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# ATTITUDE

THE DANCERS' MAGAZINE

Rocío Molina in the New York Flamenco Festival © Javier Suárez



## GOTTA TANGO!

By Alberto Paz and Valorie Hart;  
published by Human Kinetics;  
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### "It Takes Two To Tango..."

This is something my MOM would say as a mantra to explain partnership and the active role one has to take to participate in both conflict resolution, and, bickering. Her words and tough love anchored my bruised feelings at having to divide a cherished possession with my siblings.

#### TAKES TWO TO TANGO

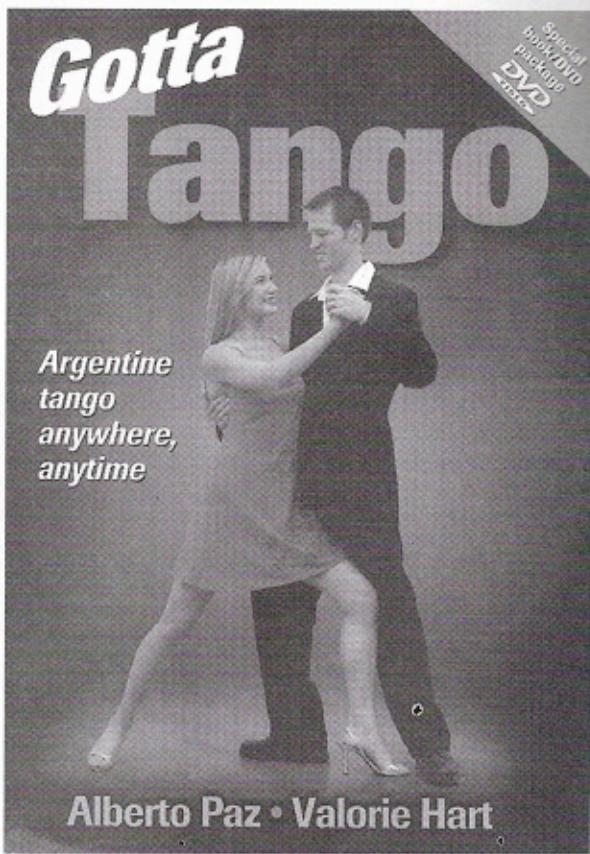
*You can haunt any house by yourself  
Be a man or a mouse by yourself  
You can act like a king on a throne  
There are lots of things that you can do alone  
But it takes two to tango two to tango  
Two to really get the feeling of romance  
Two to tango two to tango do the dance of love  
You can sail on a ship by yourself  
Take a nap or nap by yourself  
You can get into debt on your own  
There are lots of things that you can do alone  
But it takes .....  
Takes two to tango two to tango  
Two to really get the feeling of romance  
Let's do the tango do the tango do the dance of love  
You can get very old by yourself  
Catch a fish or a cold by yourself  
Dig a ditch or strike it rich all by yourself  
There are lots of things that you can do alone: BUT!*

*Lyrics by Ray Charles... after the original by Todd Rundgren*

Here is a book to provide a primer of what exactly is this 'dance of love'; Argentine Tango. It is written to get beyond the duly noted lyrics so as to learn the essentials. Internationally recognized Alberto Paz and Valorie Hart are master teachers that have assembled a compendium of information about Tango. This book tells the rich legacy of this *Creole* art form. Their book like the art form(s) is comprised of numerous facets and contributors to its music, lyrics, rhythms, instrumentations, dance steps, social and historical ethics, codes of practice and, improvisation.

*Many have reinvented the Argentine tango, and it has even reinvented itself. Just when it had been written off as passé, pronounced dead in newspaper headlines, and ignored by a couple of generations, it came back full force and full circle. There has been a revival, a reinvention of sorts, of the tango of all forms. The golden age is surpassed in sheer numbers of dancers, because the tango has had a global explosion. Credit for this is often given to the most glamorous catalysts in the form of tango shows and tango movies. But a more grassroots influence exists in the form of a handful of protagonists who preserve and foster the tango for the love and respect of it.*

*Page Xii; second paragraph*



Our authors are the first to admit that it is most unusual to learn Tango via a book. It is foremost social dancing and a shared experience with a partner. What one may know from either American and/or English Ballroom Dance called Tango is not the focus of this book. Accordingly, it is an important boon that this book is accompanied by a DVD that show this pair dancing and demonstrating spatial directions within a dancing environment with other couples moving and re enforcing the lessons.

A. Paz and Ms. Hart travel regularly to Buenos Aires to research the lifelong stories of the freedom, protocol and interactions in Tango. They cite that they learned this dance form as adults. Further this learning process happen through going backstage and asking the performers of *Tango Argentino* to show them how to move as they did. Those who remember those wonderful performances of Tango Argentino at the Minskoff, City Center and all through the USA in the 1990's found challenges to backstage lessons due to time constraint, Spanish language barrier, after show fatigue and hunger, inadequate spaces to move, (given Union houses refuse to have 'others' on their stage ... so parking lots are used), and the most pervasive: not everyone can translate what they do and do well into spoken language metaphors to teach another. They can do and hope that you

*catch it!* The other related fact is that there will be numerous examples and contradictions of steps as you request input from different performers. In other words; there are a finite number of movements that can be executed in an infinite number of ways.

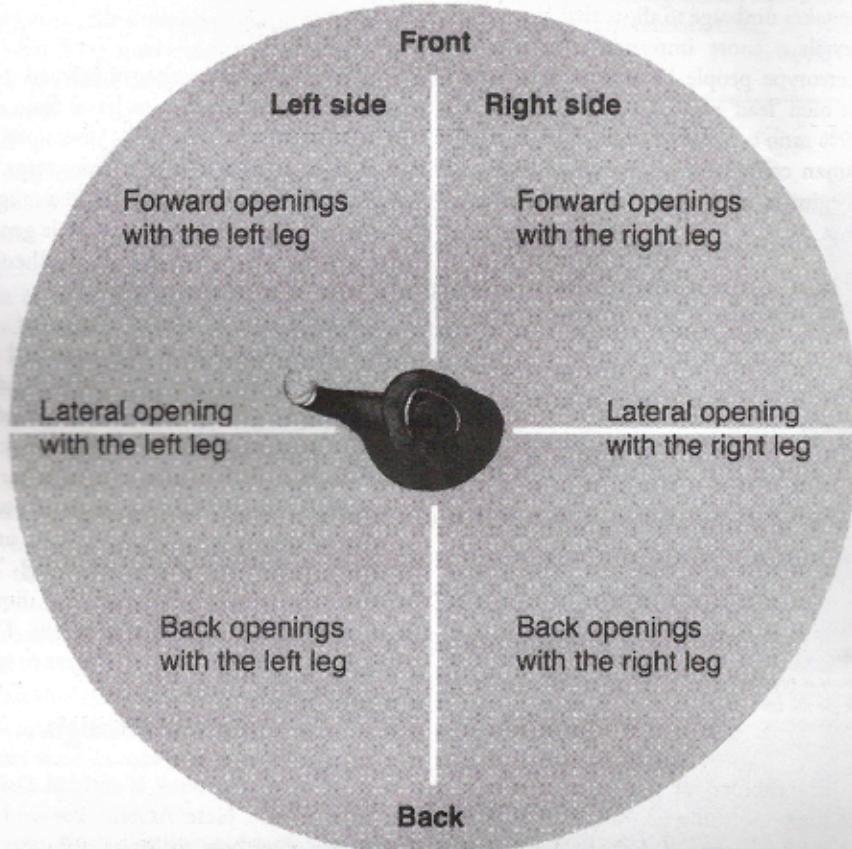
With time our authors discovered that the core way to both learn and eventually teach others would lead to the path of *learning how to learn* and having respect for that learning process in whatever human body that will want to dance. This couple also knew that they had to go to Buenos Aires to experience all of the sensory details of this new language for their bodies. Listen, Look and do rather than watch and meditate on activities. Tango is not solitary and it is a three dimensional ritual of pleasure and privilege as a duo. Hart and Paz also warn us that Argentine Tango is an addiction. This dance is accomplished within community for all its members; in all languages, sites, young, old, the wealthy or indigent. As no other its intimacy will celebrate humanity through authentic feelings and emotions.

*For tango dancers, a deep knowledge of the music is essential...*

*Many great musicians have left the distinctive sounds of their instruments for posterity, along with the unique touches of their inspiration. Their musical legacy comprises the complex set of rhythms and melodies that keep tango dancers addicted and excited from beginning to end on any given night of tango dancing.*

*Page 17; second paragraph*

Music tells us the new... It can also help one remember home. Music tells the gossip and very personal stories of transformation, grief, collective secrets and mystery as one lives in an outback as well as other geographical terrains. A good portion of the early chapters are about the seminal orchestras that shape the aural history of tango. Foremost one must know the instrumentation for tango: Violins (2), piano, a bass, and two bandoneóns. Piano is the only percussion: there are no drums used. And the bandoneón is the heart of the tango sound. There is no tango, if the bandoneón is missing. Here are some names to listen to and know: Julio De Caro Sexteto Típico, Carlos Di Sarli, Juan



**Figure 3.2** The infinite possibilities for moving from the instant position into four quadrants using openings.

© 2008 Alberto Paz and Valorie Hart

D'Arienzo, Osvaldo Pugliese, Anibal Troilo. Records, tapes and CDs are available of their distinct sounds and common beauty. Someone else to listen to is legendary singer Carlos Gardel who immortalized the lyrics and poetry of tango. His death in a plane crash in 1935 produced a national gloom and reduction of voices singing during a night at the milonga (dance club/saloon).

## Tango Time is NOW!

Part Two of this book is the instructional portion. It contains six chapters entitled: *It takes You To Tango; To Hug or Not To Hug; Getting Along in a Circle of Trust; What Goes Around Comes Around; A Sleight of Legs; and Tangled Up? Just Tango On.* Here are the meat and potatoes of the rituals and protocol for dancing tango. Readers will enjoy how emphatic our authors are of the preparation one does to be Tango ready. Valorie Hart provides a tango barre as a fitness vehicle to prepare to dance with a partner. Flexibility and strength are needed by both dancers to disassociate the upper and lower body. Both the top and bottom portions of ones body have specific skills to master while the integrity of the body axis(s) is evident and maintained. Alberto Paz wants dancers to perceive tango dancing as requiring 100% from both dancers. He takes umbrage to those that feel some other proportion prevails... more important, Paz would like to change the stereotype people have from films and 'Ballroom Tango' that men 'lead' and women 'follow'. This is not true and his 100% ratio is required from all concerned to accomplish the human connection, intimacy and joy of Argentine Tango. It begins from the eye contact invitation, then the signal to *marca*.

*The pure definition of a partnership states that both partners assume 100 percent of the responsibility for the actions of the partnership, and each partner is bound 100 percent to his or her own actions. The Argentine Tango is a dance of full partnership, in which both members of the partnership, most commonly referred to as the couple, must contribute 100 percent of their skills, talents, and emotions and assume 100 percent of the responsibilities. By definition, then, the Argentine Tango is not a lead-and-follow dance.*

Page 71; First Paragraph

*The purpose of learning to dance the tango is not to collect steps to impress the foolish but to learn the rules and codes of conduct that are faithfully followed by seasoned dancers around the world.*

Page 81; line 17

*Tango dancing is a dance of people showing their pride in the way they dance by respecting each other, the music, the dance floor, and the rest of the dancers. The fact that the man is responsible for the dancing around the floor makes him more accountable for the behavior of the couple on the dance floor.*

Page 82; lines 8-12

It is a boon that the vocabulary of tango steps as taught by Paz and Hart share the opportunity(s) for improvisation. For them, tango is not the 11<sup>th</sup> dance of the ballroom circuit that contains sets of memorized steps. Instead, tango is an opportunity to express how well we can experience intimacy, trust, adventure and a heroic code of conduct. Gotta Tango!

Early on, the authors warned that to properly study and practice, both partners will need their own copy of the book. One learns the *home position*... with the woman on the right side of the man's body, with her left triceps placed on his upper right arm. Their points of contact in this embrace have the man's right hand placed across the woman's back and her right hand surrounded by the man's left hand. Both have flexed & relaxed elbows. This *home position* has both participants using clear comfortable axis to mark an opening.

*As he embraces the woman, the man must be aware that he is first and foremost protecting her by placing his body between her body and the charge of clueless dancers. For most of the dance, as the couple circulates, the man keeps the lady on an outer route with her back always totally to or diagonally to the outside of the floor.*

*In today's environment, the man should know the fundamental canons of tango dancing:*

- R Protect the woman within the embrace.
- R Change her direction around you from one side to the other.
- R Circulate – dance – around the floor by moving the center of the couple.
- R Avoid pushing (leading) your partner and forcing her to walk backward away from you.
- R Avoid pulling your partner and forcing her to walk straight into you.
- R Avoid moving in a straight line in front of each other, which makes it impossible for either of you to dance around each other.

Page 82; First Paragraph

They use the metaphor of railroad tracks to indicate the mutual paths and options to travel from either direction as a unit. Partners have three basic directional steps for each leg: front, side and back. These six root steps (as you count right and left legs) exponentially provide a range of movement the couple can achieve on their axis while generating a multitude of diagonal options that will move them around the floor, and, with no collisions.

Body positions, touch language and hand signals convey intentions. Some of the seminal steps of tango that are taught in Part II are the simple *Salida, cruzada* (how to cross the legs), *Cambio de Frente, La salida Cruzada, Sacada, the Giro*; both clockwise & counterclockwise, a *Medio Giro* with *Pasada*, all the *Ochos* and their variations, the evasive *Arrepentida*, an introduction to the *Parada*, the provocative *Gancho, Boleo* & other signature cuts and breaks. This is daunting to talk about! So no talking! The directions and diagrams are very clever and clear. Equally important to having 'privates' with this duo, the DVD supports this clarity with company: fellow dancers to move with.

## No Last Tango... Yet

Part III of this book is entitled *Doing Argentine Tango on Your Own*. Here Alberto Paz and Valorie Hart give information on how to locate milongas in the USA. They even mention places in Buenos Aires and tell how in recent times the *Association of Organizers of Milongas (AOM)* had to persuade the Cultural Secretary of the City of Buenos Aires

to exempt the milongas from the decree 'closing all dance halls until further notice'. Such an extreme stance was taken by the city government because of a major fire in 2004 that took place in a very overcrowded Buenos Aires night club. This nightclub fire was during a rock concert rather than dancing. As it happened, the owners of the site paid grafts, operated without safety inspections and worse, used burglar bars and security doors that trapped the youths inside a lethal stampede. Some of us may remember that hundreds of young people perished. The blowback from this graft scandal initiated the draconian regulations and the aforementioned ordinance.

In contrast to Buenos Aires' milongas;

*The codes of the milongas in the United States are loose, and they vary from location to location and from organizer to organizer. Time – honored Argentine traditions may seem tedious, outdated, and foreign to those eager to go out and just have fun, and that is quite understandable. A tango dance party is a more (accurate) descriptive term to describe what is done outside Buenos Aires. Being able to understand the difference between a milonga and a dance party gives us a good reality check and keeps us honest with ourselves. At tango dance parties in the United States, cigarette smoke is nonexistent, hard liquor is seldom poured, and above all, the formality with which the rituals of Buenos Aires milongas are conducted is almost nonexistent.*

*Page 161; Fourth Paragraph.*

Our authors also share their observations on the variety of societal changes that have made codes of conduct and protocol adjust to 'same gender dancing', women sometimes initiating the invitation to dance, lax dress codes, etc. Conversation is still at a minimum in Buenos Aires. In Argentina, the talk only happens between and among those not dancing and seated to hear gossip, listen to music, drink and eat while watching.

Alberto Paz and Valorie Hart are life partners who show and tell tango dance in vivo. The *Gotta Tango* DVD is 64 minutes long and is a physical display of all the lessons in Part II of the book. This book and DVD are valuable power tools for tango dance lessons. These masterful lessons are provided in a setting with a golden oak floor and a two-tier arrangement of tables and chairs around the peripheral. Different camera(s) angles are used and it helps that from time to time, two other couples are also shown. One enjoys that the dancers wear various clothing choices in each lesson. It makes the tango moves even more legible by just that one aspect. Here too, with this screening, viewers can gauge spatial dimensions, floor patterns, details of partnering and the important shifts and changes from axis to gesture. For me; there was just one time that there was challenging visibility: that time, both Hart and Paz chose to wear classic black so the touch cues were less observable.

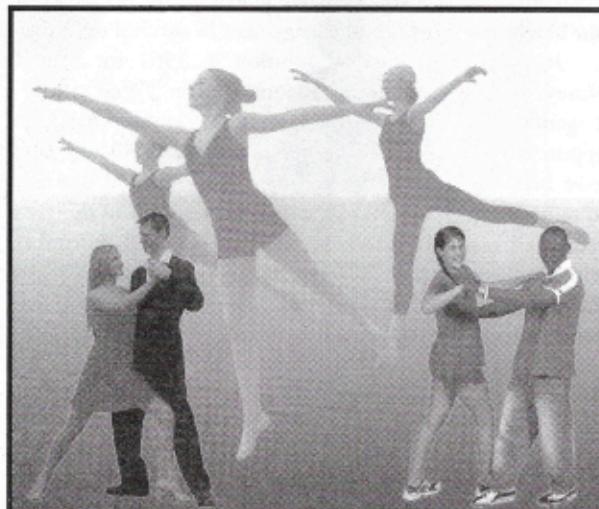
*The Argentine Tango is known as a dancer's dance. It affords the utmost experience for the couple dancing socially. The ability of one person to indicate motion to another and improvise movement for navigation requires thought and control of the body. The ability of the other person to be connected to herself and to her partner with finesse and to understand the concept of axis, motion, lack of motion, and response in a moment is tremendous. While its core concepts are not*

*difficult to understand, it is the one dance that cannot be faked or choreographed for the social dance floor. You must trust that you will be comfortable with yourself and with your partner. Reading about it, talking about it, watching a DVD, or going to class alone will not make you a tango dancer. Dancing tango makes you a tango dancer. The more you dance, the better it gets. So please go out and dance, and go out and dance often. The world of Argentine Tango grows everyday, yet at the same time the tango world becomes smaller because of travel, the Internet, and all media. It is a wonderful expression of human ability to embrace in the context of sociability and popular art forms of music and dance. We hope to meet you and dance with you and share our mutual healthy addiction.*

*Page 169; Second Paragraph*

In closing, here is some personal information about Valorie Hart and Alberto Paz. Ms. Hart was born in the United States and is a ballet trained theatre dancer. Alberto Paz was born and grew up in Buenos Aires. They met in 1995 at a Tango conference at Stanford University. Argentine tango dancing is their business venture through PLANET TANGO, A COMPANY DEDICATED TO PRESERVING, and FOSTERING AND ADVANCING THE TRADITIONAL VALUES OF ARGENTINE TANGO CULTURE. Their school and saloon is located in New Orleans and yes, they are Hurricane Katrina survivors. This couple also publishes an international Argentine Tango magazine online, *El Firulete*. Readers and dancers can contact them for networking classes and workshop at [www.planet-tango.com](http://www.planet-tango.com). Keep remembering: *It Takes Two to Tango!*

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