

Early Argentine tango in the Twin Cities

By Molly Culligan

As a little girl I glimpsed my parents dancing a tango flawlessly. Around 1993 "Tango Argentino" hit Minneapolis directly from Argentina. It was raw. Seasoned *milongueros* wildly danced four hours. My man was enthusiastic. By three hours, less so. We stayed. For me, it was a natural transition from flamenco. I heard it. I knew its soul.

A few teachers here taught American tango, none, Argentine. Rumor had it Steve Lee had an interest. I asked him: "If I gather the dancers will you teach us?" He replied: "Give me one year to study and I will."

Grease the gears. I hired a dream American tango teacher, Mark Weiss to teach us at Colosseum Ballroom at Lake and Minnehaha. I gathered 50 tango-hungry sports. A core group of 16 continued all year, Steve among them.

Mark moved to California and the big time. Steve began teaching at Old Arizona. I began milongas and bringing guest teachers; Fred and Yermen Romero the first.

I drove to Chicago monthly. Out

Early TC tango, cont. on page 2



A banner promoting Argentine tango hangs inside a shop window in Denmark.

Tangaroo, or Dancing Down Under

By James "Jimito" Dunn

I like winter in Minnesota. Still, when Minnesota's February extends her icy arms I find myself tempted by the embrace of a warmer partner. This partner is not easy to approach. She demands that I cross several time zones to reach her. She expects me to pay for her company! Ah, but she is worth it.

I'm talking about Sydney. Of course, Sydney, Australia. I visited in 2008 and liked it so much I returned in 2009 for a longer stay. First, the numbers: Sydney is a city of four million or so spread along the squid-like arms of a magnificent harbor. It takes 14 hours to

get there from Los Angeles or San Francisco. Add the trip to the West Coast and you can spend 20 hours door-to-door. Roundtrip Minneapolis to Sydney cost me \$1,250 on United this time. I rented a very large efficiency with balcony, small kitchen, laundry, etc. for about US\$90 a day, helped by the 30 percent currency boost. Prices for meals are like those here, depending mostly on one's taste and pocketbook.

Like Buenos Aires, Sydney is a city of distinct neighborhoods. This time I stayed in Woolloomooloo, a part of town between the Central

Tangaroo, cont. on page 6

From the president

The Tango Society of Minnesota and its members are so lucky to have had such great leadership, starting from the very beginning with Lois Donnay as TSoM founder and our first president. She helped set the course and purpose we still follow today: "To promote Argentine tango and to support other organizations who do the same."

We especially owe a great debt of gratitude to the 2008 board for leaving us in excellent shape and giving us real momentum to build upon.

Today, the 2009 board is building on the hard work and dedication of our leaders. We had an outstanding 10th Anniversary event at the German American Institute led by Lisa Thurstin; we have a new venue for our 2nd Saturday milonga, ERV Dance Studio of Hopkins—reminiscent of an authentic Buenos Aires tango salon; we started a membership appreciation and participation incentive program that's giving us both record-breaking milonga attendance and a big jump in membership; we've added more Who's who and What's what to the www.mntango.org home page; and we've launched a new 5th Saturday milonga at Downtowner Woodfire Restaurant in Saint Paul.

Look for more from us, and we'd love to hear from you.

—Dan Griggs
dcgriggs55410@yahoo.com

Early TC tango, cont. from page 1

on Northwest Highway Bob and Cathy Dronsky created Tango... nada mas, a ballroom palpitating red roses. My tango poetry insisted. I wrote all the way down and all the way back.

I combed the Twin Cities for spaces with *ambiente*. I was pre-computer: Typewriter. Kinko's. Telephone. Post office. A few good women took the money and brought food. Janine and I housed instructors. Sada helped...yum!

My sweet daughter Meghan be-

came ill and died. The dance was the repository for my grief.

I made my way to Buenos Aires with Daniel Trenner, arriving at Hotel Continental at 10 p.m. No roommate. She piled in at midnight; "Get up! A milonga!" It was very grand. A famous old building opened for that night only. I never again saw the highest echelons of Buenos Aires society and politicians dancing. Argentine décolletage is impressive.

Class at La Ideal at noon. A seminar

Early TC tango, cont. on page 3

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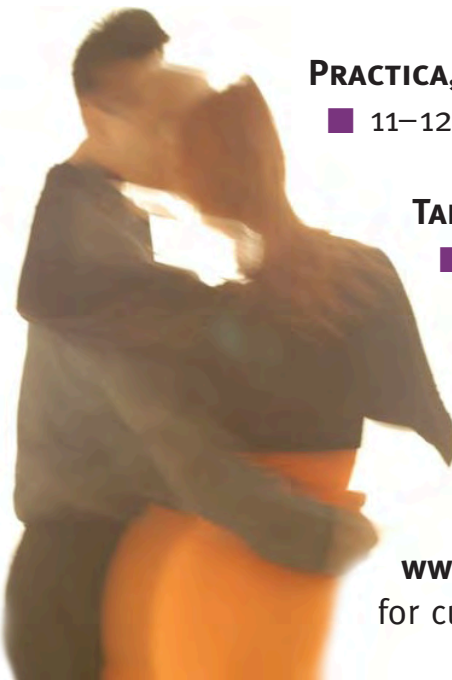
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Early TC tango, cont. from page 2

with a master tanguero or a widow, four till six. We sat at their feet. They instilled tango, its formality with its strict codes of behavior. They touched on their suffering during The Dirty War. Made us hold our breaths. We wept.

Daniel implored Juan Bruno to dance his father's tango. He danced in tears and had to stop.

One night Daniel brought to the hotel a fabulously promising young dancer from the Andes: El Indio! Swarthy, fiery, solo. *Ole!*

I became fast friends with two of our 20 assistant teachers, Javier Bucher and Marcelo Solis.

Back in Minnesota, Steve held milongas on Lyndale and 64th. One summer he discovered *el melieu mas puro*. Lake Hiawatha Recreation Hall looking west, windows wide open, the moon sailing past. Turn-of-the-century. Peggy fed us. Still miss it.

Only the old Loring Bar with the hole in its white mosaic floor could rival its charm. Those floor-to-ceiling windows swung open to the lake. Americans in Paris some

nights, Frank and I danced up and down the steps and rushed across the park to the little arched bridge for more.

Adding to riches, the café expanded into the old Ballet of the Dolls' studio with its sprung floor. Café Accordion Orchestra played in the charming orchestra loft over the sunken bar. Toward closing they struck up an Arabian vamp tune. Lisa and I sprung up and sprung loose! Sweep and lights and grandeur. We DRESSED, we did. Sometimes the Dolls and their choreographer Myron Johnson joined us.

Here in Saint Paul I discussed tango over dinner with Horatio Pecorino, from a long line of Argentine tango composers and bandoneon players. As my sojourns in Argentina stretched out, his sister Adelita and her husband Rafael took me on long *barrio* strolls deep into tango history. I told them I was searching for sheet music to bring home to Severin Behnen to begin a tango orchestra. They brought me a thick sheaf of browned brittle tango scores covered with notes and inscriptions by the composers and orchestra leaders. "*Por Severin*

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Behnen!"

Severin lost no time. Orquestra Sol y Sambras opened at the Loring Bar, I reading a tango lyric in Spanish then in English; Severin at the piano. Myron took my hands, "That was beautiful, Molly!"

Severin's big chance for his PhD came and he moved to Los Angeles. Alas! Consolation? Rebecca returned from studying tango in Italy to create Four Seasons, the prettiest dancing salon I know.

Vive, el tango! ■



mumtaz anwar, associate AIA, a Cornell university graduate, has extensive experience in architecture and interior design. Known for minimalist designs that are functional and aesthetically pleasing, he pays attention to play of light and shadow and free-flowing spaces. His careful attention to detail, lighting, color scheme, and decor is evident in fellow dancer Mark Jefferis's loft, pictured at right. The furniture is designed and built by Mumtaz as well. Call Mumtaz for help with your design projects.



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Tango guide: Where to dance in...



Mumbai, India

By Javier Zuniga

There is only one milonga on Mondays at a restaurant called Zenzi Bar. It's free because it runs after the class, and I think it goes from 10 p.m. to midnight or 1 a.m., depending on how many people they have (which is usually not many; tango has not really caught up that much in Mumbai). The address is 183 Waterfield Road, Bandra West.

Info: <http://lindyhopindia.com/events.html>

Airfare tip

Start with a travel search engine, like Orbitz.com. Note the airline with the lowest fare to your destination, then search the airline's Web site—the fare may turn up cheaper.



Lima, Peru

By Javier Zuniga

I recommend two places to dance. The first one is an Argentine restaurant called Patagonia; the address is Bolivar 164, Miraflores. The milonga on Tuesday runs from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. The cost is 10 soles (about \$3). They have a diverse crowd, favoring young people. Good music; relaxing atmosphere. The organizer is Argentine, and he's also an instructor.

The other place is Barbacoa, also a restaurant; the address is Elias Aguirre 166, Miraflores. The milonga is every Thursday and Saturday from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. The cost is also 10 soles. I think there are more people here, and it is a little more formal.

Both floors are actually not quite good so you want to be careful.

Info: www.protangoperu.com



Copenhagen, Denmark

By Brad Hokanson

There generally is a milonga every night, except for *Onsdag* (Wednesday). It's my experience that locals may not be aware of tango in any given neighborhood, so look online before you head out.

There are about eight tango orchestras in Denmark, ranging from traditional tango to Piazzolla-inspired nuevo tango; see <http://tango.dk/diverse/orkestrer.htm> for a list. Even smaller cities such as Aarhus have a tango orchestra. Malmö, right across the bridge in Sweden has some sort of tango every night. Both Copenhagen and Malmö have multiple tango festivals.

Info: www.tango.dk or http://tango.dk/kbh/kbh_milonga.htm. For broader Scandinavia, check out <http://tangoportalen.com>.



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Tokyo, Japan

By Noriko Sakuraoka

Try Fridays and Saturdays at El Abrazo in Shibuya district. The floor is medium size and slippery. The music is traditional. The instructors are good, and excellent Argentine professional dancers often have workshops. The cost is 2,500 yen with one drink (\$28).

Also try Fridays and Saturdays at Zero Hour in Roppongi. The two floors are medium size and slippery. On Saturday, the milonga is in two rooms—white room, nuevo music; black room, traditional music. The atmosphere is not very welcoming, so I recommend going with your friends. Most foreigners prefer this milonga. The cost is 1,000 yen (\$11) on Friday; 2,500 yen, with one drink, on Saturday.

Info: www.monglan.com/tango_links_in_tokyo.milongas.htm

Tip: Most dancers prefer close embrace, dressy-formal. Very few, including me, wear jeans—it's not very welcomed. Young women show skin a lot! There is no tanda, no cortina. Until you or your partner want to stop dancing, it goes forever. (I'm not joking.) Women usually don't ask men to dance.

The city is very safe; you can carry anything anywhere. But most people barely speak English. Most restaurants and bars take credit cards; not grocery stores and local fast food. Tip is not necessary.

Berlin tango: *Möchtest du tanzen?*

By BreAnne McKenzie

During my summer in Berlin, I had the luxury of attending most of the milongas at least once. I will describe to you the Berlin milonga etiquette and also, at the end, what I consider to be 'the best of' the tango scene.

First of all, visiting tangueros must be prepared for the fact that there are no cortinas. German efficiency has created a situation that can be a bit awkward at first if you're ready to end the dance after four songs and your partner is not. It also makes it difficult to catch a dancer with whom you really want to dance with since there is no natural change of partners. Followers, if you try the *cabaceo* and it's not working, I recommend approaching the leaders to dance in Berlin. I'm not a superstar, but I've never been refused when I've done this and if they like you, they'll look for you next time.

Also, this way you will have a chance to dance eight songs with a skilled dancer who may not otherwise notice you there in the dimly lit corner. Asking for a dance is important too because the scene is very international—many people have never met each other before. Luckily you speak English; so chances are no matter who you approach that person will also be able to communicate with you fairly well.

In regards to sitting in dim corners, don't do it. This is a big scene, and a good strategy is to position yourself close to the DJ

booth since this is where most of the advanced dancers and locals tend to hang out. Also, I never worried about leaving my things in a pile under a chair. Nothing was ever stolen.

Although the dress is casual and bohemian, many leaders in Berlin have commented to me that they really enjoy dancing with women who dress nicely (read: dressed up and sexy) and, believe it or not, have nice toes. Therefore, to be noticed, I recommend that ladies dress elegantly and seductively—to whatever point you are comfortable with. This will also make your tandas last longer, whether you are enjoying it or not.

As for feet, I have the biggest, ugliest feet in all of Germany, but leaders actually commented how nice they looked when I used the foot scraper, toe nail polish, and toe rings. For men, as always, I recommend deodorant and subtle cologne. Advanced dancers wear dress shirts and suit coats and also bring a change of shirt because the indoor milongas are like ovens, and sound regulations do not allow open windows. If you're a tall woman, you're in luck because there are many leaders over 6'2" who are quite good.

As usual, the best dancers arrive sometime after midnight and dance until about 2:30 to 5 a.m., depending on the milonga. But if they're hosting it, then they're there from the beginning

Berlin tango, cont. on page 7

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Tangaroo, cont. from page 1

Business District and the eastern 'burbs that has more "o" in its name than any other place on earth. In fact, the town council should consider leasing two or three to a locale with a vowel shortage. Russell Crowe has a pent-house-style apartment atop the restaurant-encrusted Finger Wharf across the street from my building. Thought of saying to each stocky, sunglassed fellow on the block, "G'day mate, care to pop in to the Spotted Cow for a Toohey's New?" The actor and I may have become mates, but I decided certain Crowe-like fellows might take this the wrong way; so refrained.

In any case, from my *barrio* I had easy access to Sydney's excellent ferry, train, subway, and bus system. And, friends would often drive me to and from milongas, which reminds me to do likewise for visitors who come to Minnesota.

Sydney is a clean city with breathable air. It is relatively safe, though you can get into trouble anywhere, and I have. In the city itself, there is the eponymous Sydney Opera House and its five stages. I took out a second mortgage and attended a fine performance of "The Magic Flute." Sydney has the usual museums and a cosmopolitan array of restaurants and arts. The Australian pub is not just a rural institution. You'll find pubs on every corner in Sydney. And, if one enjoys swimming, surfing, sailing, or other

water-related activities, a good beach is always nearby. I stayed out of the water this time after two Aussies were attacked by sharks—one a Navy diver in Woolloomooloo Bay in front of my doorstep and one a surfer at Bondi Beach. A cynic might note that professional courtesy insulates lawyers from shark bites but I wasn't taking any chances. From Sydney, it is an easy day trip to the Blue Mountains and the uncrowded beaches to the north and south, or the vineyards of the Hunter Valley.

But what about the tango?

There is a plethora of tango in Sydney. About 11 events on a typical Wednesday night, from lessons to practicas to a "practilonga." There is just a lot more going on with more teachers and more everything than we have here. But then Sydney is the New York of Australia and a much more cosmopolitan place than the Twin Cities—though we are more diverse than 20, or even 10 years ago. *Gracias a Dios!*

Tango lessons, often from native Argentines, are available at maybe a dozen studios in the metropolitan area. Milongas are held at restaurants or clubs, such as the Hakoah Club at Bondi Beach. As in Minnesota, many of these clubs were founded to give immigrants from various places a haven in a new land. I've danced at the Polish Club and the Spanish Club, for example.

The Aussies are almost unfailingly

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Stephen Peters

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friendly and outgoing. It's relatively easy to strike up a conversation with a local. Since this was my second visit, I knew some dancers and went to the Hakoah Club where I expected to see them again. The hosts and teachers, Anna and Martin, as well as Kiriaki, my instructor in all things Greek, welcomed me as part of the regular crew. This time I attended six or seven milongas and some lessons and practices.

The followers I danced with seemed to understand my lead and style of dancing, whatever that is. The lessons I attended were not that different from the ones I go to here or went to years ago in Buenos Aires. DJs played similar music. Attire was like that worn in Minnesota—but keep in mind I visited during Sydney's summer and that it never gets cold there by our Arctic standards.

Will I go to Sydney a third time next winter? Well, there are a lot of places in the world I haven't visited, many of them boasting tango as well as other fun activities. Nonetheless, when February's chill embrace tightens, you may find me at the airport—boomeranging back to the land down under. ■

Berlin tango, cont. from page 5

so you can catch them early in the night. Perhaps if you are visiting, it's good to attend practicas beforehand to get to know the instructors and dancers.

So, where should you go?

Sunday: Max und Moritz; 5 euro (wood floor, more classical, good food), TangoLoft (cafe, bar, and snacks, more neo than classical, but one of the most beautiful environments and a great wood floor)

Monday: Strandbar OpenAir; free (on the river, bar and food nearby, bring your second-best pair of shoes, you're going to tear them up on this sandy, thin plywood floor)

Tuesday: Clarchens Ballhaus; free (full bar and food available, nice dance floor, also host swing and salsa nights, outdoor restaurant, but it can be very hot; mix of music)

Thursday: Osthafen; 5 euro (bar, outdoor seating by the river, mix of music), El Yeite; 5 euro (intimate, small bar/cafe, high ceilings)

Wednesday: Strandbar OpenAir; free (see above)

Thursday: Osthafen; 5 euro (bar, outdoor seating by the river, mix of

music), El Yeite; 5 euro (intimate, small bar/cafe, high ceilings)

Friday: Salon Urquiza; 5 euro (traditional music, nice floor), Haus der Sinne; 5 euro (sometimes live music, fire pit outside, cozy, nice floor)

Saturday: Art13; 3.50 euro (bar and cafe, neo and classical, my favorite floor, very hot), Ballhaus Rixdorf; 5 euro (most popular, bar and cafe, hard concrete floor)

The tango scene in Berlin is bohemian, young, and dynamic. If you decide to give it a try, feel free to contact me for more information: breannemackenzie@yahoo.com. ■

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TSoM member Fiona Fletcher was born in Switzerland, and her tango mantra is: "Even if you dance for a lifetime, you will never dance the same tango twice."

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TSoM in Saint Paul

Member spotlight

Name: Fiona Fletcher

Profession: Chiropractor

How did you get into tango?

I started 2-1/2 years ago. I had a decade-long hiatus from dancing and missed it fiercely. I decided to try tango because several friends recommended it.

How often do you dance?

A couple of times a week. More would be nice but not practical.

Describe an a-ha moment.

About a year into it, I was at my first out-of-town festival and saw three couples perform to the same tango in three remarkably different ways. That's when I first grasped something fundamental about tango: it is rich, diverse

and the possibilities to create a dance are endless. A few months later at another festival, I danced to a beautiful late-Pugliese piece and experienced the joy of personally interpreting the music in my dancing for the first time. These two defining moments made me realize I would be dancing tango the rest of my life.

Biggest challenge?

Wearing four-inch heels and staying up past midnight. I normally like to go to bed with the chickens and wear clogs.

What does tango mean to you?

Pure joy! I can't think of any other activity that engages me on so many levels: physical, musical, artistic, social. I also really enjoy the variety of people I have met.