



*The Beijing papers*

**V-Your most precious asset in tango. Is argentine tango easy?**

What is your most precious asset in learning argentine tango?

You!

Your attitude, to be precise.

Helpful to know this right?

☺

But then, what?

“Know thyself”

It was true twenty-five centuries ago, it is still true now.

Indeed, knowing oneself better might definitely help in learning the dance.

To know oneself implies asking us the right questions.

The first one should be:

“Am I a person who wants to know with exactitude what I am learning? Or am I cutting corners a little and may be ready to cheat a bit to get results faster?”

A bit in your face kind of question isn't it?

An honest answer can help you a great deal toward the acquisition of the correct dancing technique.

If you would answer the question with something like “I will eagerly cut corners to go fast because I am not willing to spend too much time on tango” you are now in possession of a very useful piece of information.

It means that you will try to dance with what seems first hand obvious and useful to you and, well,... that may cause you a bit of a problem down the road (!)

Trying to simplify and not bother too much is not bad per se, but, in tango, the first idea that comes to mind is rarely the good answer. Are you surprised? This might not fare well with some who have been told that tango is easy isn't it? So our next question will be:

Is tango easy or difficult?

We sometimes hear tango teachers saying that tango is easy and accessible.

Being a tango teacher myself please let me tell you how I feel about this.

If I must answer the question “Do I believe that argentine tango is easy and accessible?” and must answer yes or no, I would answer: “Yes it is”.

But, this said, I would feel very uncomfortable, almost like having told a lie.

It is very convenient to say it to attract newcomers and especially convenient to seduce them if you are selling instruction in the dance.

Maybe lying and saying half truths are a certain form of art for some professions, but lying and the art of tango are mutually exclusive in my opinion.

In fact, what could be more ethical, and closer to the truth for me, would be to say:

“Providing that you have the fundamentals right, argentine tango is relatively easy and accessible”.

The problem here is to get these fundamentals right.

Although everything in this magnificent dance is natural and organic, it is very difficult to figure out the fundamentals by yourself without some competent help from outside.

Invariably, what first comes to mind or what a beginner would understand is rarely the right way.

In other words, you can go to workshops, watch and study tango videos, go dancing AND still acquire all kinds of bad habits through ideas that might seem useful at first but are in fact counterproductive and soon will make your dance so mediocre and frustrating that you might lose interest in tango altogether.

For a list of some problems that may arise from not having the fundamentals right, please refer back to *The Beijing papers no III: the twelve most common mistakes in argentine tango*.

In this current paper, I will mention two technical elements that are generating some problems to a majority of tangueros.

The first one, I mentioned before in previous *Beijing papers* is the tilting of the axis; the second one will be the apparent fascination of some with the free leg.

I-Tilting of the axis:

Maybe you have heard the expression:

“Tango is a vertical expression of a horizontal desire”.\*

The teacher in me concurs 100% with this witty observation.

The horizontal desire may be so strong that, most of the time, I do not see the vertical expression at all...

Let's look at the technical side of it. Yes, tango is based on walking and to acquire a good tango walk is the goal of all good dancers.

Paradoxically, the idea of moving forward, walking, is a source of problems to a lot of people.

In the pursuit of their horizontal desire, they **think linear and not vertical**. In layman terms this mean that they keep too much intention forward and fall more than walk on each and every steps.

Want to fall? Tilt that axis.

Want to walk the tango walk? Ground and control from the supporting leg.

The easiest way to impose a step on your follower is to tilt your axis forward while pressing in her sternum. She will fall, you will fall and you will be a bit closer to your horizontal desire.

If you fall in love, well, I stand corrected.

If you just fall, and your dance amounts to a pile of falling steps, maybe I can offer help.

Falling is the preferred option of those who do not know how or cannot ground properly.

It is almost intuitive since grounding is far less obvious to master.

I could describe the physics of grounding in a precise manner to you but, to ground properly is not something that could be mastered reading about it. Feeling it is better. Again, a one to one meeting with your teacher is advisable here.

II- The fascination of the free leg.

Where we land in a step seems to attract more our attention than the cause of what has triggered this step in the first place

It is a bit like an archer who, oblivious to his bow technique, is totally focused on the arrow once it has been shot and observes it, maybe shouting some encouraging words at it while it 's in flight in hope that it may better reach the center of the target.

A Zen expression says that “when the wise points to the moon, the fool looks at the finger”.

When we walk forward, especially if we do not have a proper posture (and look at the ground), we might find it very interesting to observe and play with our free leg in front of us when we should be paying attention to our supporting leg instead.

The supporting leg, which is responsible for grounding and the movement in the foot of same leg, is where the intention-preparation-traction is, it is where the size, quality and flavour of the step lies.

Again, something to be felt under the guidance of your teacher.

Argentine tango is indeed relatively easy when the fundamentals of the technique are FELT and rightly understood.

Next week, more about sensations.

Love to all,

And see you on the dance floor.

Richard S.

Next week in *The Beijing papers*:

**VI- sensitivity, the senses, the sensation of silence and heightened awareness.**

\* This very witty expression is (rightly or wrongly) attributed to the writer Georges Bernard Shaw.