

TANGO PASSION

Tango Society of Rochester

Your best and only source of Argentine tango in Rochester, Minnesota

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From the President's Desk *Yuko Taniguchi*

Lately from the Rochester Tango community, I have been hearing comments like these: "Tango is such a stressful dance!" "I can't tell what he wants me to do." "I did everything right, but she still ended up standing on the opposite foot!" "My first instructor said to do this, but the other instructor said I am doing it all wrong..."

Tango Stress, I call it, has arrived in Rochester like the snow storm; sooner or later, it was going to land in Rochester. But even though we expected its arrival, living through it is still tough. We plow our stresses, try to keep our ways of thinking clear, and accept that stress is a part of learning something new. But on a bad day, all the emotions pile up so high, and we are ready to say, "That's it. I hate tango!"

So why are many dancers dealing with Tango Stress now? Perhaps because more dancers are taking Tango seriously in Rochester. The Level II Argentine Tango group lessons in November at Dahl Dance Center and TSoR's new Tango Study Group have gathered many attendees. More people are looking for practice partners. More people want to understand the core elements of this dance. More effort has been put into learning and practicing Tango. So when the dance isn't working out on the dance floor, the experience is not only stressful, but also becomes dreadfully painful. At a Study Group Session, one of the TSoR members commented to me, "I feel like a failure when I dance tango."

I am familiar with such negative talks. I have attended about a half dozen weekend tango workshops since last year. There, I have always witnessed some dancers losing their patience with themselves. Personally, I am also guilty of talking negatively to myself. When we love something, we want to be able to do it well and now. But 'a failure' is far from

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I Hate Tango.

A journey by Jeremy Anderson

"I hate tango."

Some of you may find it strange that such words ever came from my mouth. But both Yuko and April have heard me say, "I hate tango," at one point or another. I'd quickly clarify that extreme statement by saying, "No, I don't really hate tango. But tango hates me." And really, that was my attitude for a long time. Tango and I had a hate-hate relationship and the amount of frustration I experienced dancing tango outstrips any other activity I've ever engaged in. In fact, I attended regular massage therapy sessions to remove the "tango stress" that built up in my right shoulder.

Seriously.

As I've watched the Tango Society of Rochester grow, and its dancers grow along with it, I've noticed an increased level of stress in many tango dancers, stress that may be threatening to ruin their enjoyment of the dance. I hope that sharing a little of what I went through will help.

So where did my tango stress come from? Mostly, my stress came through errors in my own thinking about the dance.

First, I thought Argentine tango was a simple dance, and therefore I'd pick it up quickly. After all, it's just walking on any beat, right? My mistake was thinking that "simple" and "easy" were the same thing. Not so. Tango is deceptively simple. Just walking. But it's not "just walking." In order to be successful -- to really experience the comfort, beauty, and joy of tango, of walking in unison with another person -- we need to do more than "just walk." We -- both leaders and followers -- need to apply our technique. In many other dances, we can get away with sloppy technique. That's because other dances don't have the close, intimate embrace of Argentine tango. If we have our own space, what we do with that space doesn't matter so much. But when we share a space -- a chest to chest, heart to heart embrace -- we need to know what we're doing to make it comfortable for both partners.

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From the President's Desk...

describing a dancer who is passionate about dancing and trying hard. Perhaps a better word would be 'a beginner'. Being a beginner, especially as an adult, is challenging. We are asked to handle embarrassment, humiliation, and worse yet, a sense of inferiority. Let's face it. We, as adults, have been away from the concept of being a beginner for so long that when we are placed in this position of not knowing, not being in control, we don't like it.

So how do we handle Tango Stress? In this issue of TSoR Newsletter, we have gathered other dancers' experiences and perspectives. You are not alone in dealing with Tango Stress, but it seems that we each find our own answer to make peace with this process of learning and being patient.

As for me, I have worked with several tango instructors, and each one of them has shared a different approach and focus on Tango. Each one of them makes me feel as though I have just started learning Tango. The most precious part of being a beginner is that I have much to learn. A poet and a dancer, Elizabeth Garber, explores this concept beautifully in her poem, 'Being a Beginner.'

Being a Beginner

You forget what it's like to be such a beginner,

Learning to walk as if you have never walked.

To forget you have ever mastered anything. To be so at the beginning.

I watch the grandmother Alcira with her three year old grandson, Augustin, Telling him over and over as he places magnets on the refrigerator, Gently, slowly, despacio, He smashes them on, over and over, and they fall or pop off. She says it again and again, and his style slowly changes. More carefully, slower, he moves them into place, Until they are all on. Then he takes them all off and begins again.

I am a three year old all over again, In not knowing, A relief in not knowing, Being told again and again, How to begin to walk, How to listen through the body, How to step outside of knowing, To step into this opening, Having only to be open.

TSoR is reevaluating our approach as the Rochester tango community grows and takes a new direction. We are here for you in learning tango. If you have any suggestions or comments, we hope to hear from you!

Don't forget your Tango Etiquette...

Always ask respectfully.

Don't teach unless you've been hired.

Enjoy three songs together and then share your happiness with others.

Look nice, smell good and smile.

It isn't a race—don't tailgate on the floor

Remember to say "thank you"

**I Hate Tango continued....**

So the lessons here realizing that "simple" does not mean "easy" -- in fact, if you think Argentine tango is "easy," chances are you're not very good at it --and focusing on technique.

My current definition of Argentine tango is, "Walking on one foot in unison with another while they walk on one foot." The second way I needed to adjust my thinking about tango is illustrated in the phrase, "walking on one foot." In most other dances, the emphasis is on the step. Taking the step. Movement with two feet on the ground. In tango, the emphasis is on the wait. The wait *between* steps. Being balanced. What I call, "standing on one foot." Yes, that's

a technical term. This was a *major* paradigm shift for me. How many times during the day do we normally stand motionless on one foot? As a martial artist, I can safely say I spend more time on one foot than most people. But still, I'm *constantly* catching my balance by placing my second foot. And my one foot balance became even worse when I was put together with a partner. In frustrated moment one day I emailed April, "Tango is the painful dance of trying to maintain my balance while trying to maintain the woman's balance." Like any other point of technique, *both* partners need to be responsible for their own balance for it to work.

So the lessons here were patience and balance.

Thirdly. Practice and partnership. This is a tough subject. We all want someone to practice with. After all, how can we get better if we don't practice? And how can we practice a partnership dance like Argentine tango if we don't have a partner? How can we learn to walk heart-to-heart with someone if we don't have someone to walk heart-to-heart with?

I thought exactly the same way. And luckily, I had a great dance partner in Yuko. But even so, my Argentine tango really didn't get better until I started

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I Hate Tango continued....

taking responsibility for my own dancing and started practicing on my own. Points one and two above both come down to technique, among other things. And when I'm practicing with someone, my partner often becomes a distraction from my own technique. It's far too easy scapegoat for my own inadequacies as a dancer. Instead of looking at and fixing what's wrong with my dancing, I can always point at my partner and say, "I did it right, they just didn't follow." Not a good way to win friends. So if you find yourself constantly frustrated with your partner, stop practicing with them and start practicing by yourself - again, a different way of thinking. Practice by myself so that I can dance better with someone else. After all, if we can't walk on our own, how can we expect to walk heart-to-heart with someone else?

Here, the lesson is largely, be

responsible for your own dancing and practice on your own. Dan Larson often tells men at the beginning of his lessons, "Guys, it's always your fault." What he means is, "Fix yourself, not your partner." Ladies, I'd say the same is true for you as well.

Finally, tango is a slow-growth skill. Give me someone new to swing or salsa, and I can usually have them mostly up to speed by the end of the night of dancing. Give me someone new to Argentine tango, and by the end of the night we'll barely have scratched the surface. I tell this story a lot, but that's because I believe it contains a truth. Yuko and I have been taking private lessons from Florencia Taccetti for over a year now, all of them on walking. Just a couple lessons ago she finally started working with our ochos. Last lesson, after looking at our front ochos, she stopped us and brought us back to walking. Over a year of lessons and she's still teaching us how to walk.

The lesson here is patience. Both with yourself and *all* your dance partners: practice partners as well as social dance partners.

Tango can be a very frustrating dance. Especially when we start thinking we know it yet still cannot perform it as we'd like.

Remember that Argentine tango is deceptively simple, not easy. It's about balance and technique, patience and personal responsibility. And it all comes back to the walking.

I no longer hate tango. In fact, it's now in the running for my favorite dance. But I went through a lot of pain, stress, and frustration to get here. Why did I put myself through it? Many reasons, but really, if you're experiencing frustration in dancing tango, you have to find your own reason to push through. I'd encourage you to do so. I've found that it's worth the effort.



November Milonga at Sontes Lesson by Dahl Dance Center



Milonga Moments



*Jolene and Yuko—Birds of Paradise
Kyra and husband relax between dances*



*Nathan, Annie, Yuko & Jeremy
Jeff & Luis—Men of Tango*



Tango Passion staff

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2009 TSoR Board:

Yuko Taniguchi, President
April Dahl, Vice President,
James Geroux, Treasurer
Nathan Gibbs, Webmaster
Brian Bernard, Practicas



Future Events:

- **TSoR January Milonga Road Trip** Saturday, January 3rd, 2009
3 PM to 2 AM. Location: Meet at Dahl Dance Center for Departure Dining at Nick and Eddie's, Milonga at Four Season's and a Fun Road Trip!
Cost: \$30/person bus fee, \$7/milonga and your dinner
- **TSoR January Practica** Sunday, January 25th, 2009, 7 PM to 9 PM,
Location: TBA Cost: \$3 (non-members), Free (TSoR members)
- **TSoR February Milonga.** Saturday ,February 7th, 2009
Special Guest Instructors, Performers and Djs
Sabine Ibez and Eli "El Lungo " Leserowitz
8:30 PM—9:30 pm (lesson), 9:30 PM to 12 AM dancing
Location: **Sonte's**, 4-3rd St SW, Rochester.
Cost: \$10 (non-members), \$7 (TSoR members)
- **TSoR Special Workshop** Sunday February 8th 2009,
Sabine Ibez and Eli "El Lungo " Leserowitz Noon—5 pm
Location: Dahl Dance Center, 1619 North Broadway, Rochester
- **TSoR February Practica.** Sunday ,February 22nd,2009 7 PM to 9 PM
Location: TBA Cost: \$3 (non-members), Free (TSoR members)



Joey Ray
Dancer and TSoR Member

Our Members

Name: Joey Ray
Profession: Dentist, Adams, MN
When did you start dancing? I started dancing in 1992 for a couple years doing mainly West Coast Swing. In 2004, after a 10 year "hiatus" from dancing, our church's youth group asked if I would teach the kids how to dance. That rekindled my love for dancing and ignited a passion for encouraging others in the dance.
What was your first Tango experience? My first Argentine Tango experience was this last August's Milonga at Sonte's in Rochester. I immediately fell in love with it. I enjoy, and count it a privilege to engage in the non-

verbal communication of trust - not just with the physical closeness (we live in Minnesota, after all), but also with the security of staying in balance.

What is the most challenging aspect of Tango for you?

The most challenging, and most enjoyable, part of Argentine Tango for me is "taking care of your partner" : knowing where she is and keeping her safely in balance while bringing her with me to that "place" the scene "inside" is being painted as the music plays. A lot of times it feels like I'm just using crayons though....maybe something for the refrigerator door :-)

Favorite Tango moment?

All of them. But if I had to pick one, it would be when my partner and I stepped into close embrace properly, and

connected without it being awkward! It felt so right, I yelled "Oh,oh,that's it!" real loud in her ear (sorry, Diane).

Any advice for the new tango dancer?

Take good care of your partner, don't compromise your posture...and enjoy!



Joey - stretching out during a dance!

