

## ARGENTINE TANGO – Vals and Milonga

The social Argentine tango is danced by couples moving around the dance floor in a counter-clockwise direction, following the feeling of the music. The dance is totally improvised using a combination of walking steps, weight shifts, pivots and embellishments. The leaders lead and the followers follow every millisecond of the dance. Tango consists of three forms of dance: the "tango", usually in 4/4; the "vals" (waltz) in a fast 3/4; and the "milonga" in 2/4, similar to a meringue-type beat.

**Floorcraft:** The couples should keep with the counterclockwise flow of the whole dance floor and not cut across the flow of traffic. They should keep moving, not staying in one spot too long and avoiding bumping into other dancers.

**Embrace:** There are two embraces in tango: close and open. The open embrace allows room between the two dancers and is similar to a ballroom dance position. The close embrace resembles a very close hug with contact between the torsos of the dancers. Sometimes the dance is done totally in open embrace, sometimes only in close embrace, and sometimes the dancers flow into and out of both embraces, a concept that has been referred to as "liquid tango." In Argentina at the social dances, the traditional tango is done exclusively in close embrace, while "nuevo (new) tango," often done by young people, opens the embrace.

**Posture:** Posture is very important in tango technique. You should carry yourself as if walking with good posture. The weight should be balanced between the heel and the ball of the foot, but slightly more on the ball of the foot. You can sway slightly forward and back while still retaining the balance between the ball and the heel of the foot. With the slight lean forward, the toes should not be bent in your shoes as if digging into the ground trying to retain your balance. Letting your feet "spread out" will help with your balance. While walking during the dance, the thighs of a dancer should not come into contact with those of the partner. However, there are certain advanced elements in which the dancer's legs do make contact.

**Frame:** A good frame is essential to an elegant and comfortable dance. Assuming good posture, the leader will hold the follower's right hand in his left at the follower's shoulder height. The elbow of both dancers should relax toward the ground. The elbow should never get behind the plane of the torso. The hands should maintain a very slight amount of pressure to maintain the frame and to avoid "spaghetti arms." The follower should not grasp the leader's hand or thumb as a support. Both dancers should always maintain their own balance.

The leader's right arm, will go around the follower's back, just below the shoulder blades. This position will vary depending on the height of the dancers. The follower's left arm will go around the back of the leader's neck in close embrace, or on his shoulder or bicep in a more open embrace. This can change during the dance. The follower should not hang her arm on the leader, but use her muscles to support her own arm. The frame is not used for support, but rather to communicate the lead and follow of the dance.

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While dancing, the dancers should try to keep in front of the partner's torso. This is a very important concept.

Leaders must lead with their torsos and not their arms. The relationship of the arms to the torso should remain the same. This is the frame. The leader communicates the lead with the torso/frame, not the arms. Using the arms to lead makes for an uncomfortable and unpleasant dance for the follower.

**The Dance:** Tango is a walking or pedestrian dance, and good walking technique is 98% of tango. Always walking to the feel of the music, the leader should move as if just walking comfortably down the street. The heels should hit the ground first and then the weight transfers to the ball of the foot. When walking the knees should slightly brush together or at least come very close to each other. Avoid the "Frankenstein" walk with legs apart.

The followers will be walking backward the vast majority of each dance. When she feels the lead to step back, she extends her leg back as far as the lead allows, then transfers the weight to the toes or ball of the foot rolling through until the heel contacts the floor. The followers should step one foot directly behind the other as if walking backwards on a gymnastics balance beam. The knees should brush slightly during each step.

Both dancers should keep the knees slightly bent, or soft, to be more grounded to the floor and to avoid injury to the knees. The dancers must center their weight on one foot or the other. This is known as being on your "axis." The axis extends from the ball of the foot and out through the top of your head.

Pivots are a common, important and elegant element of tango. When either dancer is on axis, they may pivot clockwise or counter-clockwise in preparation for another step. The pivot starts with the torso, goes through the hips and finally to the feet in a smooth and elegant movement.

Tango is totally improvised. On the social dance floor there is no choreography. The dancers use walking, weight shifts, pivots and embellishments to create their "3-minute dance." A beautiful tango can be danced using only the most basic steps, provided the steps are executed well and are in sync with the music. Those two elements are what make a tango satisfying, whether the steps are basic or complicated.

Take your time. Enjoy the music. Enjoy the dance. Most of all enjoy them together.

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