

The Tango and Trapeze Acts

By Cacho Dante, Milonguero de Buenos Aires
November 1998

Thirty years ago, the tango wasn't a trapeze act. It didn't have choreographies, and the woman was not just a follower, she was to whom the tango was dedicated. Around that time, under the pressure of the dictatorship in Argentina, many milongueros stopped dancing. They were tired of getting picked up by the authorities every weekend to see if they had a police record.

Some milongueros went back to the neighborhood clubs where they had to dance with their neighbors, their cousins, the sisters of friends—all under the watchful eyes of mothers. It was an enormous bore.

The guys at that time had already surpassed the stage of steps. They had already passed through the filter: When they didn't really know how to dance, they did 20 steps; when they knew a bit more, they did 10; and when they really knew what they were doing, they danced five....but with real quality.

The rest they learned from the orchestras at the time: how to navigate the dance floor; how to lead the rhythm. They danced then to some of the best orchestras live every day, Osvaldo Pugliese, Anibal Troilo, Juan D'Arienzo, Francisco Canaro, Alfredo Gobbi, etc.

Later, everything changed. The tango climbed onto the trapeze and became choreographed. And it became a dance of the deaf. The dance floor today also sometimes seems like a war zone. Women don't even get the chance to choose their partners. Men snatch them from the tables as if they were fruit in a supermarket bin.

When some of the milongueros returned to dance, myself included, we wanted to be in style, to learn choreographies. But it was late for that because for us it was more important to be appreciated by the woman than to be admired by those who liked to be seen. Women chose the tango milonguero. They embraced the old guys and then later embraced the young ones as well. Even if we milongueros are fat and bald, we still carry our heads high and have plenty of women to dance with.

Sometimes you hear that tango milonguero will die with the last milonguero. But those who say that don't seem to be aware that the last one is only 17 years old and is already teaching the dance.

Nowadays, we dance to orchestras and singers that are long gone. The sons of the great orchestra leaders, as children do, did not listen to their parents. Today, unfortunately, there isn't really any new music to dance to. The orchestras now knock themselves out to follow the singers, whereas in the old days the singer was just another instrument.

The tango, some say, is growing. Others say it is getting fat. I believe it is swollen, like someone who has eaten too much. Luckily, the example of the milonguero exists and it is not by chance nor just because it is something in vogue that some young people here and other people abroad dance in a close embrace and fly. To fly, you must have your feet firmly on the earth. We Pugliese fans plant our feet on the dance floor and we fly with our torsos. There is no other way to dance the silences and the pauses. With D'Arienzo, you dance in fourth gear, with Pugliese, in first. For Pugliese, you must lower the turns and with D'Arienzo, lift them.

The tango is a feeling that is danced. That's why it is not choreographed, though it can have sequences, like all feelings. You can dance love, rage, happiness, pleasure, every mood. The tango is not a dance to demonstrate ability but rather an interpretation of feeling. It is not just moving your feet and posturing. The tango is Argentine, but it belongs to all those who understand its feelings and its codes.

Guys, to dance tango, you must listen to the heart of the woman.