# CLUB MILONGA NEWS

Brought to you by Toronto's longest-running Argentine Tango Club
Volume 14, Nov/2001

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## From the Chair

I believe the growth in numbers in the Toronto tango community has been quite remarkable in the past year. As a community we must thank our teachers, those residing in Toronto and the visiting teachers, for this growth and for the noticeable improvement in the quality of dancing as a whole. I particularly want to express our appreciation for the efforts of our 'resident' teachers, Bryant and Natalia, who have helped the Club a great deal over the past year. We look forward to having them back again in the New Year. It is also good to see more young faces around the community: the future of tango in this city.

During our last Club year ending May, 2001 we recorded over 2000 visits from members and guests. So far this current Club year, we are well on track to surpass last year's attendance record. We all enjoy our tango so much that it's hard to understand why everyone doesn't want to join in, yet in a city of 2.5 million people the Toronto tango community is relatively tiny. At the Club, we are having better and better success in attracting beginners, yet it's a slow process. The question is how we all, in the tango community, can attract more people, more effectively. One obvious approach is to demonstrate tango to a wider audience. In August, Clive and I went to the annual Latin Festival in North York's Mel Lastman Square. We saw Los Milongueros, the performance group, on stage, showing live tango to at least 500 people at that one time. They exposed tango to more people in that one day than perhaps anyone else in Toronto in one year.

The dancing was polished and the audience response was very enthusiastic. Congratulations to all the dancers: Jenny and Bob, Shahla and Doug, Create and Steve, Lisandro and Tatiana, as well as to Sandra and Ruben. The picture shows them all on stage.

Another notable event that reached an even larger audience was the showing on TV's Bravo of the NFB movie, 'Tango in a Cold City', directed by Alastair Brown. It not only showcased some very elegant dancing but also explored various aspects of the Argentinean immigrant experience in Canada. Many of the dancing community's regulars had participated in the making of this film and had a lot of fun. Yes, fun and tango really do go together. Viewers all over Southern Ontario had to be sitting up and saying "Wow, where can I learn that!"

Our September 'Fall Fandango' was a great success. We decided, after some debate, to go ahead with the dance even though we were all devastated by the September 11th tragedy. As several members remarked, tango is a life-affirming experience that can soothe and renew the spirit. If we all just give up, then the bad guys win. A big thank you to our long-time members, Michelle Duggan and Saul Fox who entertained us by performing a very expressive and poetic Tango Cabaret. The Halloween dance was also a happy event attended by many 'well-dressed' dancers. In fact, the costumes were amazing.

As this newsletter goes to press, dancers in Toronto are just coming down from the 'high' of a whole month of packed workshops with Stella Barba. Club Milonga and Paradiso are looking forward to presenting classes and workshops featuring Luis Bruni, another well-trained and excellent Argentinean teacher. Many thanks to Regina Salmon, of Paradiso, for her help in this project.

Thanks as well to all our Club members, visitors and supporters. Many thanks to my colleagues on the Board for their hard work (a special 'thanks' to Clive for the many hours he spent putting this newsletter together and for putting up with my impatience at his monopolizing 'our' computer to do it). There is no shortage of great ideas for the future of the Club. All we need is the manpower. If you would like to be involved in the exciting growth of Argentine Tango in Toronto, please consider making a commitment to the Executive of Club Milonga. We also want to thank all those of you who took the time to participate in the tango survey. It was really interesting reading your responses.

We have had a few frustrations with the sound system in the club for the last little while. This has coincided with heating problems. Both of these situations

are linked. The church is in the process of having a new heating system installed and we are unable to get suitable storage for new stereo equipment until it is completed. However, the church administrators are always helpful and they are working on solving both the heating and storage problems. In the meantime, we appreciate your patience.

Finally, this edition has more articles about dancing tango in other cities. If you have experience in dancing anywhere outside Toronto (Mississauga aside!), why not submit it for the next newsletter? We accept submissions from anyone who would like to share an experience or thoughts about tango.

*Kay Randewich*

## Tango Lyrics

*In previous editions of our Club Newsletter, we have looked at the lyrics of some well-known tangos, translated into English. These translations are available at many on-line sites, including the excellent www.planet-tango.com, where the Tango Lyrics Home Page in English and Spanish was created by Alberto Paz and Walter Kane to preserve, foster and promote the Argentine Tango culture. It includes the following, thought-provoking introduction seeking to place lyrics in their historical and social context. After reading this, perhaps you may find yourself listening in a different way!*

### A brief introduction to Tango Lyrics

The lyrics of the Argentine Tango have chronicled periods of time along the base line of evolution of the city of Buenos Aires and its inhabitants. Before it became a city, Buenos Aires was a large village where the descendants of the Spanish settlers lived with their eyes facing Europe and their backs to the vast continent of which Buenos Aires was a port of call for merchant ships.

From around 1880 and on, a massive wave of immigration swelled the population of the city with a vast majority of lonely men. These men who came lured by the promise of land and jobs, found themselves stranded around the outskirts of the city and faced with the reality of having to survive. The contrast between the well to do and the destitute was highlighted by the flourishing prostitution business that catered to the mostly male population. To have the means to live well became a major goal. Holding a menial job was not a way to meet those goals. Owning a woman capable of earning a good living at a brothel became a status symbol of sorts.

In general, the Tango lyrics as a whole have roots in a medieval religious concept that had considered women as diabolical creatures whose purpose was to incite the men to sin in sexual ways. This belief resulted in an antagonistic conception of the human roles where immoral women disdained and disregarded men's efforts and betrayed them through infidelity.

After 1910, the contents of the lyrics began to show a sign of tolerance, comprehension and even justification for the perceived flaws of the women. Gradually, as the medieval roots began to disappear, the protagonists of the Tango lyrics, mostly flesh peddlers in love, began to accept the very awful misfortunes caused by woman's infidelity. That led to the stage where they also accepted the versatility of the sexual activities of women, because of their own need to satisfy a physiological and psychological need for possession.

By 1920, the male writers and singers had begun to reflect a certain lack of interest in spiritual and material self-improvement. This was the result of an economical, social and political set of conditions established by a ruling elite on a society where the distribution of wealth was limited to a privileged few. In the context of the Tango world, the rich and powerful used their status to lure decent women from their humble abodes into a life of sin and excesses.

Along the way, the Tango lyrics have casually been labeled sad and summarily dismissed as interfering with our dancing joy. This has mainly come from outside Buenos Aires where there are major cultural and linguistic differences that only allow people to see just the tip of the iceberg.

Most historians agree that the Tango lyrics as a whole, reflect a condemnation by the working class, of the ethical, judicial, religious, cultural and political norms and canons of a bourgeoisie society. A fact not too uncommon around the world.

Fortunately, there is a renewed effort underway to study, discuss, disseminate and publicize the contents of Tango lyrics in English as a way to understand more and more that flood of shivering emotions that inundates our innermost feelings when we dance a Tango.

*Our previous Newsletters began a series of translations of tango lyrics for non-Spanish speakers. To continue this, I searched for a song with lyrics that related to the themes in this article and found 'De Mi Barrio'. This is an interesting song because it is clearly written for a woman singer, although there seem to be fewer female than male tango singers. Admittedly, the writer is a man. Do you think he is able to convey this milonguera's story authentically? Anyway, Toronto's tango dancers should read this carefully and beware – tango can be a dangerous experience for both women and men!*

*Kay Randewich*

### *DE MI BARRIO* Of my neighborhood

**Music by:** Roberto Goyeneche
**Lyrics by:** Roberto Goyeneche
**Translated by:** Alberto Paz

Of my neighborhood I was the prettiest girl
in a catholic convent I got my education
and even though my parents didn't have much money
I grew up around well-to-do families

Because of the well-to-do environment
to be a well-to-do girl was my only illusion
and completely forgetting my past
I gave my heart to a tycoon

Because of his looks and distinguished manners
because of the things he lied into my ears
I couldn't believe that he could be so bad
such a correct and educated guy

However, the bad man lured me,
promising to marry me,
to leave behind my home abandoned
to go live with him

And that's why my life slides
between tango and the champagne of the cabaret my pain is confused with my laugh
because I accustomed my pain to laugh

And if I run into an idiot that pretends
to get my love with his gold
I leave him without a penny to teach him a lesson
I make him pay for what the other one made me suffer

Today I dance the tango, I'm a milonguera
they call me loose and what have you
I'm a flower of the mud, a nobody
because of the men who deceived me.

Among the light of thousand colors
and the joy of the cabaret
I sell caresses and I sell love
to forget the one who went away.

## Dancing Around The World

'ARGENTANGO'

I want to share some of my memories of Buenos Aires.

I cannot forget my dances with older milongueros. Some of them so smooth and experienced and clever in their ways of holding you closely and inserting a leg between yours to make you do that gentle boleo so you have nowhere to go but side to side with your leg swaying like a willow in the wind. After many dances with different milongueros, I retained a memory of a smell that lingered long after the dance. So this is what I take with me – seared into my brain, the smell of milongueros.

There was one gentleman with whom I was taken aback because of a striking facial feature. How could someone lean her head against his poor marked face? I watched him dance and I summoned the nerve to give him that eye that says he may dance with me. This man had unusually beautiful turquoise eyes – so blue in a dark-skinned man. We danced. We really danced. I closed my eyes and followed his body with mine and I was transported to a dream. I learned a lesson and experienced something wonderful. Oh, it wasn't the dance (which was wonderful!), it was that I looked deeper into someone.

And then there was Big Bad Leroy from Chicago, built like a tank but danced like a ballerina. I met him at La Catedral in El Pulpo's class. It's a tango phenomenon that teachers have nicknames: El Pulpo, El Chino, El Indio, El Chino looks Chinese, El Indio is Indian but El Pulpo does not look like an octopus. Big Bad Leroy was gentle, yet had a strong, passionate lead. The noises he made when I did something he liked, which happily was often, the moans of approval, could not have been any different than if we were being intimate. And I was not offended. I wasn't moaning, but I did have a big smile on my face.

One of my best dances was with Big Bad Leroy on a rainy night at La Catedral. It was a special night when everybody showed up: the teachers and elite of the tango world. And then there were people like me – with good timing. The rain was pouring down from the cathedral high ceilings in several places. And with the other pockmarks on a floor that was badly torn up by years of usage and disrepair, you felt like you were dancing in a war zone. Tango became an obstacle course.

That was the same night I talked to two women and a dapper gentleman who had his arm around the British woman. He was drinking scotch and I made some glib comment about how it is better to drink scotch than vodka because other people can smell the alcohol so at least they know your behaviour is due to drinking. The British woman complained that she needed a good dance partner. I asked the dapper gentleman, could he recommend any. He said, "No, not really." Then he added, "Actually, as long as no one steps on anyone's toes, it is a good dance." I threw out, "Oh, I like to step on all my partners' toes. That way they'll remember me". Eventually, he danced with the British woman. Turns out the dapper gentleman was Carlos Gavito. Whoops!

Would I like to go back? I danced until I developed a backache. I wore my body down in the final week with all my late nights. When I was tired, I went to a local parilla and shared a bottle of wine and cozy conversation with my friend while we waited for the most succulent and tasty grilled meat I have savoured. I danced until I felt I was now the world's worst dancer. But I remember my special partners with whom I shared a moment and I think maybe I am not the world's worst dancer. And I think, next time – next time…..

*Betty Walton*

*Editor's note: In our last Newsletter, several people shared with us their impressions of dancing in Buenos Aires, and now Betty has made it seem irresistible. However, all our writers have been single. Would anyone like to share their experience of going as a (married) couple?*

TANGO IN THE STREETS OF TORONTO

Have you ever spoken and laughed with a beautiful woman under a streetlight, and then stepped into the middle of the street to dance with her? I have. Perhaps you think this was just a tango fantasy? No, it really happened. Oh, you think it was in Buenos Aires? No, it was in Toronto, just a few weeks ago as a balmy summer's day faded into a lovely evening.

Haike, one of our long-term Club members, lives in a community which decided to celebrate the end of summer with a street party. So, the entire street was closed to cars and taken over for a celebration of life by young and old, eating, drinking, talking and ….dancing. Haike enlisted some of us at the Club to provide a tango demonstration and instruction as part of the entertainment. It was a small-scale event, low-key and relaxed.

I quickly learned a little about dancing in the street. I already knew enough not to wear my good dancing shoes, an asphalt surface is not like a dance-floor. But I also learned that you can't do much that involves you or your partner swiveling as the surface makes this difficult. Then there were the extra navigational skills required to avoid the manhole cover. However, by no means were there just difficulties. My general feeling was that this was how tango must have been when it began, before it was even danced indoors and a long time before it began to become respectable. It seemed like my partner and I were going back to tango's roots. For me, larger movements felt better and more natural than smaller ones, to impress the woman and the onlookers with my skill, energy and boldness. In reality, no doubt my partner, as well as Haike's neighbors, were less than impressed, but that was certainly the feeling I had. Perhaps those long-ago, lonely men in Argentina felt something a little similar. I doubt that they favoured subtlety in their dancing.

Eventually, we were approached by the police. However, it was not to move us along for causing a disturbance, but instead was simply to see what was happening. They seemed to approve. In fact, one was inclined to join in and give it a try, although he was reluctant as he was in uniform. We went on with our dancing for a while, as the evening turned into night, and finally went our separate ways with a happy memory of a new experience.

*Clive Randewich*

TANGO IN THE MOTOR CITY

When you think 'Argentine tango', Detroit is not the first name that comes to mind. Despite this, in August, we went to Detroit for a dancing weekend and had a wonderful time.

A disadvantage with Detroit dancing is that prices are in US dollars. We avoided some of the impact by staying in Windsor with a tanguera friend and then commuting across the border, so we made 3 international trips in 3 days!

Our aim was to go and dance somewhere that we hadn't been before. We love socializing with all our tango friends in Toronto, but once in a while it is fun to visit a new place and dance with people we don't know. Simply by dancing with a stranger, it's surprising and fascinating how much you can learn through the tango's unspoken embrace. It's undoubtedly a two-way communication and we found that, in spite of differences, we all speak the same language.

Before we selected Detroit, via the Internet we found several smaller cities within driving distance of Toronto that have tango communities. However, we wanted to find somewhere that offered opportunities to dance all through the weekend and in many places usually only one evening is available. Our timing in Detroit was good, because Luis Bruni was visiting from Argentina and teaching a series of workshops for two weeks, at Lori Burton's 'Argentine Tango Detroit' studio. All through our weekend, there were workshops followed by an evening milonga. On our first night at Lori's studio, people kept asking us if we were staying until Sunday. Why Sunday? "Are you coming to The Brick", they asked? So, of course we had to stay. The milongas at The Brick, upstairs in a local bar, are organized by the students themselves, on a rotation basis. The location is just across the road from Lori's studio so it is attended by her students as well as those who take lessons elsewhere. I think its popularity rests on it belonging to everyone, something like our El Rancho.

Luis is an excellent dancer and had interesting approaches to teaching, some of which are much better to experience than to describe. For example, you can improve your tango posture by sitting in a chair to perform appropriate relaxation and self-awareness exercises, and you can get some surprisingly good insights into dancing milonga by doing it in your bare feet.

All who meet her agree that Lori is a unique, charming and energetic host. The Detroit dancers we met were also extremely welcoming and friendly. Perhaps this may in part be because the dancing community there is a small one. Also, the majority were good dancers in our judgment, at least as good as most experienced Toronto dancers. Although the tango community is small, the dancers had different styles, which kept things interesting. We did notice that during our stay, we encountered very few beginners, unlike Toronto. However, we were assured that beginners did exist, so perhaps they are just reluctant to go out and dance.

Lori Burton can be reached via www.argentinetangodetroit.com
There is also another Club called 'The Latin and Argentine Tango Club of Detroit', but unfortunately there were no events scheduled during our visit. More information is available at www.motorcitymilongueros.com

*Kay and Clive Randewich*

## An Interview with Nelson Avila

*Nelson has brought the Argentine tango to a world-wide audience as the star of 'Tango Argentino' and many other stage shows. His movie credits include starring with Raul Julia in 'Tango Bar'. As well as being a gifted dancer, Nelson is a distinguished choreographer. He and his partner, Teresa Pucci, are currently Toronto residents and distinguished assets to the Toronto tango community. Those fortunate enough to meet Nelson are invariably impressed by his kindness, charm and humour.*

**Nelson, when did you start dancing?**

When I was 15 and I put my long pants on. At that time, boys put long pants on for the first time at 15. If you were 14 and 6 feet tall, you wore short pants! My uncle took me to a place where Troilo was playing. I remember it was a cabaret, with ladies of the evening and there was a show with Juan Carlos Copes.

For the next few years, I went to milongas with my uncle but only to watch, because the women wanted only to dance with the real milongueros.
I started performing folk-dancing at 18. My group won a TV contest in Buenos Aires, and we performed regularly on TV. There was also a tango program with many Argentinean tango stars, so I started to dance tango with them professionally and also to work as a choreographer. We made a movie, 'Buenos Noches Buenos Aires', performed in theatres, and went to New York.
One night when I was performing in New York at the age of 23, Copes and his whole company came to see us. That was the first time I talked to him and he became my hero.

**So was Copes the one who influenced you most, early in your career?**
Yes, Copes and a very fat man they called Virulazo. *(Editor's Note - "Virulazo" and his wife Elvira danced in the movie "Tango Mio" circa 1989).* They were very different from each other, but they were both creative and very different from all the other dancers at that time. They had a lot of imagination.
I taught myself to dance by watching other people dance, but I always tried to be creative. At that time, originality was very important. If you did another man's steps, you and he might have to fight!

**What would you say has been your most interesting experience as a professional dancer?**
The 10 years I spent with **Tango Argentino**. All of us in the cast were already famous in Argentina. We did the show for one week in Paris and there was an explosion of interest in the tango. We took the show all around Europe (twice), to the USA and to Japan. We were signed for 5 weeks in New York but we stayed on Broadway for 5 months! It was the first time that people had seen real Argentine tango. We in the cast were the first to introduce many of the styles, not just in dancing but even in clothes and shoes, that are still identified with the tango today.
I also had fun meeting many celebrities who were curious about the tango, including Jackie Kennedy, Frank Sinatra, Robert Duvall and Princess Diana (she was very tall, a little taller even than me).

**Why do you like the tango? What do you enjoy best about it?**

In the beginning, I liked it because going to a dance was a social activity. Now, I particularly enjoy dancing the milonga. And, of course, I still love to do choreography.

**Is there anything in tango that is still difficult for you?**

No, I just look at how you do it, and I do it. It's a very natural thing to do.
All the orchestra directors I saw when I was a boy, I worked with when I became a man.

**If you could give people some advice to help improve their dancing, what would it be?**

Try to do things by yourself, don't just copy other people. If you copy, then all your life you will dance that way and everybody who really knows the tango will see you and know that you are just copying. Dance the way you feel. You must feel that you fly with the music. You must feel pleasure in the tango, and forget all your problems.
But the most difficult thing is to be yourself, with your own style.

**Do you think tango in Argentina has changed over the years? In what ways?**
Yes. Before and after **Tango Argentino.** The big change came because of the show's success in the early 1980's. After that, more people in Argentina started to pay attention to the tango and its importance. I think that's also the main reason that learning tango is so popular in North America today.

**How do you like living in Toronto?**

My first visit to Canada was in 1964. It was colder then. At that time, I was always working. Now that I am living here, I am learning more. I think one big difference is that here, people live to work, but in Argentina, they work to live. Toronto is a beautiful city. You have to work hard here, but if you do, you can succeed. That's good. People here are very friendly, also. I have made a lot of friends in Toronto.

**Nelson, thank you very much for talking to us.**

*Kay Randewich*

*For information about Nelson's teaching and his other tango activities in Toronto, see the Club website. He can be contacted via email at nelsonestango@netzero.net*

## A Beginner's Guide to Tango Terminology

Do you speak Spanish? If not, you may be confused sometimes by the terms that teachers and more experienced dancers often use. Thanks to everyone who took the time to give me advice about this list, any errors or omissions are mine. The commonly used term is in capitals; it is Spanish in some cases and English in others. This list includes only basic terms. Advanced terms, and much more information, are available on the Internet.

*Clive Randewich*

| SPANISH | ENGLISH | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|
| Adornos | ADORNMENTS | Various kinds of optional enhancements that a dancer can add to a movement. |
| BOLEO | Throw | An energetic swivel of one leg. Can be done high or low, depending |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | on room available. |
| Calesita or Molinette | GRAPEVINE | Dancer moves around partner by doing alternate forward and backward ochos. |
| Cruzada | CROSS | Any time a foot is crossed in front of or behind the other |
| Desplazamiento or Sacada | DISPLACEMENT | Using your foot or leg to displace partner's foot or leg |
| GANCHO | Hook | Dancer kicks back under the partner's thigh |
| GIRO | A turn | Dancer dances around partner |
| GIRO DERECHA | A turn to the right | Go around to your left |
| GIRO IZQUIERDA | A turn to your left | Go around to your right |
| Lapiz also called 'Dibujo' | PENCIL | Drawing circles (or other small movements) on floor with your toes |
| MILONGA | | Milonga is the name of a dance, which preceded the tango. Also refers to the dance event and place. |
| Mordida | SANDWICH | Woman's or man's left or right foot is sandwiched and held between the partner's two feet. |
| OCHO | Eight | Dancer moves in a figure 8 with feet |
| OCHO ATRAS | Back ocho | An ocho in a backwards direction |
| Quebrada | LEAN | A position where the woman stands on one foot, the other one hanging relaxed behind the standing foot. Often seen with the woman hanging with all her weight against the man |
| Resolucion | RESOLUTION | Standard ending of various steps, including the salida |
| SALIDA | Exit | The so-called 8-count basic step (or 7-count, if back step omitted) Probably derived from "Salimos a bailar" = "Shall we go out to the dance floor and dance?" |

## Results of the Club's Annual Tango Survey

We dance with each other, but many of us seldom share our opinions about what we are doing. We also have very little objective data about the tango community. This Fall, Club Milonga conducted its first Tango survey. The intentions were to entertain the community, to seek to stimulate some discussion, and to provide event organizers with a profile of Toronto's dancers.

Estimates of the size of Toronto's tango community vary widely, but are commonly anywhere from 100 to 300 dancers. We received 57 responses, including 11 who had danced in Argentina, so this seems like a reasonable sampling. We hope that more will be willing to participate next year. Thanks to everyone who responded, and to the event organizers who helped us to distribute the survey forms. Some small numerical differences are because a few people did not answer every question.

**Q1 My gender is...** **28 male** **29 female**

Obviously, men and women were equally interested in giving opinions.

**Q2 I have been doing the Tango for approximately...**

The average was **male** 4 years and 9 months **female** 4 years and 6 months. But when I eliminated a few people who had over 10 years experience, the averages were **male** 2 years and 11 months **female** 2 years and 11 months.

**Q3 My age is (answer was optional)...**

| | No. of Men | No. of Women |
|---|---|---|
| **Less than 20** | 2 | 0 |
| **20 to 29** | 0 | 3 |
| **30 to 39** | 4 | 5 |
| **40 to 49** | 5 | 9 |
| **50 to 59** | 9 | 7 |
| **60 to 69** | 4 | 2 |
| **Over 69** | 1 | 0 |

The women seem to be a little younger than the men. I think more research into this would be interesting.

**Q4 When I am dancing, I prefer a partner who:**

| **WOMEN** | **Yes** | **No** | **No preference** |
|---|---|---|---|
| makes conversation | 2 | 14 | 10 |
| gives me dancing advice | 10 | 13 | 3 |
| is a better dancer than me | 19 | 1 | 7 |
| holds me very close | 5 | 10 | 11 |
| I am familiar with | 7 | 2 | 15 |
| dances a specific style | 0 | 5 | 17 |

| **MEN** | **Yes** | **No** | **No preference** |
|---|---|---|---|
| makes conversation | 4 | 9 | 9 |
| gives me dancing advice | 6 | 9 | 8 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| is a better dancer than me | 12 | 2 | 8 |
| holds me very close | 7 | 7 | 9 |
| I am familiar with | 12 | 1 | 13 |
| dances a specific style | 6 | 4 | 12 |

**Q5 A brief description of my ideal dancing partner is…**

OK, with these word-for-word, anonymous comments, now we can really lift the veil on the specifics of what each gender looks for in the other, as a partner. Read carefully!

**Men's comments**

*A few comments were a little stereotypical*

- Over 5 foot 7 with large breasts

*Some were quite specific:*

- 5 foot 3, grey hair, great personality
- 5 foot 7 in heels
- About my height
- Petite, with sense of humour

*The majority of comments were thoughtful.*

- Adaptive, anticipative
- Follows well, dances to music, not bound to learned steps, not afraid of me
- Gets lost in the music when dancing
- Anyone who feels the music and dances with the beat
- Someone with great balance and who can play on the floor with the music, attentive follower
- Someone relaxed and patient
- Lady with more moves than myself
- Sensitive to lead signals
- Somebody who really wants to learn more tango
- Has a frame, sense for the beat
- Human – good follower – good leader – musical – good communication – tango is a multiple partner dance
- One that smiles and has a feeling for the moment

**Women's comments**

*Some women had extremely specific ideas about a partner:*

- Bryant!
- Ruben!

*A few comments went beyond the dance to give very practical advice, obviously speaking from bad experiences:*

- Clean, puts on perfume, no bad breath, with good sense of music.
- I would like to give advice to all male dancers that they should be more aware how to use deodorant, mouthwash and change into clean clothes before they go dancing

*Other remarks included:*

- Someone who wants me to be satisfied and not just get his own satisfaction, who really feels and dances to the music, not just the rhythm
- Someone who leads very clearly
- One who tailors dance to partner ability, not overly impressed with his own level of experience
- Has a clear lead and a few surprises mixed in with the most common repertoire of moves. Dances to the music
- Considerate leader, dances to lady's ability
- Dances well and gives constructive advice
- Able to lead well
- Feels the music, leads well, doesn't show off with outlandish steps, is able to navigate the floor safely, has regard for his partner and other dancers
- Forgiving, doesn't go too far beyond my abilities yet keeps it challenging
- Constructive criticism
- Who knows how to dance
- Non-critical unless he's a teacher, good posture, taller than me, feels the music
- Gentleman
- Who never criticizes my steps even when I make mistakes
- Has passion for the dance and enjoys the art of dancing freely
- I do not have a partner and never had. I am happy to dance with anybody who would dance with me.
- Gives me time to play, likes to perform, creative, strong leader, adaptable
- Dances in harmony with the music and shows his good leadership and not to control me
- Better dancer than me, strong lead, doesn't blame me for his mistakes
- With a light touch, makes suggestions and not demands. If I don't do what he suggests, it's not an assault on his tango ego
- Good rhythm, gentle
- Creative, sensitive in tune to music, eclectic and all styles not necessarily an expert but considers my own level and makes allowances for my inexperience
- I love dancing with many different people, as each has his own style/passion/expression/creativity

**Q6 I prefer to Tango to music that has…**

| | Men | Women | People who have danced in Argentina |
|---|---|---|---|
| **a strong beat** | 6 | 9 | 5 |
| **a strong melody** | 3 | 4 | 0 |
| **no preference** | 18 | 14 | 6 |

Music is a subject on which dancers often hear people expressing strong opinions, particularly those who are in favour of a strong beat, yet these results suggest that most people do not share this preference.

**Q7 I like to tango to music that has…**

| | Men | Women | People who have danced in Argentina |
|---|---|---|---|
| **a singer** | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| **no singer** | 12 | 10 | 2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **no preference** | 13 | 14 | 8 |

Obviously, these are very interesting results, as a lot of the music played in Toronto's tango venues features singers.
An obvious problem in North America is that most people do not speak enough Spanish to understand lyrics. One person commented that "Singers usually muddy the music, you need to know the language to make empathy to the music, if it is sung".

**Q8 Other comments about music…**

**Women's comments**

- I like to dance to a variety of music
- Music that allows for variety in steps
- Not too much show music
- On certain nights, I would appreciate the announcement of music titles, orchestras and composers so we can learn to associate these facts with our favourite tango tunes
- I do not like tangos which are too slow
- I like milongas a lot, although a good variety is best
- There should be tandas with cortinas after every three dances
- Depends on the orchestra
- I love Piazzolla
- Modern tango preferred
- I love tango music!
- There is some beautiful Argentine tango music, let's hear more of it

**Men's comments**

- Argentine performers
- No stage music
- A good mix of tango, milonga, waltz
- Variety
- No milongas
- Traditional music, but like all dances, too much of one kind gets tedious
- I like the 30's and 40's music
- Any tango is music to dance!
- Too many selections are too brief
- Good quality sound system
- Paced
- Inspired

*Interestingly, everyone had fewer comments about the music than about their partners.*

**Q9 I think Tango prices in Toronto are…**

33 **a good deal** 20 **average** 2 **expensive**

When you compare the cost of an evening's tango to the cost of going to the movies, it's hard to deny it's a very good deal for the dancers.

One woman commented bluntly that ' People expect too much for too little. Most events are in less than ideal conditions. If people would spend a little more, nicer events could be put on.' If you share this opinion, please tell the people who organize Toronto's tango events and give them a little encouragement and support.

**Q10 I prefer learning (choose only one)…**

| | **Men** | **Women** | **People who have danced in Argentina** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **new steps** | 4 | 8 | 0 |
| **technique** | 20 | 21 | 11 |

Teachers and workshop organizers, please note.

**Q11 Number of hours per week I spend on the Tango are…**

The average was 5 hours **male** 4.25 hours **female**

**Q12 Including lessons, I spend per week on the Tango …**

The number of people in each category was

**Less than $10** - 10 **$10 to $20** - 23 **$20 to $30** - 13 **$40+** 8

Clearly, dancing is not an expensive pastime.

**Q13 I have traveled to another city in Canada to dance Tango.**

| | **Men** | **Women** |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 14 | 10 |
| **No** | 14 | 17 |

Thanks to those who noted they had traveled to Mississauga to dance, but I took the liberty of deleting these from the results. Other cities included Vancouver, Victoria and Winnipeg but by far the most popular was Montreal.

**Q14 I have traveled to another country to dance Tango.**

| | **Men** | **Women** |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 15 | 15 |
| **No** | 13 | 14 |

Tango dancers are obviously well-traveled. Most common destinations were Argentina and then the USA. Others mentioned included England, Hungary, 'Asia', Hong Kong, Switzerland, Bermuda, Holland, Germany, France, Russia, Cuba, Costa Rica, Mexico, Israel and a cruise ship.

**Q15 What I enjoy most about the Tango is (just choose one)…**

| | **Men** | **Women** |
|---|---|---|
| the connection with my partner | 13 | 10 |
| the figures | 1 | 3 |
| the music | 8 | 7 |
| meeting people + the social aspect | 5 | 4 |
| other | 2 | 3 |

**Q16 It is very important to me that I dance the way people do in Buenos Aires.**

| | Men | Women | People who have danced in Argentina |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 11 | 9 | 7 |
| **No** | 17 | 19 | 4 |

These are surprising and interesting results, which are open to different interpretations. One view might be that most people don't care much about dancing the tango 'properly', that if you are going to do the Argentine tango then, by definition, you must do it in an "authentic" way. There is truth in this, but a deeper view might be that most dancers want to concentrate on developing their own personal style, as indeed seems to have been the practice in the early origins of the dance in Argentina.

It seems to be widely accepted that the social and cultural traditions in North American milongas, and society at large, are different in many ways from those in Argentina. Simple examples include the method of inviting a woman to dance, and the often-crowded conditions which influence the dancing in Buenos Aires. It's an open question as to how much of these traditions we can or should try to import. Perhaps these differences may also have influenced the responses to this question.

**Q17 I want to make some other general comments.**

**Men's comments**

- I wish there were more milongas in Toronto on Saturdays
- Strictly tango is always a great dance, one I look forward to coming to. The floor can be sticky sometimes
- Dancing tango is wonderful, but so is dancing most other dances. In general, the tango community is like other dance communities – mostly open, friendly and enthusiastic
- Good exercise
- Nice people running Club Milonga – Bryant and Natalia are terrific
- Understand tango as a way of expression and not as a way of repression
- I love tango

**Women's comments**

- We enjoy watching other people from different countries dance tango
- Dancing is supposed to be fun, don't be too serious
- I truly appreciate the opportunity Club Milonga has given us all to meet Argentinean performers and teachers, to learn some of the language of Buenos Aires and even to sample the traditional Argentinean foods, right here in Toronto. 'en nuestro barrio de tango'
- I love tango. Club Milonga is great. More introductions and ice-breakers to meet people would be nice.
- I am totally enthralled with Argentine Tango.

*We look forward to doing another survey next year. If you have any comments on this survey, or suggestions for interesting or useful questions to ask on the next one, please let me know.*

*Clive Randewich*

## Learning Tango

*We spend countless hours trying to learn the tango, but are we doing it in the most effective way? How much time do we spend thinking about what is the best way to learn? The following thoughts on this subject were recently posted to the Tango-L Internet discussion group by Larry Carroll. I particularly like his emphasis on the tango as fun rather than a religious rite, and also his comments on the value of taking risks in order to be creative.*

*Clive Randewich*

Since I've written a book on learning tango, you might think I would disagree with the statement that you can not learn it from a book. In fact, I will go further than that.

You can not learn tango from a book, a tape, OR a teacher. There is only one way to learn - to do it. To practice. This is the way we learn a language. Books and teachers can help us criticize ourselves, to know what we did wrong, but it is speaking and listening - practicing - that lets us easily and naturally communicate.

There are two kinds of practice. One is the repetition of elements of tango technique and figures. This is what we usually mean when we say "practice." It is very focused, very detail oriented, rather like bodybuilding with its work on isolated pieces. This is an attempt to converge on the perfect way to do something, based on some standards we have adopted. We can get those standards from many places. From a book, a teacher, watching others dance, creating them ourselves, and so on.

The other kind I usually call "dancing" - but is also practice in the sense that when we do anything we inevitably learn from it. But the purpose of this kind of practice is exactly the opposite of the other. We are simultaneously learning several skills, for one thing.

To have fun is one of those skills. You might think we need no practice in this, but you would be wrong. In fact, a lot of people get this totally wrong when they "dance." I am sure you have seen them, grimly moving around the floor, frowning, serious, trying to be perfect, making dancing a religious rite or a chore rather than a primal, sensual experience.

Another purpose is to learn to be creative, or more creative. Tango is improvisational. It has no standard steps, no standard rhythm - a situation deeply disturbing to those with small souls and strait- jacketed minds.

The chief goal when you are trying to be creative is to make mistakes. If you do not make a few (non-fatal, non-crippling) mistakes in a dance, you have done it wrong. You have been cowardly, not taken risks. Making mistakes is also good because you learn to overcome mistakes, to smoothly continue, to build skill in recovering from mistakes, to build confidence. You can tell who is doing this

wrong; they are the ones who stop to figure out the mistake and to practice it away, rather than embrace it.

Another thing this kind of practice does is to learn to understand the music. Not in some theoretical way, but as a sensory experience. A lot of people get this wrong too. I am thinking now of a half-dozen Los Angeles dancers that many people consider really wonderful, because they do all sorts of acrobatic figures very skillfully. But to me these six, specific men are pathetic. They never vary their rhythm, whether the music is fast or slow or alternately fast and slow. They never vary their style, whether the music is sad or happy, profound or delightfully silly, smooth or bouncy. They embrace their partner the same way all the time, rather than vary it to fit the mood and music.

Most important of all, this kind of practice can help learn how to dance with a partner. There is so much to learn here, from the mechanics of embrace and lead/follow, all the way to learning how to connect with and appreciate a unique soul.

Did you notice that I said nothing about figures? That is because they are the most visible parts of tango - but also the easiest and least important. If you have a lot of experience in dance, in fact, you will not see a single figure element in tango that is not done in some other dance. Almost literally, any figure you do while embracing your partner is a tango figure, if you do it with grace and with the music and with your partner.

So put on the music, take your (real or imaginary) partner in your arms, and let the music take you away. If you can do this, you are a tango dancer. And a better one than many who have done it much longer than you and look so much better - to those who only see the outside

*Larry E. Carroll*

*Larry regularly posts to Tango-L under the name Larry de Los Angeles. He can be reached at larrydla@JUNO.COM*

## Club Information

Club Milonga meets every Tuesday at Danforth Baptist Church. Enter on Bowden St. between Chester and Broadview.

| | |
|---|---|
| Beginner lesson | 7.30pm to 8.15pm |
| Intermediate lesson | 8.15pm to 9.00pm |
| Dancing (practica) | 9.00pm to 10.30pm |

Cover charge for non-members is $7.

Website www.tangotoronto.com
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## Would you like to contribute?

Suggestions and contributions for the next newsletter are welcome.

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