

Open Tango / Albuquerque @ Juno – Stephen's "Session Notes" from 9.06.23

Intro – Some Context and Definitions

Tango can be defined / described / characterized in various ways – one of them is: An "**improvised social dance**" >

- **Social** = we do it with a partner ... typically in the company of + among other couples doing the same.
- **Dance** = we are moving our bodies in time + space ... and there's often music involved.
- **Improvised** = we "make it up in the moment" ... and it's famously based on walking.

Tango as a "**walking dance**" >

- Draws on same mechanics as "everyday walking" – but reorganizes some of these to make the dance possible.
- We travel – the couple starts in one place, then goes somewhere else = Tango takes us on a "journey."

Two main differences between Tango and ordinary "everyday" walking:

- **Orientation** – on the social dance floor, in a typical embrace, tango partners face each other ... vs. walking "side by side" like we would down a street together, where we both face in the same direction – and ...
- **Balance Point** – in improvised tango, the couple comes to a (shared) balance point between each footfall > Unlike what we do in (most of) our "everyday walking": In tango, we do not maintain our momentum over distance – that is, we don't let our momentum (automatically / routinely) carry us over into our next step – and therefore: We don't "fall" into our next step from the one before – instead, we choose when + how to move ...

Important: This moment of "shared balance" between each step is key – it's what allows tango's two partners to **collaborate** together ... and thereby **co-create** the improvised dance.

How: They do this by (a) communicating, negotiating + sharing (b) three main pieces of information during their moment of shared balance which (c) allows partners co-create each + every step / footfall together:

1. **When to go = Timing** > often in relation to musicians + music = the other temporal artists + parallel art form.
2. **Where to go = Direction** > many variables, including: Forward / Side / Back (from dancer's own body), clockwise / counter-clockwise (couple's turning motion), with / against "Line of Dance" (neighbors), etc. ...
3. **How Far to go = Scale** > size of step: bigger / medium / smaller / "in place" (= no dimension).

These are the **Core Aspects / Features** of every signal + step that the partners send, receive + share with each other.

... But: How is this "**When – Where – How Far**" information passed between partners?

What kind of "signal" does the Leader offer? – and – How does the Follower catch it + then do what they do?

- Follower is on their **Balance** (on one foot), and in relationship with Leader's body (via touch / embrace) ...
- Something happens in the Leader's body, which the Follower picks up / catches via their **Touch** on Leader...
- This signal causes the Follower to go off balance = from their standing ("supporting") foot to their other ("free") foot – which invites Follower to **Make a Step** (gesture, footfall) with their free foot ...
- **When** = when Follower begins to go off their balance ...
- **Where** = what direction Follower goes off balance ...
- **How Far** = Follower goes off balance a little bit or a lot > invites a smaller or bigger response / step.

Comment: In order for Follower to catch Leader's signal:

- Follower has to be on their (own) balance ... and in touch with the Leader's body, ready to catch a "signal" ...
- Leader's "signal" is a movement in their own body ... which disturbs Follower's balance, inviting them to step.

[Note: Full details, exercises + observations from this workshop are left out of this online excerpt ...]

Recap on the Session

A few key themes + ideas we explored together:

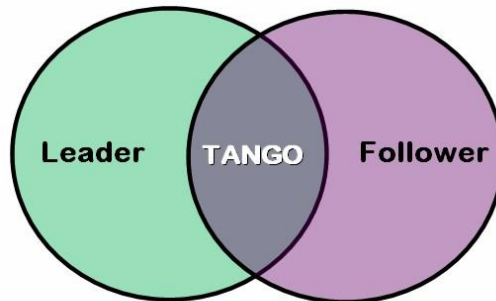
- Tango = **Improvised Social Dance** > we make it up together in the moment via **Give + Take**, speak + listen ...
- **Two Roles** = partners are equal + distinct > but emphasize **Different Tasks** + use different **Raw Materials** ...
- Key info that passes between partners: **When – Where – How Far** ... = Timing, Direction, Scale ...
- **"Gather"** free foot between each step – on **Balance**, on one foot, ankles touching, toes slightly "turned out" ...
- **"Press"** from foot to foot = creates small, "in place" step that doesn't go anywhere (is right underneath) ...
- **"Wind up"** = suggests a larger step, in direction opposite "load" we feel on the edge of our supporting foot ...
- To better **Isolate + Diagnose** any situation, problem, or skill: Consider simplifying options / movements ...
- Key aesthetics: **Connectedness**: $1 + 1 = 3$, emergent system ... **Coordination**: flow through time, fluency
- **Walking** dance > we **Travel**, dynamic environment, move in "Line of Dance," **Share Space** with neighbors
- **Basic Navigation** strategies = change up Timing, Scale and/or Direction ... **Embed** ... **Angle Change** / Turn
- **"Layering"** = combining simpler movements to make more complex ones, e.g. Rebound > "Asterisk" Turn
- A good leading strategy: Balance **Accessible with Novel** > Follower can readily respond, but stays interested

Attitude + Values

Whether in practice, a class, or on the social dance floor:

- In any tango partnership, we're looking for **Common Ground** – we want to notice it, then seek to make the most of it –

Improvising tango together is very much like finding + celebrating the overlapping space shared by two circles in a Venn Diagram:



Couple = You, Me, Us ... $1 + 1 = 3$

- In this process, it helps to remember that we dance with the person in front of us, our partner – and they are doing the same with us. We don't just dance with each other's "steps" and/or somebody's "set of skills" ...
- Much more valuable + interesting are the Human Qualities that we bring to the dance floor + share together:

Openness ... Curiosity ... Kindness ... Generosity ... Playfulness ... Sense of Humor ... Courage.

- Whatever we do in tango, and however far we go: We try not to lose track of **Human Qualities** like these – more than anything else: They are what make this dance worth doing ...