

How to attend tango festivals

Three days and four nights of tango, the length of many festivals, including the Heartland Tango Festival in Minneapolis, can make you feel like you've died and gone to Buenos Aires. It can also be a taxing experience if you aren't prepared. But a little planning can make all the difference.

Prepare for the festival

- **Step 1**—Locate a tango festival. Festivals are held around the globe and their sheer number can be overwhelming. So visit a tango Web site like www.tangofestivals.net to find a festival.
- **Step 2**—Go directly to the festival's Web site, if there is one. Most festivals post their schedules online so you can peruse the teachers and milongas and make sure it will be a good match for your approach to tango.
- **Step 3**—Know your dance level. Most classes will be for specific levels: beginning, intermediate, advanced, and perhaps professional. Sign up for classes you know you are qualified for, or your experience will be frustrating for you and other attendees.
- **Step 4**—Register online, if possible. Some festivals have

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2008 Heartland Tango Festival teachers Cecilia González and Donato Juarez. Original photo by Valerie Molineri.

At the heartland; TSoM members pitch in

Well organized. That was the most echoed sentiment on the 2008 Heartland Tango Festival evaluation forms. Even vendor Yolanda Rossi, who's been selling clothes and shoes on the festival circuit for more than six years, agrees. "Yours is one of the best organized and presented," she said, "and you really made me feel very welcome."

Almost 250 people came to the second Minneapolis festival (May 9–11), organized by a group of TSoM members and led by Four Season Dance Studio owner Rebecca Abas. U students and tango club members were tapped as volunteers during the weekend.

Master teachers Alex Krebs, Brigitta Winkler, Cecilia González,

Donato Juarez, Florencia Taccetti, and Tomas Howlin gave the Dinner/Dance Show crowd inspiring performances—as couples, in a group of couples, and as a group of couples that randomly changed partners. "It [was] such an energy boost to the whole community," said local dancer Paul Lohman. "And a great bargain," added Gail Wagner. "I'll be back next year," said Cecil Ho, a dancer from North Carolina.

Prefestival promo

The Heartland Fashion Show and Sunday Brunch on March 27 to promote the festival packed more than 180 people into Picoso. Owner-chef Lindell Mendoza said the event was the "classiest" they've hosted since the restaurant's opening. ■

From the president

What is community? The dictionary definition: (a) *unified body of individuals*, (b) *people with common interests living in a particular area*. Or a *body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests*.

When we talk about community, we're focused on people who come together for Argentine tango. Our community is made up of individuals with diverse interests who are accepting of differences in style and taste. (If we were all the same, life would be predictable.) It is that unpredictability and the thrill of the dance that entices us all.

A community is only as strong as the support it receives from its members. For the past year, the TSoM board has focused on community building. One of the first, most basic, things it did was conduct a survey to find out what members want.

Now, we're beginning to implement some of the ideas to further grow our community. Examples are tango happy hour (see above right), anniversary party, mentoring program (more info soon), and tango bombs (see story on page 7), as well as supporting the recent festival.

Endorse these activities by attending or volunteering. Or if you have other ideas, come to a board meeting or e-mail me.

—Diane Hillbrant
diane_hillbrant@yahoo.com

Tango happy hour

Mike and Suzanne Doyle have been to a number of *milonguero*-flavored festivals, many of which host teachers—a.k.a. old *milongueros*—who were around during the Golden Age of tango (1930s–50s). On May 18, the Doyles became the TSoM Membership Committee's first Tango Happy Hour guests.

About 20 people attended the event, held 90 minutes before the Black Dog milonga. Among them Marcy Muldoon: "I thought it was helpful. We discussed a variety of tango-related topics [and] it was a

very informal discussion—one topic fluidly led to another."

The goal of this new TSoM activity is to promote deeper connections among dancers, on and off the dance floor. Each is organized at a time and place adjacent to a milonga or other event on the TSoM calendar. Happy Hour guests are current TSoM members interested in sharing their experience on general topics. You don't need to be a member to attend. Questions, e-mail orrrx058@umn.edu. ■

Up next: BA travel; Friday, June 20, 8–9:30 p.m.; upper deck, Joe's Garage.

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a limit on the number of participants, and classes with especially popular instructors could sell out at some festivals.

- **Step 5**—Reserve lodging nearby. The festival may recommend a hotel and may have specials on accommodations at or near the main venue.

Enjoy the festival

- **Step 1**—Check in at the festival, and sign up for classes if you haven't already. You may receive a packet of information that will orient you to the festival.
- **Step 2**—Socialize. One of the best things about a festival is that it puts you in touch with the entire tango community—people come from across the world to attend the larger festivals. Exchange contact information with the people you like. You might just have a place to stay the next time you are in their hometown.
- **Step 3**—Attend the milongas. A festival can be worthwhile even if you don't attend any of the classes (though classes are one

of the best ways to meet potential partners for the milongas). With up to 500 attendees at some of the larger milongas, you will experience the true magic of a crowded dance floor, a rare treat for most *tangueros*.

- **Step 4**—Use the *cabeceo* or eye contact to get dance partners. Festivals follow the Argentine tradition of asking for dances with your eyes. If you see a follower you want to dance with, catch her eye and see if she responds. If she does, walk over to her. If you see a leader you want to dance with, look at him until he makes eye contact. Wait for him to walk over to you.
- **Step 5**—Know milonga etiquette. Don't pass others, and keep *boleos* and other moves low and small so nobody gets hurt. Also, keep moving if there is space or else your lane will become congested.
- **Step 6**—Pace yourself. A festival is an intensive tango experience that lasts a few days. Keep this in mind and take breaks when you feel tired. ■

Edited from www.ehow.com

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MN Heartland Tango Festival May 9–11, 2008

*Photos by Valerie Molineri
and Pauline Oo*





See more photos at
www.heartlandtango.com/gallery



Dance crushes

By Peter Silverman

There are lots of things I love about tango: the music, the melting feeling you get when you're really in sync with someone, the fun of trying to master some new aspect of the dance. The most fun for me, however, is getting crushes on people.

These are not serious type 1 crushes that make you miserable because your beloved doesn't return your desperate longings. These are type 2 crushes, and they are on the maturity of junior high school: remember that girl in history class who is so incredibly amazing, though you can't exactly remember her name. But when you see her, a bolt of electricity goes right through you.

And unlike type 1 crushes, they feel good. On a good day you can feel an enormous amount of affection for someone you barely know. On a bad day they provide you with memories that can snap you out of a bad mood. You can have lots of crushes at the same time. And they are unlikely to jeopardize your marriage or your health: the worst you can get from nine minutes of close embrace is an upper respiratory infection.

The fact that you spend only nine minutes at a time with the person you have a crush on not only adds to the mystery about who they are, but it prevents you from learning about the many ways they can probably be pretty annoying if you got to know them better. (And they're probably just as well off not knowing the many ways you can be pretty annoying, too.)

These minutes of wordless snuggling imitate the relationship of lovers, without the complications

that come into relationships that last. The snuggling, the hand holding as you take her back to her seat at the end of a *tanda*, these are delicious. While they don't begin to take the place of a long-term

relationship where you go through a lot with the other person and stay together, they can be tango's biggest delight. ■

Peter Silverman is a tango dancer in Ashland, OR. He wrote this piece on September 15, 2007.

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Tango bombs

U-tango club demonstrates moves for potential members

By Kristi Goldade

Students yawn through the last ten minutes of chemistry lab, unaware that just outside, a cultural stealth attack is in the making. Dancers from the Argentine Tango Club are readying a boom box outside Coffman Union on the U of M's Twin Cities campus.

Classes are—finally—dismissed. Students let out a collective sigh and stumble out the doors. It's time.

A dancer presses "play" and music from the *barrios* of Buenos Aires wakes up the campus. Lunch crowds stare as pairs of dancers tango in jeans and jackets, gliding through bike racks and commuters, swaying passionately to the melodies.

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It's official: the Tango Bomb has been detonated.

"It gives people a visual," says Lindsey Stratton, former president. "The Tango Bomb allows people to really experience the dance, so hopefully, we can attract new members." ■

Editor's note: This act of dancing in atypical places and disappearing before anyone can tell them they can't dance there is common among swing dancers nationwide. Lindy bombs, as they're called, have happened at malls, light-rail stops, and even the side of a freeway during a traffic jam. TSoM member Gretchen Larson has proposed tango bombing at local art fairs this summer. Watch for details.



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TSoM member Kitty Matthews is an artist of Chinese calligraphy and painting. She is also a professional downhill ski instructor.

TSoM hotline

For current information on milongas and other tango events in the Twin Cities.

763-576-3349

Member spotlight

Name: Kitty Matthews

Profession: An aspiring Renaissance woman

How did you get into tango?

In May 2006, three months after my husband died, I attended a lecture by a woman who had learned tango dancing after a loss. I called Lois Donnay and took my first lesson. I had always wanted to learn the tango because it is so beautiful.

How often do you dance?

After becoming hooked, I now dance and take lessons approximately five times a week.

Describe an a-ha moment.

It came when I was driving home from a lesson; I realized that for

1-1/2 hours a week I was lifted out of my grief and having fun.

Biggest challenge?

My biggest challenge is getting dressed up to go to a milonga at a time that I used to think about going to bed.

What does tango mean to you?

When I used to rock climb and every hold was in the right place and I became one with the rock, I never wanted the climb to end. That's the same feeling of having a perfect connection with a dance partner and feeling one with the music. To me, that is the essence of tango. Life is perfect at that moment.

Tango mantra?

Keep dancing, find the connection, and listen to the music.