

So, what level am I?

How to determine your Argentine tango level

By Clay Nelson

During weekend workshops and tango festivals students often attend classes more advanced than they are. Reasons for this include: students think that they're better than they really are, that no one will notice, that they'll learn faster, that it's only about patterns, and that they want to dance with the "better" dancers.

The problem is, students who do this fail to realize several things. It hinders the instructors from completing their class objectives; it frustrates and angers the students who have met the criteria and now have to struggle with students who have jumped their level of expertise; and it decreases the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the class.

What level tango dancer you are depends on many factors, such as:

1. Number of years you've been dancing tango.
2. Whether you are a leader or follower—learning to lead usually takes longer than learning to follow.
3. Quantity and quality of classes and workshops you've taken.
4. Quality and the focus of teachers you've studied with—

What level am I?, cont. on page 2



Photo by Divert Lahn-Johannessen of Bergen, Norway.

Summer to do: tango

By Pauline Oo

Ahh... summer...and we're almost at the tail end of it. Are you happy? Have you done all that you wanted to do? Is tango still a part of your life, your weekly routine?

During the summer months, there's lots going on outside to distract us from our tango routine of classes, milongas, and practicas. Many find themselves asking: why should I be inside when I can be outside in gorgeous weather? (Now, if only we had a dance studio with a retractable roof or more outdoor tango activities; anyone care to step up?)

Well, the good news is, with a little imagination, you can fit tango into your summer lifestyle.

Here are some ideas:

Listen to tango music while gardening, biking, or making sand castles on the beach. (The more you can hear the subtleties in the beat, melody, and instruments, the better you can dance to the music.)

Practice basic techniques (e.g. your walk, posture, and weight changes) while you're in the grocery store pushing a cart, strolling around Lake Harriet, or waiting in line to buy that Strawberry Kiwi Swirl cone from Ben & Jerry's.

Get a tango buddy. Practice with a fellow dancer so you'll have someone to hold you accountable and to motivate you. Afterwards, share an iced mocha or sip some wine on the front porch. ■

From the president

Good news! TSoM has made agreements with two organizations. The Tango Society of Madison will soon be our sister organization with reciprocal agreements. And the newly formed Tango Society of Rochester is the first TSoM chapter. A special event to formally announce TSoR will be held in Rochester on Sept. 1, 8 p.m.–1 a.m., at the Rochester Art Center. Advanced tickets are \$15 (\$10 for students). To reserve, call 507-884-9201.

Why is it important to have these types of agreements? To ensure continued growth of our organization and to encourage teamwork within our community—both near and far. In other words, the more organizations TSoM is affiliated with, the more opportunities you will have to dance!

Coming up: our inaugural Tango Dance Exchange. Reserve Thursday, January 31, thru Sunday, February 2, for this new event, which coincides with the “Estampas Porteño” tango show at the U of M on Jan. 31. (See *Miscellany* for more info.) We’re looking for volunteers to help; e-mail me.

A new TSoM calendar will be rolled out late August. Instructors and promoters will find it a lot easier to enter and update information. You, as a dancer, will find more accurate and reliable details on ongoing and upcoming events.

—Diane Hillbrant
diane_hillbrant@yahoo.com

What level am I?, cont. from page 1

- e.g., learning and dancing close embrace is quite different than open embrace.
5. How long and how often you practice.
 6. Who you dance and practice with.
 7. Natural ability.
 8. Other dance experience.

It’s difficult to write a precise guideline to determine each student’s exact level of tango expertise. But I can offer the following minimum criteria:

Beginning dancer

- Has had zero or less than one year of experience in dancing Argentine tango. This includes professional grand champion ballroom dancers who have not yet studied Argentine tango.

Intermediate dancer

- Has been dancing twice a week for at least one year.
- Can hear and stay on the beat of traditional Argentine tango, as well as vals and milonga.
- Understands open and close em-

brace and can dance comfortably in both.

- Leaders maintain line of dance and wait for the follower to complete her step before leading another.
- Followers collect and wait for the lead.
- Understands the concept of parallel and cross feet and can lead or follow from one to the other.
- Can correctly and consistently execute the following steps solo and with a partner in time to the music while maintaining their own axis and balance: marking time, walking forward/backward, side steps, check left turn, crusada, back ocho, forward ocho, and ocho cortado.

Advanced dancer

- Has been dancing Argentine tango twice a week for at least two years.
- Has mastered all of the above criteria.
- Has the ability to lead/follow from the torso only.
- Can interpret the musicality of tango, vals, and milonga—

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dancing to the beat as well as the melody.

- Can comfortably walk in cross feet on both left and right side of the follower.
- Can correctly and consistently execute the following steps solo and with a partner in time to the music while maintaining their own axis and balance: molinetes, boleos, and ganchos.

Clay Nelson is a tango teacher and festival organizer in Portland, OR. ■



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Tango

A poem by Katelyn Haupt

The tango is not a dance,
it is a way of living, a way of being.

The tango is a chance,
a chance for love to bloom,
in all its fragrance and beauty.

It is a chance to learn,
a chance to build your imagination.

The tango is like a flower,
so delicate yet so strong.
If you stop trying, if you stop
giving, the flower will not
bloom, will not grow.

But if you nurture it, help it on,

you will see, the flower will be
beautiful.

For the tango is not a dance,
It is a way of living, a way of being,
a flower.

Katelyn Haupt, age 13, is a friend of
Madeleine Ibes, daughter of TSoM
members Sabine and John Ibes. ■



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One foot in BA

This is a regular column on the sights and sounds of Buenos Aires. TSoM member Kim Kotila starts us off with some accommodation, transportation, and milonga tips. If you have a story to share, e-mail pauline@umn.edu.

By Kim Kotila

Just got back from my first trip to Buenos Aires. Highs and lows. I'm glad I went; I'm glad to be home, and I can't wait to go back.

The Paris of South America? Forget it—BA makes Paris look dull and gray. And, of course, it is the Mecca, tango anonymous, so many choices at any time of day but morning.

Hot spots for dancing

If you go in the next few months, contact me or someone who has been there recently for suggestions (as hot spots do change over time). Also, do get a hold of *El Tangauta*, a very good monthly magazine that tells everything going on (suscripciones@eltangauta.com, 54 11 5217 05119, or available at most tango houses and shoe stores); the magazine *Dios Tango* is an excellent resource of all the milongas (diostango@gmail.com or visit Corrientes 1463); and the tango map and guide produced by tango house Caserón Porteño is good (mapa@caseronporteno.com or visit www.caseronporteno.com).

How to get around

If you go regularly to some place, try to find the best bus route. It costs 80 centavos (about 30 cents instead of \$4 for a taxi), and you get to mingle (sometimes closely) with the people and watch the city instead of the taxi meter in traffic. The subway is another inexpensive option. Keep your handbag tucked under your arm as the pickpockets there compete with the British.



At the subway stations in Buenos Aires, you'll find art lining the walls and tango music wafting through the air. The subte (from *subterráneo* or "underground") is an inexpensive and convenient way to get around. There are five underground lines; Linea A is the oldest (built in 1913) and still carries the original subway cars with antique wood-framed interiors. The Buenos Aires subway is the oldest in Latin America and across the Southern Hemisphere. Photo by Steve Lee.

Milonga etiquette

Ladies, at the milonga, do not change your shoes anywhere but the bathroom. Some people feel very strongly about this. At the milonga, you must order something to drink, at least an *agua con gas* (carbonated water) or *agua sin gas* (plain water).

And, by all means, ladies, be aggressive with the *cabeceo*. If you are staring off into space, you will never get a dance. Some people say never accept a dance with someone who asks you verbally or someone you haven't seen dance on the floor. I am tempted to agree with this. Though I did have some nice dances with exceptions I made, I also had some horrible disasters.

If you do get the nod from a gentleman, stay in your seat and wait until he stands on the dance floor in front of you. This avoids confusion (humiliation) as to who

exactly got the nod, and also, it is the procedure he expects. And some of them are non-plussed if you don't follow milonga etiquette, say, by helping him out and meeting him at the corner. Knowing a little Spanish helps too—dancers usually like to chat a little between songs. One gentleman asked me for my *nombre*. I thought he was asking for my phone number and I told him I didn't have one. Later, I learned *nombre* meant name.

Carry change

Always try to have change (for taxis and other small purchases.) Cash in your 100 notes (and 50s) at every possible opportunity; for example, use them in supermarkets or at restaurants. Supermarket cashiers are trained to look at you imploringly and ask if you have change. Stand your ground. No, you do not. Change as little money as possible at the airport (bad exchange rate).

Eating green

It is not true at all that you can't find a vegetable in BA. Fruit and vegetable stands are all over the place, and I grew particularly fond of a good *tarta de verdura* (a quiche with greens) or an *empanada de verdura*.

Where to stay

If you can get away for as much as a month, rent an apartment. (I was very happy with my beautiful one bedroom on the 17th floor in Palermo for \$650 a month.) The cheapest guesthouses are about \$30 a night.

Shop ahead of the season

Bring an extra suitcase, or buy one there. I've always hated shopping, and even I had to buy an extra suitcase. If you go at the end of their summer, say March or April, you can buy summer clothes on sale just as we head into summer here. ■



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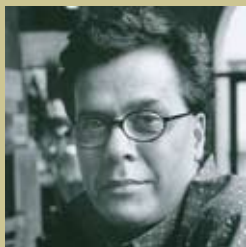
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The price of *piropos*

By Vessela Kouneva

There's a Spanish word, *piropo*, that you have to go to Buenos Aires to truly understand and appreciate. In the dictionary, it's translated as "flirtatious compliment." During my second visit to BA last year, I had a chance to get a more authentic understanding of that word.

I was in Salon Canning and sitting at a table alone, looking for potential dance partners. The floor was pretty crowded, and there weren't many men available. Then I saw a man I had danced with the night before at La Viruta. I'll call him Eduardo. He was a tango teacher, and I had really enjoyed dancing with him. I fixed my gaze on him, trying to catch his eyes. Sure enough, he noticed and came over.

"Hola!" he said, and we exchanged a few words in Castellano. Then he walked away! I was disappointed; I had expected an invitation to dance. Thankfully, another man invited me—not as good a dancer, but good enough to shake off the disappointment of not being

invited by Eduardo. Then, I sat for a couple of tandas and here came Eduardo again!

This time he actually invited me right away! We stood on the dance floor, which now was a lot emptier. He watched me for a few seconds without starting to dance—a very unnerving habit of porteños! Then he said in Spanish (all my private Spanish lessons proved worthwhile that moment): "YOU ARE LIKE A FERRARI! You should not be driven at slow speed (here he made a noise imitating a car with a dying engine) on a congested road! You need high speed and a lot of space!" (He imitated the sound of a revving engine.) I was stunned by the compliment! It surpassed any that I'd ever gotten! How imaginative and sharp! And the best thing was that as we started dancing, I did feel like a Ferrari!

Later, while getting ready to leave, Eduardo came back and asked me to dance. So I put my shoes on again, and we danced a tanda. At the end, I decided it was a good time to go—so I could leave with the exhilarating memory of feeling



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like a Ferrari! I thanked him for the wonderful dances, and he said: "I am leaving, too. Would you like me to give you a ride to your hotel?" I didn't have to even think; my instinct of a married-for-14-years woman spoke for me: "No, thank you; I'm going to get a cab." I anticipated a negative reaction from Eduardo, but he didn't blink, saying nonchalantly: "OK then, see you later!" I was so relieved and even more impressed with Eduardo!

I didn't see Eduardo again until one of my last nights, at Niño Bien. I anticipated dancing with him again. Finally, he came towards my table. I smiled, opening my mouth to say "Hola!," and registered that he was looking at me but not smiling back. He sat at the table behind me, and I stared at him in shock! He stared back, and this time, he didn't need to use words. I could hear him: "You pretend to be a Ferrari, but you're a lousy station wagon!" I was glad no words were spoken but still felt very embarrassed!

Later, I realized I was given a great lesson, not only on the meaning of *piropo* but also on the complexity of interactions between men and women. Gracias, Eduardo! ■

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10th anniversary member recognition

TSoM was founded in 1998, and we're looking forward to celebrating our 10th anniversary in 2008.

We'll recognize founding members at a special milonga (TBA). Formal records started in 1999, so we plan to declare anyone who joined TSoM in 1999—and is still a member—a founding member.

According to the current records, those individuals are:

Jim Aubrecht, Bill Boyt, Lois Donnay, Nancy Downey, James Dunn, Stuart Klipper, Mike Ludvigsen, Michael McGuire, Marlyn Rodi, David Rost, Jason Saari, Kevin Schroeder, Ellen Thayer, and Gayle Whitney.

If you joined in 1999 and aren't on the list, then either your membership isn't current or there's an error in the records. Please call Paul Stachour at 952-884-4977. ■

Miscellany

Share news; e-mail pauline@umn.edu.

TSoM members **Dan Larson** and **Lynne Schulz** promoted Argentine tango at the TC Open dance competition in Bloomington July 12, earning a first-place certificate.

Social Dance Studio presents **Sean Dockery and Charity Lebron** Sept. 28–30. Back by popular demand, they bring a fresh look to tango. Check the TSoM (www.mntango.org) or SDS (www.socialdancestudio.com) Web sites for details; or call Sabine at 612-501-7956.


U of M Tango Club will host **Ramu Pyreddy** Oct. 12–14. As a teacher,

he emphasizes musicality and connection in social dancing. As a DJ, he's one of the most sought after for festivals in North America. (Ramu will DJ the TSoM milonga Oct. 13.) Details, e-mail Lindsay at orrx058@umn.edu.

Maximiliano Gluzman returning to Four Seasons, Oct. 19–21. Details to follow; contact Rebecca at 612-342-0902 or rebeccatrust@yahoo.com.

"Estampas Porteños" tango show Jan. 31, 2008, 7:30 p.m., Northrop Auditorium, U of M, Minneapolis. TSoM is negotiating discounted tickets for members, as well as master classes and a milonga. Details to follow on TSoM-Announce. ■

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Dance has always been part of Tango Moments ad manager Sandra Uri's life. First it was ballet and modern dance, now it's Argentine tango.

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Member spotlight

Name: Sandra Uri

Profession: Ad agency office manager/event planner

How did you get into tango?

About six-and-a-half years ago, after embarking on a new solo lifestyle, a friend took me on a tour of the TC dance scene. The dramatic low light and eclectic, enticing music that filled Four Seasons Dance Studio, where I initially took lessons and experienced my first milonga, took my breath away. I was hooked!

How often do you dance?

In the beginning, four to five times a week. Currently, about twice a week...of course that doesn't include all the kitchen

tango my sweetheart Steve and I do on our own.

Describe an a-ha moment.

I was dancing with an excellent lead when I realized that through emptying and quieting my mind, I could let the music flow through my body and express what I felt.

Biggest challenge?

Finding time and space to completely immerse myself in tango.

What does tango mean to you?

Tango has given me a chance to rediscover the joy and passion of connecting with people in a spirited and soulful way.

Tango mantra?

Feel the music. Feel the lead. Be one with all!