

## Discovering Tango

by Steven Lee as told to Jennifer Sellers

Steven Lee was one of the first Argentine tango instructors in Minnesota. *Tango Moments* recently sat down with Steven to find out how he got involved in tango and to learn how Argentine tango came to Minneapolis and St. Paul. Here is his story.

I started ballroom dance in my senior year at the University of Minnesota with the University's Ballroom Dance Club. After learning the different ballroom dances the club had to offer, I took more dance classes for credit that were taught by Mary Lampey. Mary asked the advanced students, including myself, to assist in instructing her class as part of our grade. I discovered that I had a knack for teaching and really enjoyed it.

After graduating from the University, I found that my two quarters of assisting Mary gave me a good base for teaching and they encouraged me to continue to do so. I taught classes for my fellow officers in the U.S. Navy, community groups, park and rec organizations and other colleges. This continued until I was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1981. I took a ten-year hiatus from teaching dance, but not from social dancing. I resumed teaching again in 1991, but this time with an emphasis on Ballroom Latin. I finally came around full circle when I was asked *Discovering*, cont. on page 4



A TTC milonga at Woodhaven Lodge, Villa Maria. Photo by Pauline Oo.

## Tango Teacher Co-op brings students of tango and teachers together

by Sabine Ibes and Jennifer Sellers

This summer, tango magic happened. Under the starry skies near Frontenac State Park, about 100 tango dancers and tango teachers from across the U.S. and Europe gathered at the picturesque Villa Maria Retreat Center for the Tango Teacher Co-op (TTC) June 7 – 10, 2012 to connect with one another and study the dance we all love.

Sabine Ibes and Homer Ladas dreamed up TTC, a unique tango festival designed to train new and current Argentine tango instructors and simultaneously teach the dance to students. This

dual purpose met each attendee's needs and kept everyone highly engaged. The idyllic setting and myriad of activities (beyond the classes, presentations and practicas, attendees could choose to take a walk in the woods, walk through the labyrinth, hike in the state park, or take a trip into town) easily filled the hours.

It was an incredible time. Nestled away from civilization with limited cell phone reception (yet only a short drive to town), everyone got offline and focused on being present in the moment with one

*TTC*, cont. on page 5

## From the president

Would someone have invented a replacement if there was no Argentine tango? What do people do when there is no Argentine tango nearby? Can we learn to dance with no instructors? Fortunately, we do not have to answer any of these questions anymore. Our community has grown! We once had only a lesson or two each week and one or two milongas in a month and now, thanks to the many dedicated dancers and instructors in our community, we have many lessons and milongas every week. Thanks to those who believe in our community we now host visiting instructors, hold intensive workshops that stimulate continuous learning and creativity. How many of us thought about alignment or walking before we were swallowed by the tango? Now, how often do you catch yourself thinking about how you are taking a step? Dancers simply move differently than non-dancers.

For me, the simplest history of the development of tango in Minnesota is that a small group of us followed our hearts. Others liked what we were doing and joined in. We captured those who found a connection and have continued to dance. Once there were enough dancers, more instructors appeared who brought even more dancers. Through it all, we have connected with the spirit and emotion of our dance, while hoping for those elusive tango moments.

As you know, TSoM has been searching for the best possible venue for our monthly milonga by testing a new location each month. While this may be an impossible task, we believe we are making progress. Thanks for your patience as the search continues, and remember to check the calendar for location updates.

When I dream of the future, an endeavour both fun and a little risky, I see many positive developments for TSoM happening over the next several years.

In no particular order:

- TSoM finds a milonga home location and everyone agrees it is “just right.”
- Our community grows to support two milongas each on Friday and Saturday nights.
- Milongas are held five nights a week and St. Paul catches on and draws people from both sides of the river.
- There is a coordinated, year-long calendar of visiting instructor workshops.
- Our community returns to the ranks of being one the very best Argentine tango centers in America.
- We continue to blend Minnesota nice with the passion of tango in ways that can only happen here.
- We continue to meet people and build friendships that extend well beyond the dance floor.
- New people bring their energy and ideas into leadership roles in our community.

Argentine tango is a gift to all whom it touches. To watch the dance is to see a couple connect through the music. Whether it is a simple walk or a complicated combination, watching allows us to share in the dance. Dancing builds this connection from something as simple as a handshake to as intense as a shared heartbeat. Tango offers all this, and it only gets better as we move to the future.

—Bill Boyt

## Letter from the Editor

Dear TSoM members,

Have you ever wondered how Argentine tango first made the trek from South America to the snowy lands of Minnesota? What was it like in those early days?

This issue of *Tango Moments* looks back at how Argentine tango emerged in Minnesota, as recounted by Steve Lee and Lois Donnay; connects to the present with a review of the Teachers Tango Co-op festival; and looks to the future through the lens of upcoming events. If that's not enough, the fact that Sabine Ibes recently collaborated with the James Sewell Ballet to create “A Sound Embrace” proves that tango has come a long way, baby.

Happy dancing,  
Jennifer Sellers



Jessica and Jennifer Sellers try on tango shoes at TTC. Photo by: Pauline Oo

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## Falling for tango

by Lois Donnay, as told to Jennifer Sellers

Argentine tango was not my first love affair with dance, but it has been my most intense.

One of the first dances I learned was country/western. It was a lot of fun, and the community was welcoming. The men were kind and patient with newcomers. After a while, I began doing West Coast Swing, Lindy, Salsa and Ballroom. I decided to add tango. I walked into Steve Lee's class. He had recently come back from New York and was working hard to create momentum around this new dance. We learned in the ballroom structure, with women learning the follow's part and men learning the leader's part and then coming together to dance.

After I had been dancing for a little while, I began to travel around the country and take lessons. I saw that each teacher taught in a different style and that what we were doing was not quite Argentine tango. I really wanted to get better. Everyone did. Steve and Molly both brought in other teachers to do workshops. We were all just absorbing everything they had to

teach us, but it wasn't enough.

### Founding the Tango Society of Minnesota

I saw that we needed an organization, a nonprofit, that would be able to bring teachers in and promote tango in a way that individuals could not. Others in the community felt the same way. So we got together and formed the Tango Society of Minnesota. Frank Williams, Sara Nagel, Mike Ludvigsen, Jim Dunn, Dan Melamed, Bill Brown and I sat on the first board. I was the president.

### Growing the community

I had trained as an engineer, and had a Masters of Business Administration degree in marketing, so I knew a little bit of how to get the word out about tango. I wrote many press releases, which got the news media interested. We had a few articles about tango and our community in local papers, and also in the Star Tribune. Several people who are in the community now heard about Argentine tango from these articles and joined us. I kept sending out press releases everywhere I could. We were featured on Kare 11. We were named Best Place to Tango by the City Pages in 2000. We did demonstrations at the Stone Arch

bridge and other dance events. We held a free outdoor milonga in Meers Park every year. Many dancers were interested in learning about this "new" style. We spread the word in as many places as we could and slowly enticed more people to check out a milonga or a class. A few began taking lessons. We were growing step by step, dancer by dancer.

Another benefit of having a nonprofit tango society was that we could bring in more teachers. We used the revenue from memberships to fund these workshops, as well as the newsletter and advertising. We brought in as many teachers as we could, including Florencia Taccetti, Marcelo Solis, Hernando Obispo, and Daniel Lapidula. We learned close embrace. We started getting better. We knew we still had a long way to go, and this made our community willing to learn and improve. I believe we learned faster as a community than many other communities due to our openness to all that we were taught.

### Impact of Buenos Aires

The first time I went to Buenos Aires was such an eyeopening *Falling*, cont. on page 9

*Discovering, cont. from page 1*

to instruct the University Ballroom Dance Club in the early 2000s.

It was there that my interest in ballroom tango led me to Argentine tango. Like any dance, beginners first learn with the school figures. When dancers become proficient at these figures, they start to play by rearranging and changing the steps. I did the same with ballroom tango and began "copying and pasting" the different parts that make it up. I would give myself challenges, such as doing whole songs without doing a forward-side draw ending, which is a standard ending for many of the different school figures in ballroom tango. After that challenge was met, I went even further by dissecting some of ballroom tango's most commonly used combinations down to the smallest element of one step and then finally to no combination steps and incorporated them in my arsenal. Because the ballroom curriculum has more than twelve different dance studies, ballroom students generally can't concentrate on any one to the point of attaining the proficiency to create and "play" with any one of these studies, with the possible exceptions of Lindy-Hop, West Coast Swing and Salsa. It was different with me in ballroom because of my obsession with ballroom tango. Because of this obsession, I was able to "break out" of the box of the usual tango school figures.

Of course, social dance cannot be done alone. I had to drag my favorite partners along. Some came quietly and others came kicking and screaming, but to go on this mad adventure I knew they had to be the very best. They had to have the self-confidence to try something

new that might embarrass them on the dance floor. My favorite partners were Peggy Kaproth, A.J. Cranston, Pam Brose, Ingrida Erdmanis and Eva Matusinska. These women were my partners-in-crime, teaching assistants and more importantly, patient advisers who I could not have done without in the beginning. Emphasis on the word "patient," if my name for one of the moves — A.J.'s Bruises — is any indication.

In 1992, after seeing this modified ballroom tango, a West Coast Swing dancer from California said to me, "I didn't know you guys did Argentine tango in Minnesota." This comment caused me to delve into what this Argentine tango is all about. Soon afterwards I went to New York and took classes with Daniel Trenner y Rebecca Schulmann and Danel y Maria. I returned with a name for what I was doing and the fire in the gut to do it.

The fire in the gut drove me further on. I did research. I watched countless tango videos. I was voraciously learning about tango. I remember one video in particular that Jim Albrecht had of "Tango Argentina's" Miguel Zotto (later, the creator of Tango por Dos) demonstrating a practice figure in the lobby after one of his performances. After using these steps for my "Beginners" school figure, I learned it was also known by those in the know as D8CB, the "dreaded 8-count basic." Even with the bad rap that it has, I would still use this school figure today if I were teaching group classes.

In the fall of 1993, I learned that Ranier and Julie, two dancers from Dancers Studio, were holding

*Discovering, cont. on page 5*

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**Discovering, cont. from page 4**

dances in an old fire station in St. Paul. I began teaching Argentine tango lessons at their Capital Ballroom studio. I also held mini lessons around the Twin Cities in different restaurants and coffee shops. I knew that tango lessons are worthless without venues to dance, so I held my first milonga at Lake Hiawatha Park and Rec Center.

In the fall of 1994, we began holding monthly milongas at Lake Harriet Dance Center. We called it Tango Plus, because we interspersed two tandas of ballroom among the tango tandas to help our dancers who were ballroom crossovers feel "at home." During this time, we persuaded Miguel Zotto, after one of his "Tango por Dos" productions, to come and instruct a workshop in Jeff Chin's home ballroom in St. Paul. This was one of the first Argentine tango workshops in Minnesota.

During this time, I heard about the first Argentine Tango Congress held in the United States. It was to be held at Northwestern University in Illinois with the best instructors in the world. With a team of instructors who included Juan Carlos Copez and Pepito y Suzuki,

how could we be disappointed? These maestros are very particular about how their dance should be done. During the Q & A session, I asked the question that had been on my mind. "Is bad tango better than no tango in Minnesota, where there isn't any Argentine tango and when what I do is far from perfection?" Their answer, after quite an animated discussion was, "bad tango is better than no tango." It was then that I decided to make a concerted effort to foster and grow Argentine tango in Minnesota.

My initial focus was to get a critical mass of dancers interested in Argentine tango. We had milongas at coffeehouses, played tango music all around town and tried to get people interested in learning. I knew that once we had a bigger community, Argentine tango would take off on its own. Soon, in 1996 – 1997, I was able to put together enough people to organize a group trip to the week-long tango workshop at Stanford University where Pablo Veron (from the movie "The Tango Lesson") was a guest instructor. Soon, more and more Argentine tango workshops were held. These workshops became frequent events mainly because of the efforts of Sharon Dawson.



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Sharon worked hard to bring in highly ranked instructors, such as Fernanda y Guillermo and Carlos Gavito y Marcella Duran.

Some twenty years later, Argentine tango in Minnesota has a life of its own, growing and dividing itself into different styles. As long as we think inclusively as a community, our diversity will give us many different "nets" to catch new members and the numbers to support our many venues. I also believe we all understand that we must dance together as a community to be able to dance together on the social floor. Besides, as you progress on your tango trip, you'll learn that in the end, it's all tango. ■

**Evan Griffith**

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*"Evan's glowing passion for Tango is most inspiring. His understanding of the musicality and sophisticated interpretation kept my eyes glued to his dancing. As well as being the refined leader and follower he is, I trust his approach to teaching will be rewarding to all students."*

— Tomas Howlin

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*TTC, cont. from page 1*

another and our shared passion, Argentine tango. Exceptional instructors taught classes during the day that ranged from strengthening the foundations of students' dance to focusing on specific advanced steps and patterns. Afternoon practicas offered dancers time to further try out their new knowledge, and gave teachers-in-training a chance to practice some of the teaching techniques they were learning. Clear, starry skies and the abundant fireflies lit the way each night to the Lodge for evening milongas, where a spacious dance floor, shiatsu massage, tango shoes and clothing, fabulous snacks and special surprises (Midnight pancakes! Tango movies! Amazing performances!) kept the dancers' energy high into the wee hours.

Many volunteers from the Minnesota tango community came together to make TTC possible. Pauline Oo, Donald Rowe, Jean Mueller and Diana Devi served as the core team supporting Sabine and Homer, coordinating numerous key details. During the festival, Christopher Everett supervised the sound equipment and Lynda Cannova prepared meals and refreshments for attendees. John Ibes and David Hassis cooked pancakes for 120 people at two in the morning. Katie Thompson, Helen Lininger and Brittany Corwin assisted instructors during classes and served as receptionists during the milongas. Many more volunteers helped at the registration desk, cleaned up after the milongas, filled water pitchers, and attended to any details needed.

In addition, fundraisers and



*The castle-like main building of Villa Maria created a magical atmosphere.  
Photo by Pauline Oo*

donations from the community (including the sponsorship by TSoM and Springboard of the Arts) helped make the TTC festival affordable for attendees. In January 2012, Rebecca and Bruce Abas graciously donated the Four Seasons Dance Studio

for a fundraising milonga. A week before the Festival, Sandra Uri secured an amazing cast of artists to donate their performances in a variety show fundraiser held at the James Sewell Ballet Company's TEK box. Paul Lohman provided his DJ services to cap off the variety show with a milonga.

Next year, with the help of the community, Sabine and her team will bring TTC back with a new name: TTC Minnesota Tango

Retreat. See you then!

Want to see more? Check out this YouTube video for more pictures.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txw7\\_CwcRr8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txw7_CwcRr8) ■



*Nick Jones and Diana Cruz teach a boleo class. Photo by Pauline Oo*

## A musical feast is coming to town

By Tamara Demarco

A couple of years ago, a friend of mine who lives in Paris told me about a stunning tango quartet from Argentina who were touring Europe. "It was a feast to listen to and to dance to..." she exclaimed. She had the privilege to dance to their music: The Alejandro Ziegler Tango Quartet was playing in the City of Love.

So when Florencia Taccetti mentioned that Alejandro had contacted her because they were planning their first tour in the U.S., I immediately jumped on this great opportunity to bring them to the Twin Cities.

We are a very lucky tango community to have great local tango musicians who delight us with their interpretations, and we

know diversity and variation are always an enriching experience, especially when it comes directly from Buenos Aires.

### Who is the Alejandro Ziegler Tango Quartet?

Created in 2007, the Alejandro Ziegler Tango Quartet has already toured Europe four times between 2009 and early 2012, visiting more than 40 cities. They are quickly gaining international popularity and recognition. In the increasingly rare time they spend in Argentina, they perform in different venues, including concert halls and milongas.

The ensemble members are Guillermo Ferreiro on violin; Matias Rubino on bandoneón; Lautaro Guida on double bass; and Alejandro Ziegler on piano,



doubling as the band conductor.

Over the years, the Ziegler quartet developed their own unique style of tango music that reflects both innovation and tradition. On the concert circuit, the band performs a repertoire of modern day tangos, mostly from the 1960s through today. Beside Alejandro's own compositions, they also play works of such tango legends as Piazzolla, Salgán, Plaza, Di Sarli, Pugliese, Troilo, and many more.

### Challenges

Bringing the quartet to the Twin Cities is a private and personal effort, and is not sponsored by any organization. The risks are high; the tasks, endless; and the difficulties to overcome are much more than I had imagined. Fortunately, some members of the community offered to share the effort, and I count on them! This is the kind of endeavor that can't be done by just one person. I am very excited about having the Alejandro Ziegler Tango Quartet in the Twin Cities, and I'm sure you will be too! If you

*Musical feast, cont. on page 8*

from Buenos Aires to Minneapolis...

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*Musical feast, cont. from page 6*

are interested in being part of this adventure, please send an email to: [info@bataclantango.org](mailto:info@bataclantango.org).

**If you want to go:**

The Alejandro Ziegler Tango Quartet will be performing at a milonga on Oct. 20, and at a concert on Oct. 21, here in the Twin Cities. They will also conduct master classes for musicians and tango dancers.

It will be a very fun weekend, and will hopefully attract new members to the tango community. The local press is very interested in covering the event, so we expect to reach a wide range of people. Let's be ready to welcome them in!

**Listen online for a sneak preview**

You can sample Alejandro Ziegler



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Tango Quartet's performances online and listen to some of Alejandro's original pieces on YouTube and at [www.alejandroziegler.com](http://www.alejandroziegler.com).

For more details on these exciting upcoming events, check out [www.bataclantango.org](http://www.bataclantango.org). ■



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*Falling, cont. from page 3*

experience. I realized that I had no idea what tango truly was until I danced in Argentina. I truly heard the music and felt the embrace when I danced with an Argentine. That is why I emphasize musicality so much in my classes now. I realized that the dance was simple, yet complex. How the dance is structured as well, the reason for the cabeseo, tandas, etc., all this became clear to me through my trips to Buenos Aires. The cultural aspect of tango became clear to me too. I saw how tango had originated with this group of people: proud, independent, and very artistic. Tango is an individual expression of art, so every dancer has their own dance style. Here in U.S., we like to imitate; we believe that if we do something exactly like our idols, we have achieved our goal. This is a performance mentality that leads away from creativity. I saw how differently Argentines approached tango and I really wanted to bring that interpretation of the music and individual expression to Minnesota. There is so much to learn when you first visit that it takes several trips to really get it. Even now, the longer I wait to return to Buenos Aires, I feel that I start to lose that sense of individual interpretation and expression, so I go as often as possible.

### **Bringing Argentina home**

After having such wonderful

experiences in Buenos Aires, I just knew that we had to bring that level of fun and creativity to Minnesota. To do that, we had to improve our skills as a community, so people would feel comfortable enough to improvise. And we had to grow. We attracted a lot of people initially, but lost many right away, because on a whole as a community, we weren't good enough. It wasn't fun to dance. Our overall level had to improve before we could retain people. I felt that it was really important that we have fun dances. I noticed that the Denver tango scene had a wonderfully strong community and dancers. They really understood tango and music and were just really good dancers. I wanted Minnesota to emulate them. I thought I might be able to help people inject some fun in their dance. At the time, I was assisting Florencia, and decided that I would like to teach my own classes as well. I began officially teaching in 2001.

### **Teaching**

I love teaching students who feel that they can't dance. I still remember how clumsy and uncoordinated, how pata dura (stiff-legged) I was when I first started dancing, and how, over time, I learned to dance. I now specialize in students who feel that they have two left feet. I enjoy helping them see that they too, can learn to dance and have fun doing it!

I am very proud of the tango community in the Twin Cities. We have great, committed, fun dancers. Some communities have many people who spend more time in lessons than on the dance floor, but we have a fun scene, and there are a lot of places to go. We have generous dancers — those who dance with a lot of people. Not every community has that. Many experienced dancers feel they are too wonderful to dance with newbies. So that generosity is something to treasure. As in Buenos Aires, many men dance with beginners and make an effort to give them as enjoyable a tanda as those who have danced for a long time.

Our community is going in the right direction. I would like to see TSoM have more and better events, as well as focus more on bringing new people into the community. I believe all teachers and students should all be members of TSoM to build the community. The more who are members and volunteers, the more the society will grow and can do more. And our community will continue to grow



**Mauricio Castro**

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— Mauricio Castro

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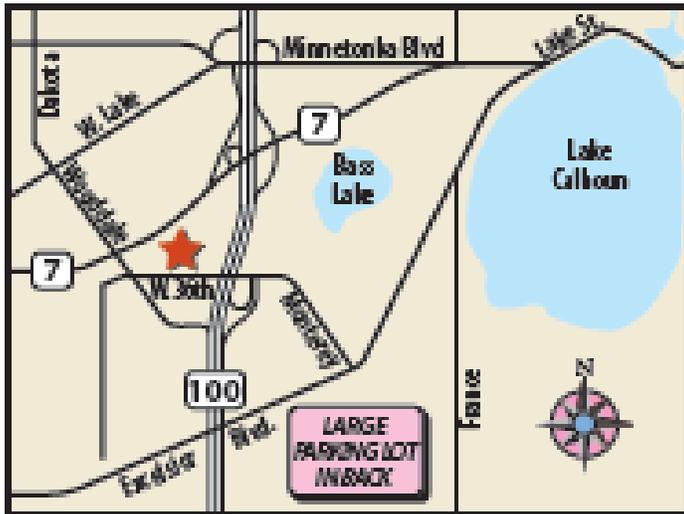
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Thank you for honoring those that have given much to the dance and our community!

### Tango Moments staff

Editor: Jennifer Sellers  
Ad manager: Sandra Uri  
Contributors: Sabine Ibes, Lois Donnay, Steven Lee and Tamara Demarco

The editor reserves the right to alter contributions to reflect considerations of content, style, or space.

Email jennisellers@gmail.com to comment or contribute stories. Email sandrajoyuri@gmail.com for ads.

Tango Moments is published three times a year by the Tango Society of Minnesota to help keep members informed about Argentine tango.

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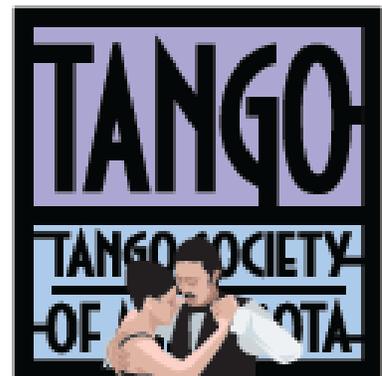
The Tango Society of Minnesota is excited to honor some of our dedicated dancers who have made outstanding contributions to the Minnesota tango community over the years. If you would like to nominate someone, use the nomination form in the previous pages, pick one up at our monthly milongas or print one from our website.

[www.mntango.org](http://www.mntango.org)

For Your Bulletin Board **YOUR NEXT TSoM MILONGA**  
**August 11, 2012**

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5810 West 36th Street, St. Louis Park



**Nice, Large Floor with  
Plenty of Social Seating,  
Tables, and Food**