



*The Beijing Papers*

## **II-Musicality for tango dancers.**

“I never had dance teachers, but I had tango teachers. One was Julian Centella, a poet (the one speaking at the beginning of the tango *Café Dominguez*), who taught me to feel tango from the inside. The other was the composer and musician Miguel Calo. He made me understand how to listen to music. He directed me like I was another musician in his orchestra”. Carlos Gavito\*

Musicality for tango dancers: a quandary.

What means musicality for tango dancers?

The definition of musicality as it could apply to dance is not at all obvious.

Musicality is pertaining to music. Dancers, well... dancers dance, they do not make music per se. How does musicality then enter into the realm of dance?

Let's answer by looking first at the meaning of this word in its original context.

From a musician's point of view, musicality is the art, the *quality* of what is musical. It refers to some value added content that is more than the correct execution of the notes on a score.

Musicality is what will distinguish a performer from another. Musicality is what will make the music so wonderfully expressive under the hands of a good artist.

Dancers, like musicians, are performers and both have in common the possibility of adding value to their art when they perform.

In a dance perspective, should we talk about *danceability* instead?

Such a word falls short and merely indicates a music that could easily be danced to.

Therefore, for lack of an adequate dancing related word, let's borrow the word musicality and connect it with tango dancing.

Does it make sense though? In our understanding, definitely yes.

In the following lines, we will try our best to demonstrate how musicality and dance are, in fact, the two sides of a same coin.

Let's consider the art of choreography for a moment.

Imagine that you are a ballet master who is commissioned to stage a ballet on a chosen musical work.

Your language consists of steps and sequences of steps and your task is to organise them and make them fit with the score. There is no doubt in your mind that you will not throw them at

random, counting on the technical excellence of your dancers and their rhythmical precision to create a piece of beauty.

You definitely will try to make them blend well and integrate seamlessly, synergistically if possible with the music. If you are talented for that matter you will gain a reputation for being an excellent choreographer.

Dance and music are two Siamese twins.

With the difference though that social tango is not set dancing like classical (or tango) music is set on a score. It is all improvised, more like jazz.

But, even if it is improvised, it is nonetheless a spontaneous choreography.

It is a choreography in the sense that a good tango dancer, an artist, will not throw sequences of steps regardless of the musical phrase.

The phrasing of the music:

Music is a language, and like all languages, it possesses a structure, a syntax and is organised into chapters, paragraphs, sentences with punctuation and articulation. Think of a singer for a moment. A singer has to breathe, a good singer will do so by integrating his needs of breathing with the musical phrase. In the mind of the composer, the phrase has to breathe on it's own as well. The singer will then study the score and will find the articulation, the places where the music breathes and will attune it with his own needs.

A dancer will do the same. He will "breathe" his steps, so to speak, and will integrate them to the music.

From the phrasing, he will improvise what does integrate and blends well. This will confer a pertinence to his dancing, a sense of harmony in relation to the music.

Musicality is something immediately perceived and felt by followers and is usually the most important quality they cherish in a leader.

The late Argentinean composer Astor Piazzolla used to despise tango dancers that were not listening to his music. He felt abused by people who would only use the rhythmical beat as a drive to make them move.

Out of respect for all these first rate composers and the beautiful music they have written for us, let's integrate musicality in our own tango dancing!

From now on, please bear in mind that the classic tango scenario is not represented by a sextet (like the orchestra *Color Tango*) which means six musicians PLUS eventually two dancers, but is in reality an octet composed of eight dedicated individuals striving to serve the music written on the score.

They both are in possession of a different medium (dance, music) but the goal is the same: to reveal the beauty and add expression to the music.

By playing musically the notes on the score, musicians will strive to make it happen in the audible dimension; dancers for that matter will improvise sequences of steps and will project their musicality in the tri-dimensional space.

The art of argentine tango calls for musical dancers.

Social dancing with musicality is felt as deeply satisfying in the intimacy of the dancing couple and can be beautiful to see as well.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, argentine tango was endowed with a considerable amount of first-rate music. In fact, the production of good music continues to this day  
To serve it better, it behooves dancers to develop their musicality potential by dancing, of course, and by studying it.  
They will follow a path similar to the one followed by musicians, play music and go to class to develop both your technical skills and your musicality.

In the coming weeks, I will be giving a musicality workshop here in Beijing.  
Welcome to all!

Richard S.

Richard Sagala bio notes:

Canadian born musician and dancer, a certified music teacher, Richard Sagala has been teaching and performing argentine tango in Canada, USA and now China.

While a student in the conservatory of music (where he graduated with four diplomas: DEC, CES, DES, Premier Prix), Richard studied classical ballet and got involved in ballroom dancing from 1990 to 1999.

Richard discovered the art of argentine tango in 1999 and has pursued it relentlessly ever since training with the best and brightest everywhere.

In China, Richard teaches with Beijing tango. You can get information about workshops, regular and private classes by writing to [beijingtango@hotmail.com](mailto:beijingtango@hotmail.com)

\*Carlos Gavito *tanguero extraordinaire* died on the first of july 2005 after a long fight with cancer. In 1963 he danced tango with Miguel's Calo orchestra in Buenos Aires.