

Body, Solidarity, & Argentine Tango Dancing

Soc/Dance 271

(Wed. 1:00 – 3:00 pm)

Classroom: KH 205 (Club Room)

Fall 2023

Instructor: Professor Seungsook Moon

Office: Blodgett Hall 300C

Office Hours: Tue. 10:30 – Noon

& by appointment

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Guest instructor: Ms. Maia Martinez

(Co-Director & Instructor of Dojo

Dance Co. & Hudson Valley Tango)

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Course Description:

This new experiential course explores the primordial and enduring significance of bodily connections and interactions to human relations by learning the basic structure and movements of Argentine Tango dancing. Originating from streets of Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay during the nineteenth century, it was dance of European immigrants, former slaves, and working-class or lower-class people. While maintaining its basic structure, Argentine Tango allows for individual improvisation in dance movements as freedom of self-expression and non-verbal communication with other human beings.

As an amateur Argentine tango dancer, I have been learning and practicing it since 2014 until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a sociologist, I have been keenly interested in examining and understanding cultural mechanisms and practices that nurture the sense of connection and solidarity among human beings. I have always loved dancing as an avocation because it brings music, which is my other artistic passion, and bodily movements together. From my own experience, I feel that Argentine Tango nourishes and accentuates nonverbal communication and intuitive interactions not only between dancing partners, but also among all dancing pairs, who share a dance floor. This development stems from an evolving sense of trust and interdependence among individuals as a dancing pair and a group of dancing pairs. In the current digital era dominated by mobile phones and social media, it will be deeply enriching and meaningful to teach students, who have become so accustomed to human interactions in the mediated virtual reality, about corporeal human connections and solidarity cultivated and discovered through experiential learning of Argentine Tango.

For this intensive course, I work closely with Ms. Maia Martinez, a professional tango dancer from Argentina, who has lived and taught dancing in the mid-Hudson Valley region since 2011. The class meets once a week for two hours to learn and practice dancing, and then reflect and discuss our corporeal experiences to be centered around, but not limited to, human connections, trust, and solidarity through dance movements. In terms of learning the dance throughout the semester, Ms. Martinez will guide and facilitate

students to learn and solidify their dance movements and improve their connection with the music and partners.

Course Requirements:

1. Class attendance and mindful and full participation
2. The participation means not only learning dance movements and practicing them, but also contributing to weekly reflection on bodily interactions and solidarity.

*Due to the nature of experiential and experimental learning, this course would be non-letter graded. If you need to get a letter grade for this class, please consult with me.

Course recommendations:

Attending an Argentine Tango Dancing Event as observers (or participant if local and causal).

Tango Socials, known as MILONGAS, can be intimidating and not welcoming for beginners. Students will learn the codes and etiquette to understand cultural conventions of Argentine Tango events and gradually you will feel comfortable to join. However, if the dance floor is crowded, it is convenient for you to simply attend early (and dance before the large group arrives) or as a spectator.

TANGO TEA PARTY DATES:

October 1st and November 5th 2023 (3 - 7pm)

Where: J & B Dance Center, 734 Broadway, Kingston, NY 12401

(Depending on how this class as a whole unfolds during the semester, there can be some modifications in class schedule and specific contents. In that case, you will be informed in advance.)

Course Schedule

8/30 Wed.

Course overview & planning

In-class watching: 1) A Brief History of the Black Roots of Argentine Tango
(14:49 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vRF_hGR_yU
2) Chasing the Tango High (2006, Canadian production)
(about 50 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcPICiHgQxo>

Recommended: "Now hear this Piazzolla's History with Tango," a wonderful PBS documentary under "Great Performances" series on Argentine Tango music but less focus on dancing

9/06 Wed. Dance Practice Week 1

Introduction to Argentine Tango Dancing

Summary: Fundamentals

* Abrazo (embrace/hug) *Posture * System (Connection and roles) *Caminada (walk)

Objective: To approach Argentine Tango with the understanding that it is not just a dance and not just steps. Tango embodies feelings that we dance. Tango is culture. To begin to develop the connection with music and explore meanings of the abrazo through experience. Students will start to move around the floor together.

Social/cultural context & reflection: Tango is a social dance. Tango is folklore, which belongs to the people. Where did tango originate from? Where is tango today?

9/13 Wed. Dance Practice Week 2

Cruzada aka cruce (cross)

From walking to Cruzada, from Cruzada to walking

Summary: Learning Argentine Tango (AT) Basics; salida to the cross.

Objective: To incorporate fundamentals from the previous class; students will lead and follow "la cruzada" & practice how to maintain connection & communicate in both roles. To understand when and how to apply standard basic (8 count step)

Social/cultural context and reflection: How did the "standard AT basics" come about?

9/20 Wed. Dance Practice Week 3

Improvisation from la cruzada: Front Ochos

Summary: Exploration of various possibilities from “La Cruzada”:
Introducing forward ochos from the cross.

Objective: To continue to apply fundamentals from previous and present classes (including dissociation, connection, & collecting).

Social/cultural context and reflection: sharing my personal experience of how I learned the ochos. How has it changed?

9/27 Wed. Dance Practice Week 4

Review of all movements we learned; applying Tango etiquette & codes

Summary: learning the cultural codes, practicing and acting out different scenarios; Learning how to ask or accept a dance to how access and leave the dance floor.

Objective: To learn the traditions and what makes tango “Argentine Tango”; to maintain its cultural values.

Social/cultural context and reflection: the evolution or involution of tango. Breaking the codes and resistance.

10/04 Wed. Dance Practice Week 5

Parada and Pasada

Summary: Variation on 2 front-ocho sequences that incorporate Parada and Pasada.

Objectives: To learn a very popular AT figure. Leaders will lead la parada "stop" and the follower will play with la pasada (stepping over). To give opportunities to practice leading and following skills.

Social / cultural element: learning more terminology and understanding various components of AT movements. Connecting words with movements.

10/11 Wed. Dance Practice Week 6

Back Ochos

Summary: Starting back ochos with a side step (as in the basic/Salida).

Objective: To lead/follow back ochos using dissociation rather than relying on arm leads. Leaders will see how the entry can be the same as the entry to walking to the cross. Followers will exercise dissociation, balance and focus on collecting.

Cultural context/reflection: discussion on practicing the movements

10/18 Wed. October Break: No class

10/25 Wed. Dance Practice Week 7

Discovering the boleó

Summary: inviting students to perform front and back ochos. Changing directions from one to the other.

Objective: To experience the effects of leading and following. To explore improvisation and the magic of true connection.

Social/cultural context and reflection: Tango steps that are “banned.” The “no nos “ of boleos.

11/01 Wed., 11/08 Wed., & 11/15 Wed. Dance Practice Weeks 8 through 10

Putting it all together

Summary: besides practicing what we have learned on previous sessions, introducing the following, depending on class progress:

- Sandwichito (sanguchito)
- giro
- Music listening

Objective: To practice etiquette and codes along the movement. To listen to the music



11/22 Wed Thanksgiving Day: No class

11/29 Wed. Week 11

TBA: possibly dancing with professional dancers

12/06 Wed Concluding reflection and discussion

