



## Shall We Tango?

---



By John Loofbourow, MD

TANGO, LIKE MOST ART FORMS is not static; it is alive. There are modern and professional iterations. Yet these differ from the original classical Argentine tango. Perhaps, in some ways the new is "better" where art is concerned, who is to say? Nonetheless, the tango in its classic form holds an enduring appeal that is again being resurrected as a unique combination of poetry, music, and dance.

Today, even in our little three-county area, one can dance every evening of the week away somewhere to the sound and sentiment of Argentine tango. There are from two to five *milongas* (dances) and/or classes nightly.<sup>1</sup>

Why has the tango lasted so well over time? And why has it reappeared here and now?

Every art form springs from the loins of a people. It begins, and develops, in the womb of a time and place. It is nourished by the placental blood of a culture. It is born, and grows to maturity within a generation or two. It can be preserved, or reborn, but is never recreated.

From time to time the world reinvents an art form, yet later generations inevitably fail to reproduce that original unique expression of the inexpressible. No one faithfully recreates for example, the feel, the power, the essence of Pericles, Michelangelo, Beethoven Puccini, or even Hank Williams; each was, and is, unique. As I write this today, new and never to be recreated art is developing everywhere, even though the public and the creators themselves are unaware.

But why resurrect the Argentine tango here; and why now?

First, dancing tango unites people rather than isolates them. The old expression "*It takes two to tango*" is apt. In classic Argentine tango there is no long distance dancing. No solos. It is a dance for and by two people who attempt to communicate physically and emotionally, to dance as one. It requires an invisible and intimate connection between the dancers, a sensibility and sensitivity, each for the other, while they dance.

Dancers often put on what I call a "tango face" - a focused, intense or concentrated look. Idle chatter and joking is not common, except between sets.

Second, tango is egalitarian. It is perfectly attuned and accessible to all ages and conditions, not confined to the young, the beautiful, the lean, limber, athletic, or even the trained dancer. *Nuevo Tango* or professional tango ballet skills are inappropriate for classic *milonga* or tango dancing venue where the dance floor is too limiting or crowded. No. Classic tango is for the ordinary, and allows us to express the extraordinary.

A middle-aged couple, a college student and a widow, a pair of McDonald's clerks, all find themselves dancing together and trading partners as is traditional at a lesson, or a *practica* or a *milonga*. The short leather-skinned pair under a streetlight on the nighttime streets of Bariloche are one with the wealthy couple at a Luis El Suave Sacramento Waldorf School *practica* on a Wednesday evening.

Third, tango can be sensual but not usually particularly sexual. It has the aura of sexuality but, like Flamenco, in the flesh it is usually too serious, and too focused, to be very sexually arousing.

Fourth, dancing tango is not about Self. The lyric is not about the dancer or even the dance, but about universals: life, loss, love, revenge, privation, resentments, age, death, and yearning. The poetry embedded in classic tango is particularly powerful, though the message, if it should be called that, can be perceived readily without language.

Fifth, it invites ordinary people to share music, movement, emotion, and lyrical poetry, in a cooperative physical interaction; each dance is a little creation by two people. The dancers don't focus or generally follow a beat or an insistent pulsating rhythm. They dance to the underlying, often contrasting song and feel of the music itself. Each dance is therefore open to infinite interpretations of the moment.

Each couple creates a different dance that forms and dissolves like a summer cloud, and then is forever gone. Tango is here in Northern California today because so many people find in it something that tells of the numinous of existence on this little earth in this little time. And it is uncritical; unthreatening; and escape; just plain fun.

The 1977 British film, *Tango Lesson*, by Sally Potter is an introduction to tango. I recommend it. Yet, in the movie the dancing itself is often so beautifully and professionally done that it doesn't convey the broad appeal to the non professionals who just dance.

To understand why we do so, one must simply do it; you will be in good company.

john@loofbourow.com

1. A continually updated listing of tango venues and events in this area, including all of Northern California, can be found online at [www.lists.sonic.net/mailman/listinfo/sacramentotango](http://www.lists.sonic.net/mailman/listinfo/sacramentotango)

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society  
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819  
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: [info@ssvms.org](mailto:info@ssvms.org)

Copyright © 2000-2008 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - All Right's Reserved