

Trine and Morten's Compendium on

Tango

Connection – Music – Technique





Preface

For us, tango isn't the steps. It's everything that happens in between. It lives in the milongas – in the music, in the conversations, in that moment when we begin to listen.

When we meet at a milonga, we don't talk about figures. We talk about the atmosphere, the DJ's choices, the colors of the orchestra, and the special calm that appears when everything in the dance falls into place.

Maybe that is really the gift tango gives us. A quiet space in a world that always wants more. We slow down, breathe, and feel presence grow.

And it is still tango.

We don't dance to fill the room – we dance to share it. The complexity isn't in the steps, but in how our movements meet the music. From the outside it may not look like much, but inside it grows – larger than ourselves.

This compendium is about that. About the path towards finding your own tango.
It only appears when you stop looking for it – and start listening.



Introduction

You've been dancing tango for a while now – maybe you go to milongas, and maybe you've been to festivals or marathons. Your understanding of tango might be that it consists of steps and figures that can be broken down and combined in different ways – and that the dance is created from that.

We've written this compendium for you, because we want to tell you a different story about tango.

For us, tango is made of three things, in this order: **1. Connection, 2. Music, 3. Technique.** The order reflects both their importance and the amount of time we invest in each of them.

Today, most dancers spend the most time on steps and figures – but those don't even appear on our list of what tango is. Not because there's anything wrong with steps and figures – we used them ourselves to learn technique and effects. But for us, tango is improvisation in everything we do, so figures no longer make sense when we dance.

Our connection with the music, and with the person (or people) we dance with, is what inspires our movement.

We meet many dancers who say they “dance to the music”, and when we watch them, they walk on the beat, and sometimes they pause when a musical theme ends and a new one begins. That's a good start – but the music goes much deeper. It holds emotions, accents, rhythmic variations, dialogues between instruments, and so much more.

To help you experience what connection and music can give you, we work in this compendium to make your dance as simple as possible. Weight shifts, open steps, forward/back crosses – that's all you need. The complexity appears in the meeting between the music and the connection between you and the other.

This compendium is about how you can restart your tango with the tools you already have.

Reading and Training Guide

What follows is divided into three chapters, one for each of the three elements above. Including a chapter 4 about **Social Dancing**.

We suggest that you:

1. Start listening to tango music from **1935–1945**. Listen to the great orchestras like Juan D'Arienzo, Carlos Di Sarli, Aníbal Troilo, and Osvaldo Pugliese. Read Chapter 2: Music, and begin to notice things like beat, rhythm, and dynamics.
2. Move to the music on your own. See if you can walk on 1 and 3, try double time, and work on catching the syncopations. Use simple movements like weight shifts, open steps (side steps), and forward/back crosses.
3. Dance with a partner and try to explore what the music gives you together.
4. At the same time, work on your technique as described in Chapter 3. Your axis and your movement into your axis matter a lot.



5. When you start to feel how the music works with your dance, you can begin to work more deeply with your connection, as described in Chapter 1.

Our training philosophy is to explain how things fit together and sometimes offer suggestions for exercises. But **you** must do the work. Repeat often and let your body understand, until you no longer must think about what you're doing. That becomes your tango.

Choose one focus at a time, depending on where you are in your dance. At first, it can feel difficult or overwhelming but keep going. A focus could be always seeking your axis, training how to lead/follow, or practicing how to hit the syncopations in the music or sensing the person you dance with.

And over time, you'll be able to use some of the steps and figures you've once learned in a new and musical way. Your experience of tango will change. It will gain depth, and it will move you on a more personal level.

Chapter 4 is about **Social Dancing** – what it is, and how you can practice it. One of our goals with this compendium is to help create better milongas, with calm dance floors where people dance with respect for one another. To do that, it helps to know what social dancing is, and to have trained it.

What if I'm a beginner?

Even though this compendium is written for dancers who have already come a good way in their tango, we believe it's also a great approach if you're a beginner.

- You will quickly develop a connection between the music and your movement.
- The way you learn to move this way is better suited for dancing at milongas than the traditional focus on figures.
- You learn to improvise, to lead and follow, right from the beginning.

What is "Mas Alma"

Mas Alma is Spanish and means "more soul", and the name refers to a project we've created to spread knowledge about tango as a dance that is primarily about connection, musicality and technique.

It's the same tango you already know, but we care much more about musicality and about sensing each other than about dancing a lot of figures or worrying about how the dance looks from the outside.

Mas Alma is also a learning project for us. We experiment with different ways of inspiring dancers to rethink their dancing and the way they approach milongas.

We do it because we want better milongas and dancers with more soul!



Who are we?

We are Trine and Morten, and we have danced tango together since 2009, and have taught and organized tango for many years.

We love dancing tango and we enjoy travelling to different events in the Nordic countries and across Europe. We are technically skilled dancers, not only in close embrace but also in more open and dynamic styles. However, these days it is especially the classical style of tango that matters to us. We often travel to close-embrace events or *encuentros*, where style and etiquette are important parts of the dance experience.

Our journey into the dance and the music has been shaped by inspiration from many different sources:

- About ten years of seminars with Chicho Frumboli and Juana Sepulveda, including their masterclass seminars in Barcelona.
- Morten's development as a DJ.
- Trine's development as an active follower.
- Various workshops, events, YouTube channels about music and tango culture, such as lectures by Michael Lavocah, "Tango by Year", and interviews with older tango dancers.
- Countless workshops and private lessons over the years with many different teachers, both local and international.
- Trips to Buenos Aires, events in the Nordic countries and Europe, and local milongas – especially in Hamburg.
- Many years of teaching, organising, and running events.
- And hosting our own *encuentro*, "Sydfyn Embrace" (www.sydfynembrace.dk).

Learn more

Here are links to two YouTube channels with interviews featuring people who experienced a part of tango's golden age. Both channels offer English subtitles.

Pepa Palazon's YouTube channel "Tengo una Pregunta para Vos"

Playlist: interviews with dancers, musicians, and people connected to tango culture.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4uWiPclZR3PHIIXJsZQ_VBuKD8zLp78R

MPTango's YouTube channel

A collection of interviews with older milongueros and tango personalities.

<https://www.youtube.com/@PractiMilongueros/playlists>



1. Contact

Connection is everything for us — both in dancing and in life. The connection with the person we dance with, with the music, and with the other couples on the floor. It's what allows us to feel joy, tenderness, and sometimes even melancholy — all the emotions that remind us that we are alive and feeling.

The Argentine tango dancer and teacher Carlos Belvedere once said: "Tango isn't just danced — it's felt." He, and many of the old masters who are sadly no longer with us, all spoke about the same thing: that tango is an expression of life itself. And when we dance, it's as if they whisper to us from the past — reminding us to *feel* the dance, just as we should feel life.

They want us not to *show* the tango, but to let it live inside us. It's not a show, but a conversation, a feeling, a presence — something we give to each other.

If you're new to this way of thinking, such descriptions may sound a bit "fluffy", especially when all you want to know is what you're *supposed* to do.

So in this chapter, we try to make connection more concrete — to show how it can be understood both practically and sensorially, so you can begin to feel it in your body, in the music, and in the meeting with the person you dance with.

1. **Leading and Following**

In an improvisational dance – what do you do when leading and following one step at a time?

2. **Connection**

How do I sense your response to my dancing, and how do I adjust if it feels out of harmony?

3. **The Dance Comes Primarily from Your Center**

We have learned to control our center so that we can lead/follow from it, but we also use the whole body to express the dance, including side-to-side and up-and-down movements.

4. **Active Follower**

Leading and Following

Many dancers on local milongas are used to steps and figures. We often learn sequences and patterns, but far more rarely the actual craft of leading and following them. For a follower, it can be surprising to meet a leader who doesn't build their dance around figures. In tango, it isn't about executing memorised movements — it's about *creating the dance together*.

We like the idea of preparing each other for what's about to happen. A good analogy is throwing a ball to someone who isn't ready — chances are, they won't catch it.

But if we give a small warning, a signal in the body, an energetic intention, the person becomes ready to react.

That's exactly what happens in tango's lead and follow.

We use the space we have around us when we're standing on our axis — the small area where we can move our upper body without losing balance. Here, we use circular or rounded movements to prepare each other. These are micro-movements, small internal loops in the body that are rarely visible from the



outside.

They live inside the dancer's centre — a "movement before the movement" — and they create a sense of what's coming.

When the leader gives such a signal, a reaction appears in the follower: maybe a leg already pointing toward the next step, or a small movement in the upper body that shows the invitation has been received.

This changes the relationship between the roles. Movement doesn't have to be synched. If the follower feels the intention for say a side step, they start moving from the impulse — not because the leader steps at the same time, but because the lead has already been given.

This opens a wide space of nuance and possibilities, where improvisation and communication can unfold freely. Tango stops being a sequence of steps and becomes a *living interaction*, where movement arises in the space between two people listening deeply to each other.

Connection

Connection in tango is more than technique. It contains both physical and emotional presence. When we dance, we don't just sense each other's movements — we sense each other's *presence*. There is a space where we feel the other person's reactions, and where we adjust if something feels out of harmony.

At the same time, a deeper form of connection can open — emotional resonance that doesn't have to be romantic but is grounded in presence and trust. That warmth, that joy, that tender feeling that almost brings tears — and then afterwards you can go home to your partner and your everyday life without confusion or mixed signals.

That is one of tango's gifts: deep human moments shared, without needing to become anything else.

One exercise we use to train connection is this simple awareness while dancing:

What do I feel that *you* experience when we dance? Adjust if something feels out of sync!

For us, this exercise has been the one that has given us everything on a personal level. But the musicality needs to be in the body first.

There is also another layer of connection: the connection between the couples on the floor. When couples sense each other's presence and adjust their dancing to one another, the whole room becomes more harmonious.



The Dance Comes from Your Centre

In tango, we feel that movement comes from the body's centre. From here, movement is directed and shaped. By engaging or releasing the abdominal muscles, we can nuance the movement and create clear leading in combination with the acceleration toward the axis. This tension can be felt throughout the body and can be expressed with greater or gentler intensity, enhancing both the musicality and the quality of the connection.

Examples of exercises:

- As a leader, if you want to initiate a movement, work with the effect of engaging your abdominal area as part of your intention. Try making it impulsive and vary the intensity.

Active Following

You've probably heard the term "**active follower.**" But what does it really mean, and how do you bring it into your dance?

A follower's main responsibility is to stay on the beat — neither lagging behind because they didn't sense the lead, nor rushing ahead if they momentarily fell behind. When the leader sets a direction, the follower continues until the leader signals a stop or a change of direction.

Timing is crucial: if the leader intends to stop or turn, the follower must be ready, so they haven't already moved on based on the music alone.

A follower can add "weight" to the dance if the leader is moving faster than the music allows, subtly pulling the tempo back. Conversely, they can also take initiative if the music suggests something that the leader hasn't indicated.

It's important for the follower to **understand** how much space the leader allows for active contribution. This must always be done with respect — for the partner, for the music, and for the dance itself. The follower cannot take over; if they do, the dance **stops being shared**.

Some leaders may not enjoy an active follower. In that case, don't force it — the goal is a positive experience for both partners.

That said, most leaders appreciate an active follower, because it gives them freedom to enjoy the dance without always being the sole creative force. It reinforces the sense that the dance is a shared creation.



2. Music

Tango music is what awakens our desire to dance. It holds a depth that can move us far beyond the steps — if we give ourselves time to listen. For many dancers, the journey begins with figures and patterns, and in most milongas this is also where the focus tends to be. Music often becomes something that simply sets the tempo — a rhythmic background for the dance — but not something we truly enter.

Yet it is in the music that tango's heart beats.

When we begin to listen — not just follow the beat, but *feel* the melody, the dynamics, and the story — a whole new dimension of the dance opens.

Dancer, writer, and lecturer Michael Lavocah once described what it is in tango music that inspires us to move. We have drawn inspiration from his ideas and put together these points about tango music, seen from a dancer's perspective:

- Beat
- Rhythms
- Dynamics
- Lyrics
- Traditions

Beat

For a tango dancer, the beat in tango music lies on beats 1 and 3. These are called the “*strong beats*”, while beats 2 and 4 are the “*off beats*”.

The strong beats are often clearly emphasised in the music, while 2 and 4 are softer.

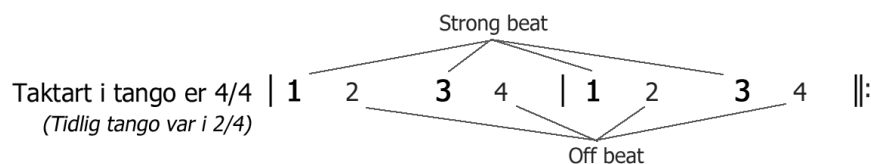
This is the pulse that makes us want to walk.

A good example is Carlos Di Sarli's “*Maldita*” from 1931. This way of accenting beats 1 and 3 is called *marcato en dos*.

Some music marks all four beats more evenly, known as “*marcato en cuatro*”.

An example is early music by Juan D'Arienzo from the 1930s.

The beat is important because it drives us forward and gives us the impulse to move.



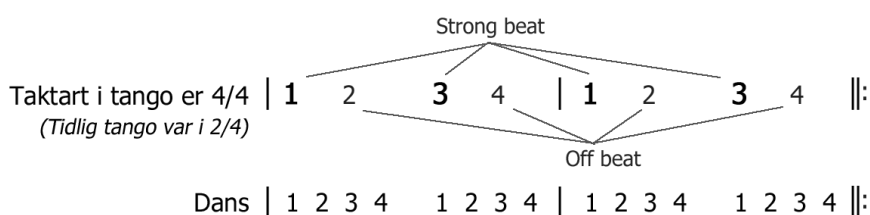


Rhythm

Rhythms are, essentially, everything that is *not* beat.

Some of these rhythmic variations are what we call syncopations — movements in double-time compared to a normal beat.

A visualization of this for tango could look like this:



Some dancers like to count “and-1-and-2-and-3-and-4”. Another way to illustrate it is to count “1-2-3-4” only on the strong beats.

A syncopation would then be “1–2” in double-time (equivalent to “1-and”).

One way to learn syncopations is by counting them while dancing, but that requires being able to count the music *and* move in relation to what you count — which can be quite challenging.

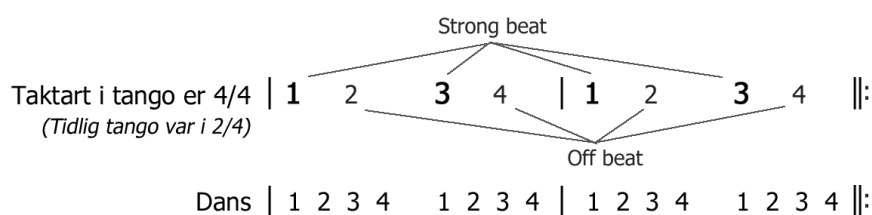
Another way is simply to listen for syncopations in the music and recognise when they appear. This creates a more intuitive and practical way to dance them.

Traditional Syncopation Patterns in Tango

There are several traditional syncopation patterns that are often supported by the music.

The most common one — by far — is the “121” pattern.

Starting with the figure from before:





Here are some of the traditional syncopation patterns that we can dance in tango, with '121' (no. 3) being by far the most used.

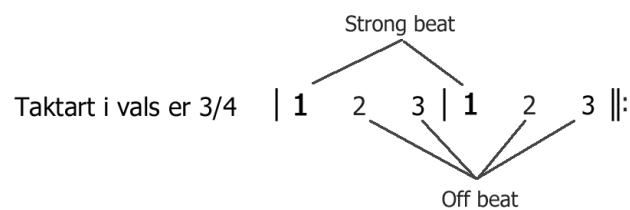
1:	1	1	1	1	:				
2:	1	3	1	1	3	1	:		
3:	1	2	1	1	2	1	:		
4:	1	4	1	1	4	1	:		
5:	1	2	3	1	1	2	3	1	:

There also exist some less frequently used variations:

6:	1	2	3	4	1	1	2	3	4	1	:
7:	1	2	4	1	1	2	4	1	:		

Syncopation in Waltz

For tango waltz, the feeling is different:



Typical syncopation patterns in waltz look like this:

Variationer i dansen

1:	1	1	:		
2:	1	2	1	:	
3:	1	3	1	:	
4:	1	2	3	1	:



Waltz in tango is not the same as typical Viennese waltz, even though both use three beats with equal spacing. There is also a variation called “Waltz criollo” or “Peruvian waltz”, sometimes played in waltz tandas. Waltz criollo can create the impression of a slightly “syncopated” shift in the beat:

| 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 ||:

| 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 ||:

Try to use this slight shift in your dancing.

Dynamics

In practice, we work with different musical elements — themes, melody, counter-melody, the dialogue between instruments, and the impact when the singer enters. All of this gives us things to play with in the dance.

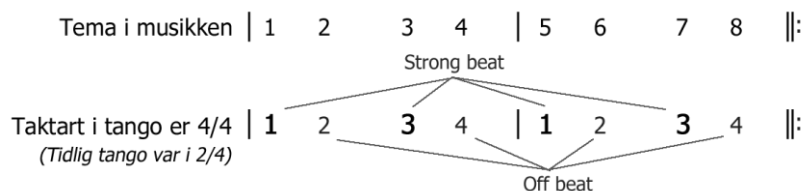
When the singer begins, the dance often softens. Traditionally, dancers hold back a little out of respect for the singer. Here we dance legato — calmly, smoothly, with softer movement, as if the energy flows continuously through the body.

When the music becomes more rhythmic or intense, and the instruments — for example bandoneon or piano — step forward, we dance staccato: more marked, rhythmic, and tight.

Staccato movements can feel light and upward, whereas legato feels grounded and anchored.

Tango music contains themes and variations, often structured in phrases of eight beats.

As dancers, we often feel it like this:



When a theme ends, we hold back — and start again on beat 1 when the new theme begins.



Lyrics

Even if many of us in Europe don't understand Spanish — and especially not *Lunfardo* — the lyrics can still influence the dance. We can still feel the emotional tone.

Think of D'Agostino with Vargas — there is a solemnity when Vargas starts singing. With Di Sarli and Podestá, the mood becomes soft and rounded, while D'Arienzo with Echagüe sparkles with energy and bite.

The music speaks its own language. When we let ourselves be moved by that language, and allow the emotions to shape our movement, a new layer of tango emerges — a place where music, poetry, and dance meet.

Traditions

There are traditions for how we dance to certain orchestras:

Carlos Di Sarli: “floating on clouds”, soft, spacious movement — especially when Podestá sings.

Juan D'Arienzo: rhythm and tempo, with respect for the singer's entrance.

Osvaldo Pugliese: building and releasing energy.

Aníbal Troilo: a mix of everything — lyrical, rhythmic, emotional.

Of course, this requires being able to recognise the orchestra or having a DJ who shows the playlist visually. If not, simply follow your experience of the music.

A Different Kind of Practica

Here is a suggestion for a practica designed to train connection, music, and technique:

5–7 days before the practica, the organisers send out a tanda — always from the same orchestra, from approximately 1927–1955. For us, this period is important because this music holds the beat, rhythm, and dynamic variation we don't usually find in modern tango or re-recordings.

You can find such tandas on YouTube by searching “tanda + [orchestra name]”. For example: “D'Arienzo tanda”. Many tango DJs upload their work there.

Participants are encouraged to listen to the tanda before the practica — ideally many times — and even move a bit to it at home. The more familiar the music is, the easier it is to dance syncopations or work with dynamics during the practica.



The Practica (1–1½ hours)

- It is a guided practica, meaning that one person or couple leads the session, offering guidance or inspiration as needed, and may also explain a technique or demonstrate an effect.
- Participants should not be beginners; they should dance regularly on milongas.
- We dance small and simple to work with music and connection.
- No figures.
- We dance rhythmically, dynamically, and focus on the experience of the dance.
- A short introduction to the orchestra and the musical period.
- A brief walkthrough of the musical characteristics and traditional approaches to dancing to that orchestra.
- Couples mostly practice on their own, but the guide may help with connection, musicality, or technique when needed.

Learn More — Additional Resources

Podcast

During the pandemic, Michael Lavocah and Dag Stenvoll created a podcast series about tango music. They took one year per episode — for example 1943 — and discussed the orchestras that stood out that year. There are around 25 episodes. All free.

Tango by Year (SoundCloud, free account needed)

<https://soundcloud.com/user-342390385>

Books

An essential book for every tango dancer:

Michael Lavocah — *Tango Stories: Musical Secrets*

<https://www.tangomusicsecrets.co.uk/buy-now/english/>

Archives

Online databases with listings of recordings:

Tango DJ – All About Tango

<https://tango-dj.at/>

El Recodo

<https://www.el-recodo.com/?lang=en>



Buying Tango Music

Places to purchase restored tango recordings:

Tango Tunes

<https://tangotunes.com/en/>

Tango Time Travel

<https://tangotimetravel.be/>

And of course, almost all tango music exists on YouTube — in varying quality.

Online

Todo Tango: <https://todotango.com/>

Music for Training

Here are some tango tracks that are useful for training:

Carlos Di Sarli, "Maldita", 1931: <https://youtu.be/NcE6NRiKOoY?si=p-PxZhIfUae3DT49>

OTV, "Viento Norte", 1929: <https://youtu.be/z2oLc0oeAJs?si=CBNhRRKU3SmDterJ>

Miguel calo, "La Vi Llegar", 1944: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDUa3hzksqA>

Carlos Di Sarli, "Junto a tu corazon", 1942: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NhvfLbTEcw>

Juan D'Arienzo, "Mandria", 1939: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlXbMbK-j1g>

Juan Maglio, "Caminito", 1927: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UIJDnGu67Q>

Anibal Troilo, "Torrente", 1944: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oooXJR95Hfo>

Carlos Di Sarli, "Nido Gaucho", 1942: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D7o6ORS00E>



3. Technique and Effects

In tango, technique is not a goal in itself — it is a tool.

It helps you move more freely, listen more deeply, and create a more honest connection — with the music, your partner, and yourself. External perfection matters far less than the inner sense of balance, presence, and musicality.

If you watch dancers from the 1950s and 60s, or look at older dancers today, you will often notice that their technique looks very different from modern ideals. And yet, their dancing has an authenticity and emotional depth that can easily be lost when too much focus is placed on form and too little on *feeling*.

The purpose of working with technique and effects is not to look good; it is to gain more freedom to *feel*. It is about developing awareness of your body's weight, balance, and direction — and letting technique support natural movement. These principles form the foundation of all tango, whether you dance in a close embrace, an open embrace, or with more complex steps and figures.

We distinguish between what happens *inside* the dancer — the individual body work — and what happens *between* dancers when they meet in connection.

The technique in this chapter focuses on mostly on the first part: the personal work with body, axis, movement, and energy.

We divide technique into:

- Axis
- Movement
- Staying behind / in front of your partner

These are not all the techniques that exist — but they are, for us, the most essential ones. The ones that create the most social, connected dance, and which support dancing in a close embrace.

Axis

The axis is the body's internal centre — the point where balance feels stable and movement feels natural.

Finding your axis starts with sensing your own body: moving side to side, forward and back, and noticing the moment where calm and control are present — without locking your knees. This is your axis.

This awareness is the foundation for all movement. From the axis come steps, pivots, and weight changes. It functions as the stable midpoint even when you are in motion.

Whether you dance in open or close embrace, each dancer must be able to move freely without losing their own axis. A key principle is being able to stop at any moment, in full control, on your axis.



Movement

Movement from axis to axis happens by pushing from the floor and accelerating toward the new axis. This applies to forward, backward, and side steps.

Train variations in step length and intensity.

A close embrace often produces smaller steps, but you should still push from the floor and allow the movement to accelerate toward the axis.

And remember: There are no “transport steps” in tango. Every step matters — every step is part of the expression.

Staying Behind / In Front of Your Partner

The relationship between the dancers’ axes is essential.

Regardless of role — leader or follower — your torso should always stay oriented toward your partner.

When you move, you should remain *behind* or *in front of* the other person depending on your role — not to the side.

This precision creates clarity in the communication and establishes a shared centre in the dance.

A lot of this comes down to dissociation — the ability to move your upper body independently from your hips and legs.

To dissociate well, you need relaxed knees and the ability to work down into the floor.

Many Other Techniques...

There are many more techniques and effects. Working with types of steps, off-axis movement, elasticity, the dance’s center, and so on. We also use turning a lot when we dance. In this compendium, we have focused on what we believe is needed to move from a dance that is about steps and figures to a dance that is meant to be felt.

The techniques and effects we have chosen are also fundamental, whether you want to dance openly and broadly or simply and musically.



4. Social Dancing

The idea of *social dancing* is about the shared framework that makes a milonga a good experience for as many people as possible. These guidelines aren't rules for the sake of rules — they are about respect: for each other, for the music, and for the shared space we all dance in.

Some dancers express the music with great technique and creativity, and it can be wonderful to watch. But in social tango, we don't dance to fill the room — we dance to *share* it.

As organisers, of course you want participants to have a good experience. It's not about getting as many dances as possible but about creating conditions where the dances that *do* happen have quality — and where people want to return.

As dancers, we must remember that we are not just attending a milonga. When we are there, we *are* the milonga. Our behaviour, our attention, and our respect shape the experience for everyone.

Social dancing is not a modern invention. In Buenos Aires, there are many stories about *floor managers* who would firmly dancers to leave the floor if they behaved without consideration. In some marathons — and especially in encuentros — we still protect these principles. Not to control, but to protect the quality of the atmosphere and the dance.

We simply experience better milongas when people not only know these guidelines but also practise them. This doesn't just influence the atmosphere — it shapes the way you dance. It requires awareness and training, but it makes tango and milongas richer for all of us.

Below is a summary of the most common social guidelines:

- Always invite with mirada/cabeceo
- Always make eye contact with the couple to your left before entering the dance floor
- Keep your feet on the floor
- Adapt your dance to the space available
- Respect the line of dance and keep your place
- Invite people you don't know

Mirada (the look) / Cabeceo (the nod)

At milongas, the respectful way to invite someone to dance is through mirada and cabeceo.

You get eye contact, and if you receive a nod, you have an agreement to dance. If not, simply continue looking for someone else.

As a follower, you remain seated until the leader you cabeceo'ed stands directly in front of you.

Remember, it may be someone *behind* you who was actually invited.

Keep eye contact with the person you accepted — it tells the leader that the invitation is real.



If it turns out the leader was inviting someone else, no one loses face — they simply walk past you to the correct person.

You should not walk up to someone and say things like “I’ve tried all evening without luck.”
Mirada/Cabeceo might be working perfectly — just not in your favour that night.

Some dancers take a rejection personally. It might be personal — but often it isn’t. Perhaps the person is saving the tanda for someone they love dancing that orchestra with. Just try again later.

After the tanda, the leader politely offers to accompany the follower back to their seat.

“Leader Mirada/Cabeceo” at the Entrance to the Dance Floor

Never enter the dance floor without first getting eye contact and acceptance from the couple approaching on your left. If the floor is crowded, wait for space.

At the beginning of the *first* song of a tanda, where everyone enters at once, this is less strict — but the line is fluid, so pay attention to when it’s needed.

Keep Your Feet on the Floor

We often dance close — very close — and safety matters. Avoid movements where your feet or heels fly up into the air.

If you are a follower on a crowded floor and you are led into something you would normally do with more leg freedom (boleos, high adornos, etc.), keep your feet down regardless.

Safety is everyone’s responsibility.

Adapt Your Dance and Keep Your Place

In this compendium, we emphasise keeping the dance simple enough to feel both your partner and the music. You can practice by dancing in a one-by-one metre square — this teaches you to dance on the space you have and to keep your position in the line of dance.

If you switch lanes, for example moving toward the centre, stay there — don’t jump back just because you see a gap.



Invite People You Don't Know

Look around — is someone sitting who hasn't danced much? Invite them!

Your value as a dancer is not measured by how advanced your partners are, but by how well you dance with the person in front of you, regardless of level.

Be social, be generous, and help create a good atmosphere on the milonga.

Of course, you shouldn't dance with someone you genuinely don't feel comfortable dancing with. But remember — people grow and improve. Sometimes it's worth trying again after a while.

And if the music that night isn't your taste — or no one invites you — then simply:
head for the bar! :)



Afterword

Today, there are more people dancing tango outside Buenos Aires than there are in Buenos Aires itself. This also means that tango is evolving elsewhere—in directions different from where it originated. Places where the weight of history doesn't carry the same significance as it does for a porteño (a native of Buenos Aires). Encuentros, for example, are not a type of event you find in Argentina.

This doesn't mean we don't care about the essence of tango—quite the opposite. We try to find something genuine, something calm and profound, that resonates in our stressed-out world. We find it when we focus on the experience of connecting with others.

Some suggest that milongas are one of the reasons tango has survived—they create a special social space where people come together around the dance. If we take that as our starting point, it gives tango a purpose: a space where it can unfold and develop.

We, Trine and Morten, did not invent the theories behind this compendium. We build on what we have learned ourselves and relate it to how it can work in practice at milongas. Our aim is to strengthen and develop the social and experiential aspects of tango.

Many instructors have good intentions with workshops that focus on a specific technique or effect. But often these workshops end up centered around a single sequence, where most students are focused solely on the steps, and the technique itself is more or less forgotten. This then carries over to the milongas and shapes the way dancers talk about tango.

It's not the close embrace or milonguero/tanguero styles that hold the key to learning Argentine tango. We believe the key lies in focusing on connection, music, and respect—whether you dance open or closed. But to reach that point, you must let go of the idea that tango is just a collection of steps.

For many years, there has been a strong focus on visual tango—the kind that looks impressive in videos and competitions. Argentinians who have participated in the local World Tango Championships, the Mundial de Tango, are fascinating to many. Their workshops are popular in Europe because they must know what they're teaching—and in many settings, that works very well, especially if it's not applied at milongas but explored in practica sessions or at home.

However, communities are beginning to emerge where dancers question whether what they are learning truly represents an authentic expression of tango. People who are not just looking for technique or performance, but who want to use tango for something else: to find calm, depth, and a more genuine connection in an often-stressful everyday life—both with themselves and with their dance partners.

We hope this compendium can help open eyes to the fact that tango is much more than the next figure. Our experience is that for far too long, learning Argentine tango has focused on figures, causing dancers to lose touch with the music.

Deep tango is our passion. It's where we experience the most profound personal moments—and it is that journey we invite you to join us on in this compendium.