

INTRODUCTION TO TANGO

Tango came to the dance floor from the street dances and bordellos of South America. Political upheaval drove ex-patriots to Europe, who took their tango with them and it became the rage of Paris society. Hollywood made it popular in the movies of the 1920s. Today its music still has a Latin, mesmerizing sound but it is considered one of the “smooth” dances.

CHARACTER

Think like a cat stalking prey—slinking, determined, body appearing not to move while the legs do the work underneath. The music tells you the feel. Listen to the instruments to hear the characteristics of tango: Plaintive violins, the moan of a bandeleon, sharp sounds for the link and a drawn-out feeling for the walks, creating what we call “light and shade.”

MUSICAL TIMING

In round dancing, tango is shown in cuesheets in 4/4 timing, meaning four beats in each measure of music. The most basic rhythm is **QQS**, which means you dance the first “Q” on beat 1, the second “Q” on beat 2 and “S” on beats 3 and 4, but tango has many variations of timing. For example, a progressive link is **QQ**, while a closed promenade is **SQQS**. These two figures together make up two measures of music. You get used to it.

TERMINOLOGY

Round dancing includes all styles of tango in its syllabus, borrowing from American tango (with its more open choreography), International tango (always in closed position) and Argentine tango (identified usually by Spanish terms). International tango is the predominant source of advanced level round dance tango choreography so you may have to learn some new terminology. “Semi-closed” position is called “promenade” and “banjo” may be cued as “outside partner.”

TECHNIQUE

Your body will feel like it does when you are sitting on a high stool. You are sitting with a straight upper body, hips forward and knees flexed. Walk as though you are carrying a tray of glasses. Picture doing this in a room with a ceiling lowered to the top of your head. You can't bend over, so you have to lower through the legs.

Feet: Beginning position, stand with feet together facing the wall, then keeping the feet on the floor, turn 1/8 to the left and slip the right foot slightly back so that the ball of the right foot is at the instep of the left foot. This will give you the feeling that your right knee is “tucked” behind the left. Come back to this standing position at the end of most figures.

Forward steps require heel leads, with weight taken on the inside edge of your foot. You will step, then move your center over the standing foot.

Tango has no rise and fall. The feet are picked up and placed, not glided. By contrast, in other smooth dances, your center is moving ahead of your feet, your ankles are flexing freely to swing and you roll through your feet as they swing from behind you to in front of you. Figures with heel leads particularly will have a different look and feel from other smooth dances.

Hold: The tango dance position is more compact than in other dances. Man's right hand comes further across the Lady's back, to her spine. If the Man took dance position without a partner, he would see that his right hand is in front of his sternum. Lady's left hand will be

tickling his armpit. There is a sense of “locking” yourselves together for the sharp compact movement of tango.

This does not mean that Lady is directly in front of the Man. In fact, she will be further to her left than usual. He will have to bend his left arm slightly to accommodate her position.

Because of the compactness and lowered position, there should be contact between the partners from the waist to the knees.

BASIC STEPS

Walk: **SS**

Tango gives the impression that it curves to the left in the walk. For this reason, you may hear it cued “walk 2” or “curve 2.” Think of a slight arc drawn on the floor in front of you, with Man’s left foot walking on the inside of the arc and his right foot on the outside of the arc.

When walking forward in semi-closed position, forward steps are slightly sideways, beginning with the heel and then the inside edge of the ball of foot and onto the whole foot. Don’t have toes pointing down line of dance.

Progressive Link: **QQ**

This is a most dramatic figure, creating the “pounce” of the stalking cat as it goes for its prey. Inexperienced dancers will overdo it; think “less is more.” It starts in closed position and goes to semi-closed.

Man steps forward on his left foot, thighs crossed at top (CBMP). Rotate slightly to the right on that foot, then place the right foot under the body. Your feet will be pointed DLW but you are ready to move line of dance. Lady steps back on her right foot, swivels on it and waits for partner to place her onto her left foot.

Man must be careful to stay left and not enter the Lady’s space. He must also be careful not to turn her with his arms, but with his body. Using arms to finish the figure will slow your action, affect balance and look like a wrestling match

Closed Promenade: **SQQS**

This figure starts in semi-closed position and moves down line to closed position.

Man steps forward on left, forward on right, side and slightly forward on left, close right to left. Lady steps forward on right, forward on left, side and slightly back on right (turning to closed), close left to right. Lady will have a sense of being pigeon-toed between the last two steps.