasia).

These are danced to several types of music: Tango, Vals (the tango version of waltz), Milonga (a related dance that usually has a faster tempo), Tango Nuevo, "Alternative Tango," i.e. non-tango music appropriated for use in the dance

Ballroom

Ballroom tango, divided in recent decades into the "International" (English) and "American" styles, has descended from the tango styles that developed when the tango first went abroad to Europe and North America. The dance was simplified, adapted to the preferences of conventional ballroom dancers, and incorporated into the repertoire used in International Ballroom dance competitions. English Tango was first codified in October 1922, when it was proposed that it should only be danced to modern tunes, ideally at 30 bars per minute (120 beats per minute - with a 4/4 measure).

Subsequently the English Tango evolved mainly as a highly competitive dance, while the American Tango evolved as an un-judged social dance with an emphasis on leading and following skills. This has led to some principal distinctions in basic technique and style. Nevertheless there are quite a few competitions held in the American style, and of course mutual borrowing of technique and dance patterns happens all the time.

Ballroom tangos also use different music and styling from Argentine tangos, with more staccato movements and the characteristic "head snaps". The head snaps are totally foreign to Argentine tango.

Finnish

The tango spread from the dominant urban dance form to become hugely popular across Finland in the 50's after the wars. The melancholy tone of the music reflects the themes of Finnish folk poetry; Finnish tango is almost always in a minor key.

The tango is danced in very close full upper body contact in a wide and strong frame, and features smooth horizontal movements that are very strong and determined. Dancers are very low, allowing long steps without any up and down movement. Forward steps land heel first, and in backward steps push dancers from the heel. In basic steps, the passing leg moves quickly to rest for a moment close to the grounded leg.

Each year the Tango Markkinat, or tango festival, draws over 100,000 Tangophiles to the central Finnish town of Seinäjoki, which also hosts the Tango Museum. This leads Finns to regard this unlikely provincial town as the "second city of tango" after, of course, Buenos Aires.

Technique comparison

Argentine and Ballroom Tango use very different techniques and vocabularies, to the point where some consider them related in name only.

In Argentine tango, the body's center moves first, and then the feet reach to support it. In ballroom tango the whole body moves at once.

Ballroom tango steps are staccato, and generally follow a specific "slow, slow, quick, quick, slow" rhythm. The "slow" steps are best described as 'quick, hold', as the dancer rushes to step and then holds before rushing to the next step. This matches the staccato accents that appear in ballroom tango music.

In Argentine tango, the steps are typically more gliding, but can vary widely in timing, speed, and character, and follow no single specific rhythm. Because the dance is led and followed at the level of individual steps, these variations can occur from one step to the next. This allows the dancers to vary the dance from moment to moment to match the music (which often has both legato and/or staccato elements) and their mood.

The Argentine Tango's frame, called an abrazo or "embrace," is not rigid, but flexibly adjusts to different steps, and may vary from being quite close, to offset in a "V" frame, to open. The Ballroom Tango's frame is

more rigid, with the arms tenser and held higher.

There is a closed position as in other types of ballroom dance, but it differs significantly between types of tango. In Argentine Tango, the "close embrace" involves continuous contact at the full upper body, but not the legs. In Ballroom tango, the "close embrace" involves close contact only at the hips and upper thighs, and not the upper torso.

In Argentine Tango, the ball or toe of the foot may be placed first. Alternately, the dancer may take the floor with the entire foot in a cat-like manner. In the International style of Tango, "heel leads" (stepping first onto the heel, then the whole foot) are used for forward steps.

Ballroom tango steps stay close to the floor, while the Argentine Tango includes moves such as the *boleo* (allowing momentum to carry one's leg into the air) and *gancho* (hooking one's leg around one's partner's leg or body) in which the feet travel off the ground. Argentine Tango features other vocabulary foreign to ballroom, such as the *parada* (in which the leader puts his foot against the follower's foot), the *arrastre* (in which the leader appears to drag or be dragged by the follower's foot), and several kinds of *sacada* (in which the leader displaces the follower's leg by stepping into her space).

Most other types of tango, such as Finnish and Chinese, are close to the Argentine in their technique and vocabulary.

Tango Basic Step: Face your partner and stand closer together than you would in most other ballroom dances - close enough that your torsos are touching. If you're the leader, place your right hand on the middle of your partner's lower back. Extend your left hand out to your side with your arm bent and grasp your partner's right hand in a loose grip. Your partner should place her left hand on your right shoulder and place her right hand lightly in your palm with her right elbow bent.

STEP 1: On the first and second beat, walk forward on beat 1 with your left foot, placing down your heel first and then your toes. Hold for beat 2. Your partner will mirror each of your movements on every beat throughout the dance - in this case, moving her right foot backward, landing her toes and then her heel.

STEP 2: On the third and fourth beat, step forward on beat 3 and hold on beat 4 with your right foot so that it moves past your left. You should feel like you are slinking forward.

STEP 3: On the fifth beat, step forward quickly with your left foot,

STEP 4: On the sixth beat, immediately slide your right foot quickly to the right side and shift your weight to that foot.

STEP 5: On the seventh and eighth beat, slide your left foot slowly to your right foot, leaving your left leg slightly bent as your feet come together. Your weight should still be on your right foot.