



The Beijing papers

VII-What does come to mind when you hear the word tango?

The most frequent answer to that question are these two words: “*sensuality*” and “*elegance*”.

In this article I wish to talk about the latter.

Talking about elegance is not so easy.

In fact, I feel a bit daunted by this word. I will try to write modestly about elegance, since writing about it presumes that one is in possession of the concept and this may sound conceited.

I am in no way an “*arbiter elegantiae*”, like they used to say in the days of old, but I nevertheless feel compelled as a tango teacher to bring up this important topic.

The popular psyche is right in stating elegance as being one big concept in argentine tango. Elegance is indeed in the **tradition** of tango.

I totally concur with Noel Strazza (ref: *Beijing papers* no.6) on the importance of conveying the tradition in tango teaching, and this, regardless of the style of dancing you might prefer.

As for myself, I like both: classical AND “nuevo”.

In my mind, both styles should convey the defining elements that give tango its very special identity and make it the powerful and beautiful art it is.

Furthermore, elegance usually flows in the wake of a good dancing technique and is indicative of things going in the right direction.

But, unfortunately, elegance like grace cannot be conjured up by magic wishful thinking.

It is something that will come or not come, but when it will, it will come “naturally” so to speak.

Someone once defined good manners by “the noise you do not make when eating soup”.

Elegance would be a bit like good manners for that matter. It is often what you do NOT do or what you do so effectively and economically that gives an “effortless” feeling in the lead and the movements when dancing.

An example: yesterday night, Felicia and I we were teaching the ocho “cortado”, the subject of our Sunday class.

One way of leading it would be to make your follower mirror your steps in the cortado.

It is an effective way of learning at the beginning. Both roles are making the same movements (but for the cross).

An elegant way though, would be to lead it in such a way that it would be the lady that does the cortado while the leader would refrain from mirroring her steps. He would lead it in an invisible way instead, and even better, he would dance the cortado in her feet and body. The visual this way would be less cluttered and the feel would become concentrated, compact and effective.

Sabor y ritmo!

Elegant leaders know how to dance in the feet and body of their followers and how to keep it simple on their side (Ying), especially when the followers are doing something beautiful (Yang). It does not mean that leaders cannot shine at times! If they want to do something more outspoken, they will re-appropriate the Yang side and keep their follower in Ying simplicity. It is a very good basic principle of opposition and complementarity that is present in all art forms.

Another example of elegance would be for repetitions.

“Good taste” in the classical definition calls for **three** not more. More is to be avoided. It is fastidious, heavy handed and kills what it wishes to serve.

Here is an example in music: take a theme or part of a theme a composer wants to highlight. He writes it once, repeats it to highlight and emphasize it, then repeats the theme again and expands it with an additional part and/or fuses it with the rest of the phrase.

It avoids repeating to sound like a redundant loop on a scratch record...

Even if the theme is beautiful, it cannot be repeated *ad nauseam*.

It is the same with gastronomy. Tiramisu taste good and almost everybody likes it, but would you serve it on every course of a six course meal?

So, back to our ocho cortado.

It is a sequence, which is fun to repeat. (Think three times max!)

The third time, you would expand it at the end by linking it with a new sequence that would take over at the cross (for those who do know how it goes).

For example, a possibility that comes to my mind would be to use the energy of the cortado to bounce her foot at the cross than unwind it in a volcada and finish it with a back step.

This would allow us to use the energy of the cortado and the cortado step would become the first step of our next sequence.

The lady side would be to vary the colour by adding adornos every time the cortado is repeated so it is not done with a Xerox machine kind of look and feel.

But, for those two examples on elegance and taste, it is important to come back to the **BFF** (the big five fundamentals) and work especially on your spiral and on your walk.

To develop a beautiful walk is something so satisfying that everybody should strive for it and work at this on a regular basis...(no partners required!).

We always hear that tango is based on walking.

Indeed, it is true. The problem with this though, is that there is an undertone of facility to it, something that is given already, since we all know how to walk isn't it?

It would be a mistake to confuse walking in the street and the beautiful tango walk.

The tango walk in its apparent simplicity (another characteristic of elegance) hides in fact an artful technique that implies mastering the various elements of the walk and presenting them in their proper order.

It is not without reason that the old milongueros in Buenos Aires, men who have danced for fifty years plus, would not say after a nice dance evening: “tonight I have danced well”, They would rather say: **“tonight I have walked well”**.

To talk the walk like this speaks volume don't you think?



I shall end here for the moment.

It is time for me to go for my daily tango walk practice...

Love to all,
and see you on the dance floor!
Richard S.