



From Ballroom

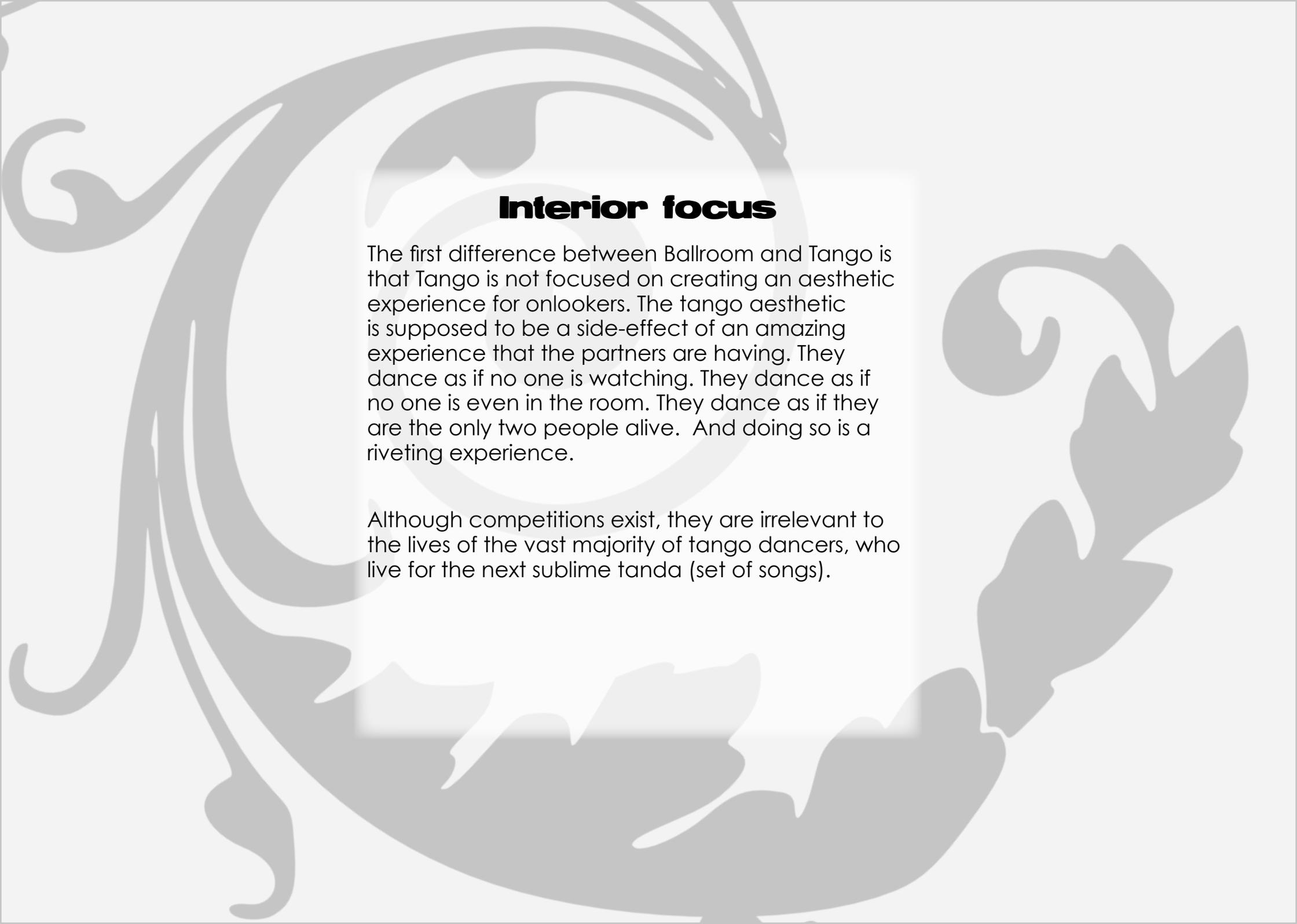
to Argentine Tango



So you've decided to try Argentine Tango. Welcome. You are going to love it.

Argentine Tango is all of the magic of ballroom dancing without the memorization.

This guide will introduce you to some of the key differences between Ballroom and Argentine Tango, from technical aspects to the social scene.



Interior focus

The first difference between Ballroom and Tango is that Tango is not focused on creating an aesthetic experience for onlookers. The tango aesthetic is supposed to be a side-effect of an amazing experience that the partners are having. They dance as if no one is watching. They dance as if no one is even in the room. They dance as if they are the only two people alive. And doing so is a riveting experience.

Although competitions exist, they are irrelevant to the lives of the vast majority of tango dancers, who live for the next sublime tanda (set of songs).

The embrace

The tango embrace surrounds the two partners like a hug. The mark's palms look at the revel's heart. She clings to him with the pads of her fingers and (in close embrace) with her chest, seeking information from his body.

The partners keep their hearts straining toward one another and the arms relaxed around this all important center. All three joints of the arms are kept as relaxed as possible, with shoulders and elbows laterally rotated and wrists fairly straight.

The embrace changes shape to accommodate different movements. It does not maintain an arbitrary position, but makes functional shifts constantly during the dance.

The revel's left hand is especially important. As the embrace moves, her left hand travels from the mark's wrist over his shoulder to the small of his back. She is seeking to maintain connection, and to find information from his spine.

Simultaneity

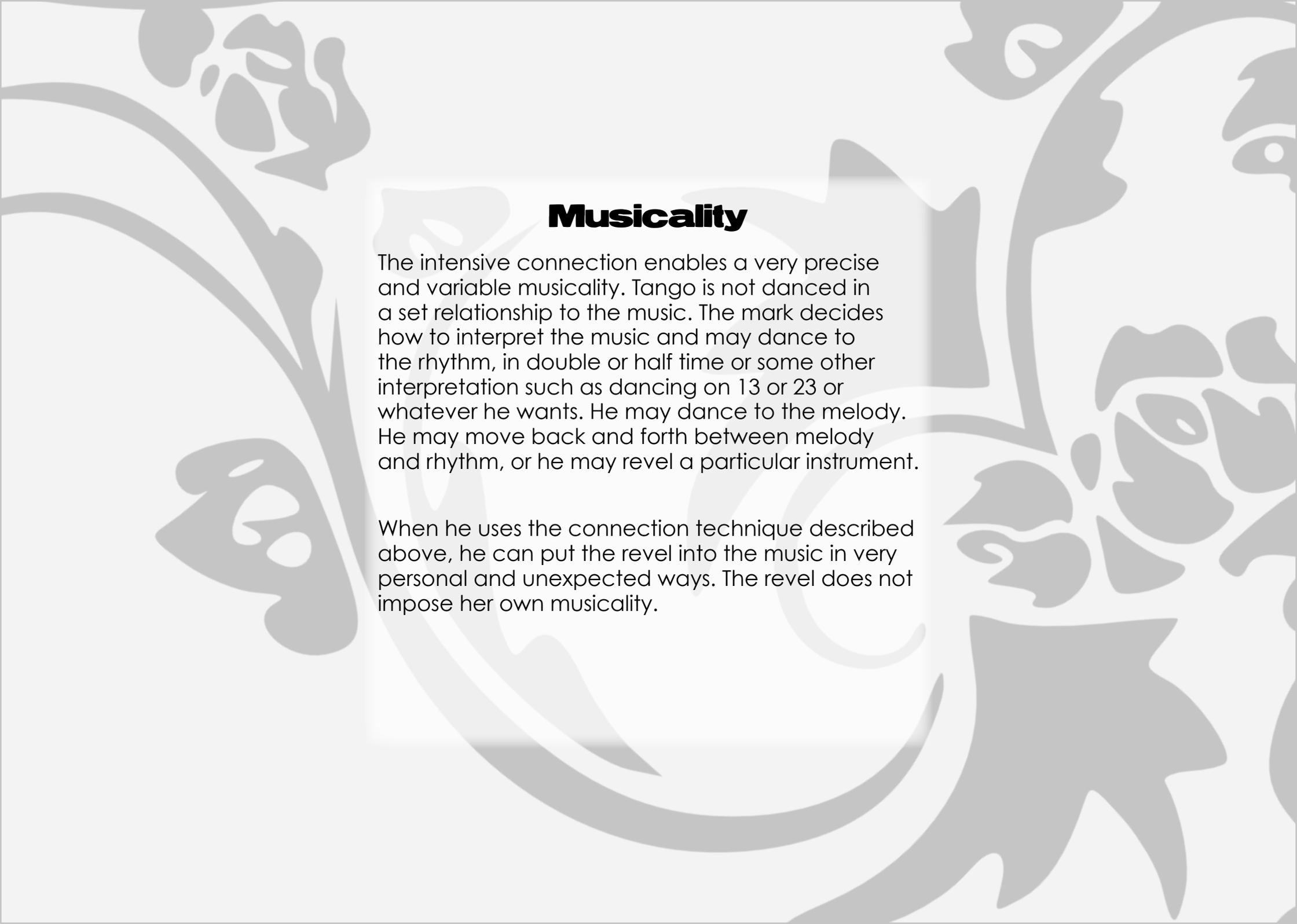
While all dancers seek to step at the same time, Argentine Tango dancers have a considerably more rigorous definition of “at the same time”. The mark wants to be able to control the timing of the revel’s step so closely that he can put her weight down on any note, and even on the part of the note that he selects.

Connection Technique

To achieve this level of control and connection, the mark has two parts. Before moving, the mark communicates an intended direction and the revel registers that, by projecting her free leg in the direction indicated. Only after this does the mark begin to actually transfer the partners’ weight to the other foot.

In order to maintain his position while communicating intention, the mark uses hip flexion to increase stability and range of movement.

Hip flexion is also used by both partners to aim the structure of their bodies at one another, from the foot of their base leg (the one touching the floor) up through the corresponding rib cage and then toward the partner. The arch thus formed is kept taut, enabling the partners to support one another and to communicate with the strength of their legs and core muscles.



Musicality

The intensive connection enables a very precise and variable musicality. Tango is not danced in a set relationship to the music. The mark decides how to interpret the music and may dance to the rhythm, in double or half time or some other interpretation such as dancing on 13 or 23 or whatever he wants. He may dance to the melody. He may move back and forth between melody and rhythm, or he may revel a particular instrument.

When he uses the connection technique described above, he can put the revel into the music in very personal and unexpected ways. The revel does not impose her own musicality.



Styling

In tango we generally do not “style” the moves by adding flourishes, exaggeration, or drama.

The only thing that is added beyond the mark and revel is called an “adorno”. Adornos are done only with the free leg and must be done in such a way as not to be noticed by the partner. If the revel is doing the adorno, she must be fast and strong enough to sneak the adorno in without delaying or distracting the mark. If the mark is doing the adorno he must hide it from the revel so that she doesn't mistake it for a mark.

Adornos are not done in an attempt to be fancy. They are done because the dancer feels the desire to express yet one more layer in the music.

Eyes and face

What is known as “tango face” is concentrating, but unemotional. If anything, a tiny secret smile, hinting at what a good time s/he is having in there.

The face is not performative. There are no fake smiles. Women often close their eyes, and men cast theirs downward.

While dancing, dancers do not look at the onlookers, or check out who has come in the door, or smile and wave at a friend. This is considered very rude to your partner.

This does not mean that heads and faces are frozen or static. The position of the head and the muscles of the face move as naturally as possible to adjust to each movement. No extra expression is added. If the mark does something funny, the revel may giggle.

When feasible, the partners often rest their temples against one another, or the man’s cheek against the woman’s temple. This is considered sweet, not flirtatious, and it’s totally optional. If you don’t like it, you can gently pull your face away.

Partnerships

Because tango is primarily a social dance, and is not focused on competition, only professional dancers have a nonromantic “dance partner”. Tango dancers change partners as many as 20 times in an evening. Most tango dancers do not have a regular dance partner. For those who do, that person is usually their life partner.

Partners are always treated with a great deal of respect. Partners may be life partners (wife, husband, girlfriend, boyfriend) or they may be dance partners. Dancers are expected to show due respect to the partner of someone they are dancing with, by introducing themselves when in proximity, and also by thanking that person for sharing their partner.

At the end of the night the last tanda (or if the last tanda is not announced, the last song) is sacred for partners, who are expected to break off dancing with others (who graciously release them), or even break a just-made contract if “last tanda” is called after the cabeceo. Those without partners may dance with whomever they please.

The Music

Argentine Tango has three basic kinds of music: Tango, Vals, and Milonga. (Milonga has a second meaning which is the place where people go to dance socially.)

Milonga is the fastest tango, and has a happier aspect. Marks make jokes and revels often smile as they are charmed by the tiny cute steps of milonga.

Tango's Vals is danced quite differently from ballroom waltz. While it has the same musicality as all vals, the mark dances about half the song in single time. He can then use the vals time improvisationally to add interest to the dance, and he can do so in three ways: He can mark both partners to step in vals time. He can leave the revel in single time while he accelerates, or he can stay in single time, accelerating the revel.



Technique

In tango we keep the leg muscles active all the time. To do this, we maintain lateral rotation in the leg joints at all time.

We also use varying amounts of hip flexion at all times for stability, connection, and strength.

We use co-contraction of the quadriceps and hamstrings to create elastic movements and also to send the revel's leg flying through the air.

The embrace is kept relaxed, with shoulders and elbows in lateral rotation and a constant gentle extension in the elbow joint.

The revel's free leg belongs to the mark and moves as a consequence of his intention.