

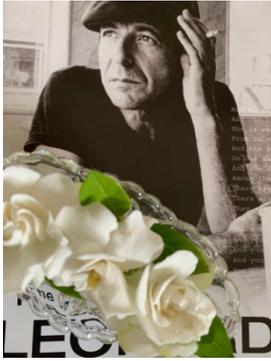
TANGO AUSTRALIS

April 2020



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Words to inspire dancers in troubling times

“SIT IN A CHAIR AND KEEP STILL. Let the dancer’s shoulders emerge from your shoulders, the dancer’s chest from your chest, the dancer’s loins from your loins, the dancer’s hips and thighs from yours: and from your silence the throat that makes a sound, and from your bafflement a clear song to which the dancer moves, and let him serve God in beauty...”

I read those words to dancers who got together on Zoom last week. The words are Leonard Cohen’s, from the ‘Book of Mercy’, dedicated to his teacher. The collection of contemporary psalms was first published in 1984, and has been republished in an elegant slim volume by McClelland & Stewart. It is a worthy volume to add to a library. It was described as ‘One of the most honest and courageous attempts in Canadian writing to grapple with ultimate truth’.

It is hard to keep our dancer spirits alive, when we cannot dance together. That’s why I am working with technology to connect with our Gentle Tango dancers, many of whom are older people, sorely missing contact with children, grandchildren and friends. Zoom is not ideal for the kind of class we teach in Gentle Tango, where touch, connection, fellowship, and a high degree of individual attention are fundamental, so it’s not a class as such that we are offering. It’s an online get-together of people who would normally be meeting each week to dance and socialize. We play tango and other music, do exercises, simple figures we have done before, and have a segment where dancers just do what they feel like, to music. Sometimes we are joined by pet dogs.

The first week, was difficult. Guiding students is not easy when you are not with them. We will continue to work with new technological challenges to connect our people through tango, hopefully improving things as we go along. The second week was just simple movements and rhythmic patterns, but introduced a new segment on getting to know more about the famous tango compositions that we like to dance too. By the end of our ‘social distancing’, our students will be far more knowledgeable about tango history and the evolution of tango music.

Improvisation dance sessions are easier to manage on Zoom, because my small, select group of female students is accustomed to moving freely, to a wide range of music styles and themes, developing their own steps, to express emotion, tell stories, and interpret music. This did not happen overnight. It has taken years to build the trust and confidence that underpins these classes. My Thursday ‘girls’ are inspirational.

Leonard Cohen has passed on now, perhaps to his eternal Tower of Song, but we had the privilege of seeing him grow old and revisit his poetry and songs, write new reflective works that speak, like *The Book of Mercy*, of praise, despair, anger, doubt, and trust, and travel to perform concerts around the world with his sublime female singers, Sharon Robinson and the Webb sisters.



Easter and Passover have passed too, and this pensive little angel contemplates a broken wing. I have been playing ‘*Show me the Place*’, from the *Old Ideas* CD (2012). We saw this concert live, when Leonard was touring Australia, and I was struck by the prayerful nature of his delivery. The plea in this song, to ‘*Help me roll away the stone...I can’t move this thing alone*’, is timely. We need help too, with Covid-19. We are all in this together, as the signs in our closed shops are saying. And we can support one another to get through this time with dignity and strength.

Pope Francis, in his Easter Vigil address, said to ‘*roll away the stone placed at the entrance to your heart*’, and bring hope into everyday life. ‘*Everyone is in need of consolation.*’ I’m not a Catholic (and neither was Leonard Cohen), but the Pope’s words were comforting. He spoke of ‘*allowing words of humanity to arise from our hearts*’. Add that to Leonard Cohen’s message of letting the dancer emerge from your body, and we might have a recipe for feeding the soul, and keeping the artist within nourished.

EDITORIAL

This is the year’s first edition of *Tango Australis*. It’s not what I intended to write, back in January, when I should have started working. For all the wrong reasons, 2020 has been a shocker. I suffered an injury, but personal trials paled into insignificance, against the widespread destruction of summer’s bushfires. After the inferno, Nature balanced things out, somewhat, eventually, with soaking rains, then floods. Burnt countryside is greening again; fencing being replaced, pasture grasses planted. Native animals will return. Houses will be rebuilt. But emotional scars will remain. People who went through it all, personally, are changed. They will remember. People who did not go through the fires in person, probably will not remember; the impact will fade like yesterday’s breaking news. Overshadowed already by a new threat.

Anzac Day is almost upon us. Australians and New Zealanders will remember the fallen soldiers of the Great War, and other wars, but, this year, there will be no two-up schools, or gatherings in pubs across the land, to reminisce after the march. This year, with most of us confined to our homes, we will place burning candles on our fences and gateposts, to welcome the dawn, honour the soldiers and their sacrifices as we think about the destruction of war, and watch a service broadcast from Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance. The Governor will lay a wreath, like wreaths that will be laid at memorials all around the country. No RSL members are in our shopping centres, selling poppies this year. There will no Australians at a dawn service at Gallipoli. And there was no Anzac biscuit competition at the Harvest Festival Tango event that was planned for Geelong.

Much in history is not remembered. We have not, until recently, remembered the toll of Spanish Influenza, spread as stricken



soldiers returned from battlefields to their homelands. A viral disease that became a global pandemic. Between January 1918 and December 1920, 500 million people were infected, 25% of the world's population, killing between 17 million and 50 million (perhaps 100 million) people.

The world has seen many other pandemics. Mostly forgotten. Between March and July, 1348, *'more than 100,000 human beings are in all certainty believed to have lost their lives within the walls of the city of Florence'* (The Decameron, written by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 – 1373). The Black Death killed an estimated 450 million people as it spread through Asia, Europe and Africa. The same disease caused the Justinian Plague in 6th C. A third epidemic in China, Mongolia and India, originated in Yunnan Province in 1855. It still surfaces occasionally in Africa and parts of the USA. Bubonic plague is one of three diseases caused by bacterium, *Yersinia pestis*, and is today treatable with antibiotics.

An estimated 400,000 people each year died of smallpox in 18th century Europe. Evidence of the disease has been found in Egyptian mummies, dating from the 3rd C BC. Inoculation appears to have started in China in the 1500s, and been adopted into Europe in the 18th century. Edward Jenner observed the immunity of dairymaids, and developed the modern smallpox vaccine in 1798. This disease seems to have been eradicated with the last recorded case in 1977. Typhoid, yellow fever, Ebola are still with us.

The history of medicine and science tells the story of battles against disease. That's why those who remember polio and tuberculosis, measles and German measles, diphtheria and whooping cough epidemics, have trouble dealing with the modern anti-vaccination movements, and parents who don't protect their children from preventable diseases.

We forget, so the stories continue to be repeated. To be remembered, a voice of remembrance is needed.

The horror of Australia's fires has been eclipsed by this new threat, invisible, dreadful and mutating, affecting the whole world; a very grim reaper. Corona virus, Covid 19 does not discriminate. Thankfully, our newspapers have stopped using the word they threw around carelessly, and wrongly, during the bushfires: unprecedented. There have been precedents.

Throughout summer, my injury prevented me working at my computer, researching my articles. I was unable to dance; I could barely walk with crutches. I avoided surgery, but languished, in shock and pain for 4 weeks while the physical results of trauma lessened. Looking back now, it feels like preparatory training for what was to come.

No New Year's Eve tango, no long driving trips interstate to go to the first summer Tango By The Sea Milonga. No beach walks, no swimming in surf. No sunset drinks at a holiday house. No riding on the new ferry to Melbourne to shop at post-Christmas sales.

My brain was engaged in working out how to do basic things in the least painful way. Then I got permission to start a rehabilitation exercise program. Doctors and my physiotherapist told me to expect a 12-month rehabilitation program. Being given the go-

ahead to start physical exercise was a relief. I could be mobile again, even if all I could do was walk painstakingly slowly, forwards, backwards, and to the side, in the warm water of a hydrotherapy pool. It was a start.

Daily 'water walking' became a meditation-mindfulness exercise, focusing on the same walking technique we teach dance students. Engaging core muscles to be stable and 'grounded' in this new watery medium, extending leg, placing foot, transferring weight from heel, to flat of foot, to ball of foot, spreading toes, driving off base leg and bringing other leg through to take the next step.

Like a beautiful slow motion stylized dance in water. Up and down and the pool, moving to an internal rhythm and the music and words of Leonard Cohen's setting of Federico Garcia Lorca's '*Take this waltz*'.

When going through difficult times, it's empowering to gain a feeling of control over something...anything. Being able to walk up steps was an early challenge, negotiating ramps another. (Ramps are good for wheelchairs, not so good for unsteady legs). Walking down steps was a bigger challenge, but the sense of accomplishment on achieving this in a controlled way was enormous.

I'm a believer in finding positive focus, in difficult situations. Pollyanna's 'glad game'. My experience has given me a deeper understanding of how important it is to acknowledge and reward every positive step that a person takes to achieve a goal.

Many fellow pool exercisers had much greater problems than I. Many people exercise to ease pain, fight the ravages of wasting diseases, heal damaged bodies, and avoid surgery. Many people with severe disabilities find that the time spent being gently moved through warm water, supported by caring hands, is all that makes their lives worth living. It makes me sad to think of their quality of life now, that the hydrotherapy pools are closed.

It was horrid to see people turn against one another, in a battle that was only just beginning. Fighting in supermarket aisles is so un-Australian. Buying sanitizer in bulk, to sell on, clearing shelves of food, is wrong. Evolution tells the story of survival of the fittest, the strongest, the most adaptable. That's not the whole story. Humans have developed conscience, social responsibility, a moral compass. Our ethics and sense of morality are challenged when faced with a situation like the current pandemic. It is good to know that many are taking time to lend a helping hand to the weak, the old, the disabled, the vulnerable. As members of a civilized society it is our responsibility to stay connected, and be alert and aware of the needs of others, mindful of how we can contribute and where we can help.

If you learn tango with a professional teacher, you will be aware that they have lost their livelihood, their entire source of income. Tango teaching is a poorly paid job at the best of times, so the chances that your teacher will have savings to tide them through these times are minimal. Some generous students are supporting their teachers through this time, in different ways: buying vouchers for future private classes, paying for courses in advance,

some have just been making deposits into their teachers' accounts. Such generosity is deeply appreciated.

The social tango scene, as so many of us have experienced in Buenos Aires – with huge tango festivals, and salons and dance floors crammed with people from all parts of the world, flying in, one plane load after another, bringing with them their exotic bugs and viruses, to be transmitted from one dancer to another – will be a thing of the past. Just as Australian universities will no longer be able to rely on overseas students to line the coffers, the municipality of Buenos Aires will no longer be able to boast that its major income source is tango tourism.

Tango has survived other crises and we hope it will survive this one. We hope that there will be a quiet and gradual return to neighbourhood milongas, frequented by local people in Buenos Aires, and in our own tango cities. A nicer, more caring tango might emerge.

We need the Arts in our lives, to create beauty, bring enjoyment, and restore our souls. Dancing helps make us fit for life, training our minds and bodies, giving pleasure. Artists, dancers, musicians, performers, can guide us on new journeys to fulfilment, shine a light for us in the darkness, help us develop different ways of thinking and appreciating life.



It is great to see how many people have paid to enjoy online concerts from the Melbourne Digital Concert Hall, supporting Melbourne musicians who had concerts cancelled: \$80,000 raised in three weeks.

The pandemic can be seen as giving us all time out to consider what is important, and where our society has been going wrong. With major projects halted, we have opportunity to breathe unpolluted air, and reconsider and examine urban development. It is time to encourage architects and town planners to think about the kind of dwellings and cities they could be building, for the health and well-being of people. Overcrowding in public transport, entertainment venues, buildings and cities is unhealthy. Air-filtering trees, gardens to enjoy, playgrounds, deciduous trees for summer shade and winter light, buildings with space between them for sunlight and a view of the sky, windows that open to let in fresh air. Let's banish unsafe, sub-standard materials, and dirty water that drips from air-conditioning units onto pavements. People need access to running water for cleanliness and sanitation, fresh air, clean produce. Let's build housing for the homeless. It's more cost effective than the band-aid measures that have been applied. This is the time to restore common sense, and take measures to enhance the wellbeing of all members of our civilized society.

And what lies ahead for the tango dancers of Australia, when social distancing rules are relaxed? Outdoor dances might be a possibility, with social distancing observed between couples. Tango *al fresco*, tango on the beaches, in the parks, with BYO picnic suppers, might become a common occurrence. Dancers might wear gloves.





Tango History

La cumparsita is one of the most famous tangos, recognized around the world, and recorded by each generation of tango orchestras in the past century. It is commonly played as the last dance of the evening at a milonga. In our library, we have a recording with 20 different versions of *La cumparsita*, played by different orchestras, but there are hundreds of others.

Astor Piazzolla did not think much of it, in fact he described *La cumparsita* as being *like an ugly person that dresses nicely...* it (the rhythmic structure) is *the most frighteningly poor thing in this world*. He said that, if you added a bass note to enrich it and pour on top of it the melody, you can create a counterpoint that raises the conventional melody. A condescending judgement, for sure, but let us not forget that this little tango is hummed, and sung, and danced to with wider enjoyment than Astor Piazzolla's complex compositions and arrangements. So perhaps he was just miffed by the popularity.

There was, and still is, something remarkable and attractive about *La cumparsita*. Even people who do not know or like tango in general, find it a catchy composition. You can sing the melody, drum your fingers or move your body to the rhythm. Julio de Caro said '*[it's] a flag that transcended frontiers in the whole world, going forth thru its golden door to erect itself as one of the symbols of our music – dance*'.

Gene Kelly danced to it in the movie, *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), and William Holden and Gloria Swanson danced a tango to it in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). In *Some Like It Hot* (1959), A blindfolded Cuban orchestra plays *La cumparsita* in a scene in which Jack Lemmon, dressed in drag, dances in the arms of Joe E. Brown, who thinks he's dancing with a woman. George Raft taught the two actors to dance the tango for this scene in 1958.

La cumparsita featured in the opening part of the radio drama, *The War of the Worlds*, in 1938. It has been used by artistic gymnasts and figure skaters for their routine soundtracks. The Argentine team marched into the stadium for the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, to the music, outraging the Uruguayan team. You see, the most famous of tango compositions is not Argentine, but Uruguayan. *La cumparsita*, was declared the cultural and popular anthem of Uruguay in 1997.

The tune was composed by a young architecture student, Gerardo Matos Rodríguez, in 1916. The title means 'the little street procession'. Carnival parades were popular events in Montevideo at the time, and the composition was a carnival march song. Manuel Barca showed the sheet music of the composition by his friend, Matos Rodríguez, to Roberto Firpo, the Argentine pianist, composer and band leader, who was playing at café called La Giralda in Montevideo. A quick look at the music told Firpo that the tune, written in two sections in 2/4 march time, had the makings of a tango.

Firpo added harmony to the first part, and for a third section, he took parts of two tangos he had composed ten years earlier, *La gaucha Manuela*, and *Curda complete*. He also used part of the song *Miserere* by Giuseppe Verdi from the opera *Il trovatore*. It was not uncommon for strains of popular music of the time to be incorporated in tango compositions.

Firpo played the piece that night at La Giralda with 'Bachicha' Deambroggio and 'Tito' Roccatagliatta. Firpo recorded *La cumparsita* in 1916 for Odeon Record label. Around the same time, a popular tango orchestra, Alonso-Minotto's, was signed up by Victor to make a recording of pairs of tangos. They needed another tango for the recording, and somebody suggested they record *La cumparsita*, which they did, on the B-Side, with Alberto Alonso on piano, Minotto Di Cicco on bandoneon, Juan Trocoli and Juan Jose Castellano on violins.

The tune had no words in that recording, although at some stage Gerardo Matos Roriguez did compose lyrics. You can hear those words on a 1926 recording with Roberto Diaz as singer. The words are strangely prophetic of the time we are living through now.

La cumparsa / de misérias sin fin / desfila / en torno de aquel ser enfermo /

Que pronto ha de morir / de pena

The masked parade / of endless miseries / promenades 'about that sick being / that will die soon / of sorrow.

La cumparsita became really famous in 1924 when new lyrics were composed by Enrique Marconi and Pascual Contursi. *La cumparsita* with the lyrics of *Si supieras* became a huge hit, with 'all of Buenos Aires' hearing, dancing and wanting to buy the score for the tango. It was in shows, broadcasts, and on recordings. It arrived in Paris on the crest of this wave of popularity, it was the tango everybody wanted when they wanted to dance a tango. It still is, worldwide.

It was in Paris, in 1924, that Gerard Matos Rodriguez met the Francisco Canaro, who was there with his orchestra. From Canaro, Rodriguez learned of the phenomenal success of his tango, being performed with somebody else's words.

Thereafter came a legal battle for Rodriguez to regain his rights as author to the most famous tango in the world. There were a number of law suits. *La cumparsita* was established as the name of the tango, not '*Si supieras*'

1. Trial between composer and Breyer and Ricordi publishing houses. Breyer had sold the work to Ricordi. Eventual result: Ricordi agreed to pay royalties to the author
2. Lawsuit against Marconi and Contursi, the lyricists who added words to the tune without permission. Gerardo won, on the basis that he had been a minor when he surrendered his rights to his music
3. 1942 lawsuit to discontinue sale of the recording of the song made by Carlos Gardel – Gardel had died in 1935

4. Widows of Marconi & Contursi sue for damages and rights as authors of the *Si supieras* lyrics

Final resolution came when Canaro as President of (SADAIC) the Argentine Society of Authors and Composers was asked by litigants to resolve the argument. In 1948, Canaro issued a legally binding document that stated the heirs of Contursi and Marconi would receive 20% of all royalties due through execution rights, royalties for recordings and movies would be divided according to rules of SADAIC, except when only the music was played in which case the 20% rule would apply, any new printing of the sheet music would include both sets of lyrics and no others. A one-off payment was made to Jose Razzano (of Gardel-Razzano fame) of 5,000 pesos for damages due to the lawsuit.

A Tanguera's thoughts on social distancing in this pandemic

WHEN Margie Daniel was asked to write down her feelings and thoughts during this very worrying and uncertain time.... she immediately thought "How am I going to put it all into words!!"



The first week of isolation went ok, I was more in a state of disbelief, this can't be happening, it feels like being in a movie set!

The movie wasn't being filmed!! Week two I realized how real it is, but my positivity stayed with me.

I noticed that the air was sweeter and cleaner and it is much quieter with less traffic. I could hear the birds more distinctly, Bonus. I could even laugh at the chaos in the supermarkets with people stockpiling toilet rolls!

Week three, I noticed my mood changing. I hardly knew myself at times, usually a calm and patient person I was becoming very impatient, frustrated, angry. Some of the things I was trying to do kept going wrong, panic set in and that's when I couldn't do anything right, I felt out of control, even cheated that my life was being taken over. I felt disconnected, I wasn't fitting in. HELP!!.

Week four (what day is it?) anger turned to sadness, I was missing my family, hugs, my friends, tango with its lovely connection, freedom. Tears are close by most of the time now but I am calmer, I see kindness around me, people beginning to smile at each other in the street and out shopping, I am starting to feel more connection with the situation and I know this is all for the best to help save lives including mine. I am able to look around me and identify what my priorities are. I am feeling stronger as each day passes even though the Easter weekend was a challenge. If I feel the need to cry I will but I won't keep crying, it's just a way of letting go of pent up feelings of isolation. I appreciate the support and help and chats and laughs I have often with dear friends and family who show they

care. I am still uncertain like everyone else is about when and how this situation will end but I trust that it will be alright.

Meanwhile I am adjusting to my new way of living every day in a bubble. I am thankful for many things.

Things that Argentines love

You might think that people of Buenos Aires all love tango, and that they go out (or went out) multiple times a week to dance the night away at milongas. Well, tango music is widely loved by *portenos*; it is the music of their city, telling its social history – but tango dancing is another thing altogether. Most Argentines do not dance tango. Some would not

want to be seen (dead or alive) at any milonga. They are bemused by the passion of outsiders for tango.



One thing that people of Argentina do seem to love, however, is horses.

Polo is truly king in some quarters, and the polo season is like Melbourne Cup week. You dress up, drink lots of champagne, but wear sensible shoes so that you can go onto the field and stamp down the clumps the horses hooves have dug up.

Horse racing is very popular, and, historically, there is quite a crossover with tango. *Tango Bar* was a movie, made in 1935, featuring the adored and idolized tango singer and actor, Carlos Gardel, who would die tragically and young, in a plane crash. Gardel plays Ricardo Fuentes, a gambler who loses at the horse races and is going to Barcelona to open a tango bar, with a dance show and

dance salon. On the ship, he meets a beautiful woman, and observes her stealing a woman's bracelet. *Por una cabeza* is a tango song written by Carlos Gardel, with lyrics by Alfredo Le Pera. The title is a winning margin in a horse race, 'by a head', and the song compares a gambler's addiction to horses and the racetrack, with his attraction to women.

There is another horse-man sport too – one you may not have heard of. We were taken to a Pato club, just out of Buenos Aires. Pato is a game played with riders on horseback hitting a leather object around a field. Readers who speak Spanish will know that *pato* means 'duck', which apparently was the object hit around the field in the original game in the distant past.

Couldn't resist including the photo, titled, 'Geelong Racing – we care!', sent by a Geelong tango dancer.

SOUTHERN CROSS TANGO (South Australia)

All Southern Cross Tango Group and Private Classes, as well as Practicas and Milongas have been Suspended due to Covid-19 social distancing restrictions.

Southern Cross Tango hopes to resume as soon as we possibly can!

SOUTHERN CROSS TANGO

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COMMUNITY TANGO IN GEELONG (Victoria)

Community Tango in Geelong Monday classes, monthly Practicas, seasonal social events, Gentle Tango Wednesday mornings in Geelong and afternoons in Sebastopol, Thursday Dance Training and Improvisation classes for women, Fridays for Blokes, and private classes, are suspended until restrictions on social gatherings are lifted. We are conducting tango meetings of different groups, by invitation, on Zoom.

Information: Pam & Richard Jarvis, richardandpam@mac.com Mobile: 041753 1619

<https://www.facebook.com/CommunityTangoInGeelong>

