

The Science of Tango

By Diana Devi

We have all been there. You are in a very comfortable chair at home, contemplating your options. You wonder, “should I go to the milonga tonight? Should I stay home and relax?” You decide to go and after a tanda you remember why you dance Argentine tango. It makes you feel good.

Turns out, these feelings have been the focus of some scientific studies. What has the scientific community discovered? Something we dancers all already suspected. Tango has health benefits! Argentine tango has been studied by various groups around the world and has been found to help with a variety of conditions. Argentine tango is used to treat Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s, brain injury from a stroke or other causes, depression, prevention of falls, balance disorders, and the list goes on as scientists continue to explore tango’s therapeutic options. We know conclusively that Argentine tango has a greater impact on health than an exercise or physical therapy program. It gets better results than salsa, ballroom dancing or traditional exercise programs, including strength training and isometric exercises or even traditional physical therapy. Why does tango seem to work better than other forms of dancing including ballroom, salsa and

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Pictured: Archelle Georgiou and Bruce Abas

Dancing with the Boogeyman

By Archelle Georgiou, M.D.

CornerHouse is a nonprofit agency in Minneapolis that works closely with law enforcement, child protection and the county attorney’s office to advocate on behalf of abused children. Each year, their annual gala, “Let’s Dance” is modeled after the show, “Dancing with the Stars.” Six local celebrities (Minneapolis business executives, community leaders or social figures with key contacts who can help raise visibility and money for the event) are paired with a professional dancer and dance studio who donate 15 lessons. The performance is a fully choreographed, three-minute performance with the “winners” being the pair who dance the best and raise the most money.

When I was asked to be one of

the local celebrities for their Nov. 12, 2011 event, it seemed like a no-brainer. I care deeply about the cause, have decent rhythm and have always wanted to take dance lessons. I am not afraid to be on a stage, the chance to exercise is always a plus and, of course, I’d get to wear a fabulous outfit. Even before meeting my dance teacher, I decided to do a Latin dance since the music and fast-paced beats were similar to the Greek music I’d grown up with.

Bruce Abas at Four Seasons Dance Studio was selected as my dance teacher and partner. He was a perfect fit, because he’d studied tango in Argentina and salsa in Puerto Rico and Cuba. At the first lesson, we briefly introduced

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From the board

Where in the world is the TSoM milonga?

The Tango Society of Minnesota is excited to be beginning the 2012 year with an whirlwind tour of possibilities for our new milonga venue. Although we are sad to bid adiós (for now) to the lovely E.R.V. ballroom in Hopkins, we are looking forward to finding a new home for the TSoM Second Saturday milonga. We will be visiting a new location each month and all members and dancers are invited to vote for their favorite.

In January, we visited the venue where TSoM first held milongas, the 42nd Avenue Ballroom, for a nostalgic trip down memory lane. In February, we have planned a romantic evening of wine, chocolate and roses at the Minneapolis Eagles Club. In March, we will dance the night away at Oddfellows Hall. The fifth Saturday milonga in March will be held at the charming Virginia Street Church. The locations for subsequent months will be announced on our website, mntango.org. Be sure to visit us online each month to discover where we are dancing and all the details. Have a suggestion for a future location? Let us know!

We look forward to seeing you on the floor.

—*The board of the Tango Society of Minnesota*

Letter from the Editor

Dear TsoM members,

The new year brings with it a sense of renewal and opportunity. The months ahead invite us to dream and plan. What will this year be like? What new steps will we learn? Which songs will become our new favorites? And just what is this Tango Teacher's Co-op we've been hearing rumors about? (Details unveiled on page 8.)

As dancers, it is vital to take good care of our health. This issue focuses on the interplay between health and tango with contributions from a few local experts. Diana Devi shares scientific studies that focused on tango and dance. Fiona Fletcher explores the integral role balance plays in tango. Don Asmussen and Meredith Butulis give us tips on how we can prevent the injuries that we as dancers are susceptible to. And Archelle Georgiou discovers how dancing can help us face our deepest fears, allowing us to conquer them for the first time.

Here's to a year of tango filled with creativity and good health!

Happy dancing,
Jennifer Sellers

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cha cha or other forms of exercise?

The exact reasons why tango has such an effect is not known, but a few discoveries that may provide some idea. Let's begin with what tango does and how it works. Tango stimulates the brain and the body in wonderful ways. We will look at two areas that are the source of most of the focus: balance and coordination, and mood changes.

What distinguishes tango from other dances may also be why it is a useful therapy. To be specific, it is the unchoreographed movement of two people to music with a roomful of other people. The improvisation in tango results in constant stimulation of the brain and the body to determine speed of movement, how your partner is interpreting your movement, how the leader is interpreting the music, how all the other dancers in the room are moving, etc. This stimulation causes new pathways to be created in the brain. The

new neuropathways can take on some of the duties of the damaged pathways, in effect encouraging healing. These new pathways support benefits in four different areas: improvement in balance; the ability to move smoothly; positive changes in mood; and cognitive improvement.

The intricacy of Argentine tango music provides a rich source of stimulation. Many people who have experienced some kind of brain injury, either through an accident or through disease, find it easier to move to a beat, such as that found in music. Over time, movement becomes easier and more fluid even when not moving to music. The same phenomenon has been observed in patients who can not speak, but are able to sing what they would like to say. Having layers of different beats, as in Argentine tango, could be related to the improvement in balance. Several researchers have looked at the emotional component of

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A word from the President

Thank you for your encouragement to take on the president's role. I have been in the Minnesota tango community almost from the very first lesson. Over that time I have been pretty good at not getting involved with the TSoM Board. I told myself that I traveled too much, was way too busy, and that it was enough to love the dance. I let others do the "lifting" while I danced sometimes every night of the week. Then two years ago, Betsy approached me with that winning smile of hers and, well, here I am. I never would have guessed that the issues we faced would become so compelling that I would change work and travel to ensure that I would not miss a Board meeting. Or that the Board members would become like family.

All of us are lucky to have board members who believe so strongly in the beauty and allure of the tango. I am impressed by the talents and experiences of each member. As we search for a possible new home, try to sort out how best to serve our Argentine tango community, and keep the special feeling that is Minnesota tango; it is nice to know that we have a team that is up to the challenge. I am excited to see how our next year works out. While I have no idea what the answers are going to be, I do know that with this team, our community is going to like the way it turns out.

We want to invite you to get involved in our meetings. As a TSoM member you are an owner. We want to hear from you, get your suggestions, and help you have even more "tango moments." We are trying to develop agendas that will give you more information about the specific topics we will be discussing each month. We are working to provide you with attendance and financial information that is easy to understand. Let us know if you have a specific topic you want to discuss. We will do our best to give you a specific time for your presentation in case you would prefer to not enjoy the entire meeting with the Board. Exercise your power as a member. We are blessed to have many people promoting Argentine tango in our community. We are blessed to have warm and accepting dancers at our milongas. We are blessed to have a Board that so willingly volunteers to serve us all.

Thank you for the chance to serve you all,
Bill

Science of Tango, cont. from page 2
Argentine tango. It appears that Argentine tango dancing causes the release of hormones that produce a pleasurable sensation—in other words, make us feel good. Everyone has heard that they need five hugs a day, right? Argentine tango provides five hugs a day on steroids! Just think of it. You are spending 12 or so minutes per tanda locked in embrace. This may explain why we enjoy dancing Argentine tango and is one of the reasons it is of interest in the treatment of depression. Last, but not least, is the social component of the dance. People who dance often have a rich social life. The stimulation from dancing increases our ability to think and

connect with others. Studies show that people with active social lives live longer and healthier lives. Other studies have shown that people who dance are healthier in general. This is true of many dances beside Argentine tango. Generally speaking, dancers weigh less; have lower rate of heart disease; a lower rate of diabetes; and live a longer, healthier life. Combining Argentine tango with other more traditional medical regimes is promising. Of course, one must deal with the side effects—such as the desire to listen to Argentine tango music and dance daily. No pain no gain! So, next time someone asks you why you are addicted to tango, you can say, "My balance is improved,

I think better, feel better and will probably live longer"—or you can simply say, "I am addicted because it makes me feel good."

Diana Devi has studied and taught various forms of dance and movement over the years including tango, ballet, body alignment, belly dancing and East Indian dancing. She is on a brief hiatus from her PhD in kinesiology at the University of MN where she is focused on the health benefits of Argentine tango—creating a new approach that combines Argentine tango, diet, and specific training and strengthening exercises to create happy, healthy people (dancers at least!). ■

Boogeyman, cont. from page 1

ourselves to each other and then Bruce quickly launched into demonstrating the Latin Basic and the Side to Side steps while we both stood in front of the mirror. "Got it! This will be easy," I thought to myself.

After 30 minutes, it was time to practice the same steps while dancing together...facing each other. And that's the last time this experience was easy. It was frightening.

In order to do any ballroom dance properly, it is essential for partners to communicate with direct visual contact, arm resistance and close body contact. In addition, Latin dance requires a sensual movement of the hips in order to make it authentic and beautiful. A basic rule is that the male partner is always in control. And, finally, trust is essential.

Try this with a relative stranger. Try this when your success has been centered around the rules, mores and conservative behaviors of corporate America. Try this when you have led your whole life being "in control." Try this when the skeletons from your past are sending you conflicting messages and fueling a heightened stress response.

Lessons two and three triggered the same fright and anxiety. I contemplated backing out, and one friend suggested that I simply write a large check and withdraw. But, it's my husband who encouraged me to follow through. In fact, not only has he encouraged me to dance well, but to dance with the emotion that it will take to win. Besides honoring my commitment to CornerHouse, it is a personal opportunity to grow. I have had my fifth lesson and

Florencia Taccetti Tango from Buenos Aires to Minneapolis...

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can finally make eye contact with Bruce. I can even do a few turns. The hip thing is still a problem, but it is improving. While Bruce is in control of the dance moves, I am finally feeling in control of my boogeyman.

Dr. Archelle Georgiou is a physician trained in internal medicine. She has spent the majority of her career as a health care executive and is currently the president of Georgiou Consulting, LLC and the health expert on Fox9News in Minneapolis. Archelle is passionate about creating health...not just managing or improving it! She writes the health blog archelleonhealth.com. Watch her dance on Youtube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kv8vioTBuCs>.

"Dancing with the Boogeyman" first appeared in archelleonhealth.com on Aug. 23, 2011. Reprinted with permission.



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Revisiting the Axis

by Fiona Fletcher

What do gymnasts, free runners and tightrope walkers all need to perform safely?

Balance. It is key to every movement we make. As a dancer, balance is an essential skill to develop; we refer to it as “finding your axis.” Finding and maintaining your axis enables you balance and know where your body exists in space. This is vital for both new and seasoned dancers. Your ability to confidently ground yourself on the floor is a necessary foundation to build your walking and your more elaborate steps. Without it, there is no ease to your dancing, even in the most basic moves.

While most people have an understanding of balance, few are familiar with the concept of proprioception. Proprioception can be defined as your ability to sense your body’s position in space at any given time. This unconscious neurological process connects position centers in various parts of your body with the sections of the brain that control motor activity. In this way, balance becomes the end result of a cycle of proprioceptive input to the brain.

The proprioceptive receptors in your body are primarily located in the feet, ankles, knees and neck. They record mainly pressure and vibration. Proprioceptive receptors are activated by moving those individual joints and surrounding ligaments (hence a dancer’s emphasis of pushing their feet into the ground with each step). Proprioceptive receptors can also be negatively impacted by trauma, scar, prolonged immobility and any degree of biomechanical malfunction.

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with Sabine Ibes

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Improving the quality of your axis must start with improving your proprioception. This can be accomplished in some of the following ways:

- Give your feet a chance to move freely; periodically, go without shoes and spend time articulating the individual joints of your feet. There are some yoga routines that solely deal with the feet and can be helpful if poor balance is a recurrent problem for you.
- Challenge your brain’s ability to sense the position of

your lower extremities by performing balance exercises such as, line walking, one legged standing with eyes closed, and tai chi.

- Remember the important and often overlooked contribution of the neck to your proprioception. Practicing active range of motion exercises with your eyes closed is one the simplest ways to activate the receptors in your neck. Start with full flexion/extension, then blend full rotation with looking

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up and down.

People with previous surgeries or joint replacement have inherently impaired proprioception and may need a customized home program of manual soft tissue therapy and vibration therapy.

If a solid axis remains elusive, you may benefit from consulting a health care professional who can help you assess your needs and recommend the appropriate treatment. I recommend A Doctor of Chiropractic, Doctor of Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapist, and some athletic trainers. Proprioceptive loss can be completely asymptomatic, making it very difficult to notice the root cause of your own balance issues. It is frustrating to troubleshoot on your own. I had a very interesting case this past summer; a young long distance runner who was training for her fifth marathon. She had virtually no injuries with her first four, but was suddenly plagued by multiple problems in her knees and ankles. She reported no new shoes or training regimen. Her gait was poorly coordinated. Some more digging into her recent health history revealed a whiplash injury the previous winter. As I suspected, her poorly healed neck injury was the source of her problems and her leg injuries were resolved without ever touching either knee or ankle. Whether dancing a tanda or running a marathon, knowing where you are in space (literally!) is vital to perform an activity with comfort, efficiency and low risk of injury.

Fiona Fletcher is a Doctor of Chiropractic who has been in private practice in Cannon Falls, Minn. since 1995. She has enjoyed Argentine tango since 2007. ■

Injury Care for Dancers

Contributors: Don Asmussen, M.D. and Meredith Butulis, MPT; edited by Cassandra M. Englund, communications specialist at TRIA Orthopaedic Center

Injury care for dancers didn't start as the focus of the TRIA orthopaedic practice. In fact, it wasn't even on my radar for many years. That is, of course, until my niece, a professional dancer in London, sustained a foot injury. Originally diagnosed as a bruise, she danced through the pain for six months. By the time a specialist discovered it was a fracture, the bones had separated and healed apart, and she was informed that surgery to remove the cone was the only answer. For any other individual, this surgery would have been a routine procedure and life would continue on as normally, but for her, this surgery would result in a 50 percent reduction in push off power. This could be a career-ending surgery. At this point, we began searching for alternative solutions. This was the beginning of my interest and study of the unique injuries facing dancers and the particular care and rehab required for dancers to stay in their sport. It is this dance expertise that I share with dancers: emphasizing the importance of listening to your body, seeing the warning signs and being proactive about strengthening the muscles that will help protect you from injury.

Overuse and injury

As dancers, you understand the athletic demands and technical precision required for proper technique. Even more than that, you know the hours it takes to get there—and sustain that ability. This often results in over usage and overdevelopment of certain muscle groups and weaknesses in others. When imbalances are left uncorrected, they become breeding

grounds for injury, but the good news is that this type of injury is entirely preventable.

A false promise: “no pain, no gain”

The culture of dance is to perform through pain. It's a dangerous notion that can lead to increased injury. For a long and healthy dance career, dancers must listen to their bodies and be smart about dancing. The first step is differentiating between pain and discomfort. Discomfort is a healthy output from muscle fatigue in the process of growing stronger and typically goes away within a couple of days after a taxing workout. Pain, however, is your body's warning mechanism, and when it doesn't go away after a few days or intensifies during activity, it's time to listen to your body and rest.

Most often, timely self-care can prevent further damage, and the situation will correct itself. Proper self-care includes rest from activity that causes pain; ice; elevation; and over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications for swelling and pain. Generally, the soft tissues and joints require one to two weeks for repair. When pain lasts longer than two weeks, involve an expert. A doctor can evaluate the situation and develop a treatment plan to get you back to dance.

Common dancing injuries

- Stress fractures in feet and shins
- Foot disorders, such as blisters
- General lower back pain usually due to muscle spasm
- Knee, hip and shoulder disorders do occur as well, but not as frequently

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Sources of injury

- Overuse
- Poorly fitting shoes
- Poor technique
- Inadequate general fitness conditioning
- Lack of core stability

Conditioning beyond dance

While dance is a great form of fitness, it cannot be your only form of exercise. Without cross-training, muscle imbalances become even more accentuated. The best cross-training for dancers are low impact activities, such as the elliptical machine, biking, walking, or swimming.

Strength in all the right places

Cross-training can increase cardiovascular endurance, but core strength can take injury prevention and dancing to a whole new level.

The core muscle groups include the abdominals, back, diaphragm, buttock and hip muscles; when you build strength here, you can avoid muscle imbalance and weakness elsewhere. Plus, it eases the pressure off your leg joints and back.

Commonly, people believe that

crunches or sit-ups equal core strength, but too many crunches can actually create instability and lower back weakness. True core strength can be accomplished using several methods, with one of the most popular being Pilates. There are several instructional videos out on the market on Pilates, as well as classes to get you started.

Using a method like Pilates will target those core muscles, but the real power is translating the core body techniques you learn to your dance. This is one point that is sometimes missed in core training. Applying the techniques to dance requires spending time considering how the exercises connect to dancing, then practicing these concepts while standing, then integrating it with dance.

Care for a precious commodity

Choosing the right dance shoes is key to protecting your feet. Shoe sizes vary depending on the brand. Although you may be tempted by a great deal online, without the proper fit, you may be causing more damage to your feet that it's worth. A tell-tale sign of a poor fit is consistent blisters or callouses.

For women, wearing tango shoes with a heel increases the stress in the low back by literally hundreds of pounds. Balance out your day by wearing flat shoes at work, or at least every time you are not at work or dance.

Besides shoe choice, improving strength in your feet will help prevent injury. At least once a day, take each toe and stretch it backwards and forwards about five times. Stretch the big toe in all four directions. Be careful, though, as performing these exercises excessively can promote athlete's foot.

Secondly, strengthen your arches. Place a towel on the floor, scrunch it up and spread the towel back out five times using only your toes. Now, make the towel scoot sideways back and forth several times. Arch supports will not strengthen arches.

Bringing it all together

To maintain staying power in dance, remember it's worth it to listen to your body, see the warning signs and be proactive about strengthening the muscles that will help protect you from injury. ■

About the contributors:

Don Asmussen, M.D. specializes in dance medicine and musculoskeletal primary care at TRIA Orthopaedic Center. He is a member of the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science.

Meredith Butulis, MPT and DPT, works in clinical practices with OSR Physical Therapy; Pilates and injury prevention with Just for Kix. She is a former physical therapist to Radio City Rockettes and several Broadway performers.

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The Tango Teachers Co-op: It's for everyone

by Sabine Ibes

In June 2012, a new type of tango festival is coming to the Twin Cities. Called Tango Teacher Co-op (TTC), this festival aims to meet the needs of teachers and students of tango, in partnership. What was the genesis for this idea? Sabine Ibes shares her vision of a tango dream come true.

"When I first started dancing, I was confused by the different ways tango was taught. As I started teaching, I was frustrated that there wasn't one central set of resources for tango teachers or tips on setting up a tango teaching business.

I brought this up with Homer Ladas in 2009 and we started brainstorming on the back of a napkin, literally! I toted that napkin around for about a year, adding ideas as I was inspired by other teachers, dancers and aspiring teachers. TTC is a collaborative effort. In the end, that is what I hope it will remain!"

Frequently Asked Questions

1. "Tango TEACHER Co-op"...is this just for tango teachers?

This is for tango teachers and tango students! They go hand in hand. Students learning from teachers and teachers learning from students. The title is there to attract the teacher, because most festivals do not have specific classes for teachers. This means that students will be dancing and learning with other good tango students.

2. Why should I come?

You should be there to play, learn, and explore tango in a new and exciting way. Explore the past and the future way of moving in dance, working close with others AND giving (plus receiving) feedback from each other, whether that is

a teacher-in-training or another tango student.

3. Who will teach?

We have great teachers who are the tango super heroes of our time: Tomas Howlin, Homer and Cristina Ladas, Nick Jones and Diana Cruz, and Brigitta Winkler.

4. Why a "Co-op" instead of a festival? What's the difference?

In this case, Co-op stands for working together to create a better tango community; learning, networking and sharing ideas.

5. Will you have beginner classes?

We will have:

- Regular tango classes,
- Presentations, and
- Movement classes, which are designed to have an impact on your tango dancing.

We do require dancers to have had some experience in tango dancing—TTC will not be geared to absolute beginners.

6. Where will TTC take place?

We will have all this fun at our own "castle" in Minnesota: The Villa Maria Retreat and Conference Center. villamariaretreats.org.

7. Why are you fundraising? If I am paying to attend, why should I give you more money?

A Co-op usually gives its members a dividend of proceeds. In this case, we plan to give back to the community via scholarships to upcoming tango artists. Your community will benefit directly by developing more well-rounded, well-informed tango teachers who will grow the community. The funds raised help bring you great tango teachers from around the world.

Learn more about how to get involved by visiting TangoTeacherCoop.org. ■

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Introducing new 2012 Tango Society of MN Board Members

Juan Garcia

I grew up in Buenos Aires not caring about tango. Someone told me once that tango is something you find when you are away from home and, in my case, it is completely true. I started listening to and dancing tango when I came to the U.S. I've been more dedicated to tango the last couple of years, and becoming a member of the TSoM board is a way to thank the local tango community for giving me a little bit of my old home.

Chris Briscoe

One day I was walking around Lake Nokomis, when I happened upon an outdoor tango event. I was offered a free lesson that led me into two years of immersion in tango. I'm surprised to say that, over that period, I've traveled to tango festivals, spoken on the radio about tango, and now serve the community by being a member of the 2012 TSoM board.

Rueben Hansen

I'm a native Minnesotan who, after studying abroad in Vienna in college and working in the Philippines as a Peace Corps volunteer, returned home to raise my family. I became interested in tango a number of years ago as a ballroom dancer and fell in love with the music and tango culture. About a year and half ago I took the plunge and decided to focus on tango, I and have yet to look back!

Liliana Imwinkelried

I listened to tango music and watched a TV program about tango while growing up in Santa Fe, Argentina; however, I learned to dance tango in Minnesota. Tango helps me feel closer to my own culture—the music, the connection, the wine, the dresses and the shoes. It is a lovely experience from the preparation to the next day when the feet hurt, but the soul smiles. I joined the board to help the MN tango community continue to grow.