

TANGO AUSTRALIS

March 2018



Photograph by Sandi Summerhayes

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Gnokan Danna Murra Burra Koe-Ki

It is March. By the European calendar, our Australian summer is over. Stunning blue skies and days still warm, but a sudden temperature drop as the sun dips below the horizon. Night air feels and smells different.

In Spain, in Avila, we loved the early hours of autumn evenings, when the air stirred and swept up the hill, carrying the scent of roses from the convent garden, into the open bedroom window of the little pink-walled palace, where we were staying. The *Parador* was nestled inside the ruins of the old city walls where storks nest, and its terrace was a magical place.

At home, in our temperate southern region, we are blessed with seasons beyond the 'wet' and 'dry' of the tropical north. Summer, autumn, spring and winter divide our calendar conveniently on the European model. But there are other measures of the changing seasons. Victorian naturalist, Alan Reid, suggested a calendar of six seasons for the Middle Yarra region; it was later modified by Glen Jameson. The agreed seasons are: Late Summer (February, March), hot and humid, thunderstorms, grasslands dry out, high risk of fire; Early Winter (April, May), cool, still and misty, birds flock and migrate, fungi grows; Deep Winter (June into July), cold, wet, rough seas, visits from Antarctic birds; Pre-Spring (mid-July and August), warming, first flowers, birds nesting; True Spring (September, October, early November) warm, wet, windy, lots of flowers and insects; and High Summer (early November, December, January), warm to hot, native grasslands grow and set seed, birds feed their young.

Aborigines have local yearly calendars. The Upper Yarra region has seven seasons: Kangaroo Apple Season (December), Dry Season (Jan – Feb), Eel Season (March), Wombat Season (April – August), Orchid Season (September), Tadpole Season (October), Grass Flowering Season (November).

According to the Aboriginal seasons we are in the middle of Late Summer, and it is the Eel Season. Like a good tango dancer, the eel's ability to swim both forwards and backwards, sets it aside from other fishy creatures. Lots of these snake-like fish live around Aireys Inlet and the Painkalac Creek, on Victoria's Surf Coast. A local author, Gregory Day, wrote a good novel called '*The Patron Saint of Eels*', with a memorable description of the annual eel migration.

From March 23 – 25, the people of the Lake Bolac region and visitors, celebrate at a little festival with a big heart, called Kuyang Lapakira (means Plenty Eels). Uncle Ted Lovett, a Djabwurrung Elder, issues the invitation: *Gnokan Danna Murra Burra Koe-Ki*. (*Give me your hand my friend so we can bridge the cultural gap*). Lake Bolac has been a sacred site for tens of thousands of years. Aboriginal clans have gathered here in the eel migration season, for important business, especially the exchange of ceremony, marriage and lore. Today the festival brings people from all walks of life on to country, to gather by the water on sacred lands.

Gnokan Danna Murra Burra Koe-Ki could be a beautiful authentically Australian invitation to dance tango: Give me your hand my friend so we can bridge the cultural gap.

Building cultural bridges

Many years ago, a woman asked us who we were. We were dancing tango at an event in Fitzroy. It was not a milonga, but audience members were invited to dance during the interval and after the show. This was a time when the Argentine community kept itself quite separate from the rest of the Australian community. It was also a time when few of the Argentines living in Melbourne knew how to dance tango.

'Who are you?' the woman asked. 'You dance tango like Argentines, but I know you are not from there. I know the Argentines in Melbourne.' We were pretty chuffed at this compliment, coming as it did from the pianist in the show, and coming at a time when we knew it was being said behind our backs, that we would never be able to dance true tango because we are not Argentine.

The woman's name was Maria Sciammarelli. She migrated to Australia after the death of her husband, to be with her son. She was a wonderful pianist, who had gone to the great tango composer and musician, Horacio Salgán, in 1986, when he opened the School of Popular Music of Avellanada in Buenos Aires. She asked the Maestro to teach her how to arrange tango music, but, instead, he offered her a place on the teaching faculty of the conservatory. And there she taught students how to play tango and folkloric music, and developed her own skills in musical composition and arrangement.

We became friends, and we quickly learned what an extraordinary musician Maria was. Without the support of the instruments of the typical *tango orquesta* and musicians trained to play tango, in what was then the tango backwater of Melbourne, Maria was playing her own arrangements of tango music in such a way that you would swear you were hearing an orchestra. She could play like Pugliese. She could take Piazzolla music to a concert stage.

And we made sure she did. We arranged for Maria to play and perform her tango arrangements at events and festivals, like the long-running 'Buenos Aires at the Beach' that graced the coastal playground of the Great Ocean Road each summer for thirteen years. Maria played for original tango shows, like two *Primavera* shows, and she played at events at The Stage and other places.

Along the way, we talked, and struck a deal. Maria would do everything in her power to transmit her knowledge of tango music to any Australian musician who wanted to work with her. In return, I would continue to write about tango and its history, informing and educating people here about tango and the culture of the country where it was born. She entrusted me to be a bridge between her culture and mine. It was a promise I have done everything in my power to keep. We need more 'cultural bridges', more listening, so that local culture can be enriched by the immigrants who come with their different dress, languages, music, dances, customs, stories, practices, traditions and foods.

The long and winding road to tango competency

Liked aged vinegar, or a sourdough culture, the tango is alive and ever-changing. Its essence is indefinable. Each generation of musicians and dancers feed on what has been created by others before them. What has been inherited and what is in the environment today influences the expressions of tango.



It is wonderful to see the cultural cross-fertilization that results when a virtuoso and internationally renowned Italian guitarist and composer, Massimo Scattolin, who personally knew tango greats, Horacio Salgán and Astor Piazzolla (and for whom Piazzolla composed works), comes to Australia and performs in a tango trio with the talented Erica Kennedy (violin) and Josie Vains (cello). They make gorgeous, vibrant music together, and their engagement with one another and the music they play is good to look at too.

I was tempted to head this article ‘tango mastery’, but mastery is a state that is rarely attained in tango. If, after years of lessons and practice, we develop the skills to become competent tango dancers, or tango musicians, then we are doing well. To advance beyond competence requires deeper knowledge of things that cannot be taught, but are leached from life experiences and acquired over time: empathy, humility, kindness, generosity, sensitivity, creativity, and a visceral understanding of tango.

The generic tango dancer could be likened to bottles of balsamic vinegar on supermarket shelves, all claiming to be of Modena. The contents are sweet and sticky reductions of cooked wine, but they are not the fine traditional Modenese Balsamic vinegar. The real thing is rarely seen here, and comes at a high price: around \$70 for 100ml. The real thing takes time, lots of time, and exposure to different influences, to develop and mature. In the hamlet of Rubbiara di Nonantola, balsamico is made from Trebbiano grapes, and the Extra Vecchio version is aged for 25 years in a procession of wooden casks, taking on different qualities and characteristics of each. Mulberry, is the first cask, then chestnut, cherry, juniper and oak.

Tango dancers and musicians take on different influences, distilling experiences as they develop. We travel from wide-eyed romantic wonder, enchantment with a mesmerizing music form, and, often, an unrequited passion for a teacher, or dancer or musician, that we put on a pedestal. But the road twists and turns; we encounter obstacles and trials. Our progress is not consistent. It seems, at times, that we are going backwards not forwards. We feel we are climbing a steep staircase. We work hard and think we’ve reached the top, only to realize that we have only arrived at a landing, a place to catch our breath, and we must steel ourselves and muster the strength to climb higher. We never get to the top of that staircase. In time, our rose-

coloured glasses fall off, and we see that some of those we've idolized and put onto that pedestal have feet of clay. We learn that tango is like life; not a dream.

Angels and tango

Australian artists, John Perceval, Sidney Nolan, Charles Blackman, Joy Hester & Arthur Boyd cavorted with angels. Angels have their foundation in Christianity's bible, but they are also found in Islamic art, and winged creatures appeared in Mesopotamian art and classical mythology of ancient Greek art. Perceval made up to 100 glazed ceramic angels between 1957 and 1962, at the height of the Cold War, when the world feared nuclear holocaust. His angels are playfully creative, whimsical, representing an essentially optimistic response to anxieties of the age.¹

The city of the dead, the extraordinary Recoleta Cemetery in Buenos Aires (the most expensive and exclusive real estate in the city), is full of angels, mostly statues. Tango has angels too: a famous dancer, former partner of Milena Plebs, is Miguel Angel Zotto. Michael was the first and the most powerful of the archangels. Gabriel and Raphael, common names for Italians and Argentines, are archangels too. Lucifer was an archangel, before he fell from grace. I have yet to meet a *Tanguero* going by the name of Lucifer, on the dance floor at a milonga. Although I am sure the experience would be interesting.



Such a fallen angel might be gender neutral. like the one in the famous image painted by Kees Van Dongen, sometime between 1922 and 1935. The painting is in the collection of the National Museum of Monaco. *Le tango de l'archange* depicts a woman, naked but for a garter around one thigh, wearing high-heeled green and red shoes, and a flapper style head-dress. The sumptuously winged archangel, face concealed in the neck of the woman, has short cropped hair, and wears a black, frock-coat and trousers, white shirt, and high-heeled black shoes. The shoes are a disconcerting element because they are the shoes of a woman, not a man. The couple is in dance embrace, mid-way through a step that could be an *entrada*, or, it could, perhaps, develop into a *gancho*.

Fra Angelico (1395 -1455) painted beautiful angels, as did Renaissance painter, Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), whose *Annunciation* features luscious wings. Angels are otherworldly beings who transport us and, hopefully, lead us into transcendence. Angels negotiate between the promise of a heavenly afterlife and the fundamental fear, drudgery and persistent horrors of corporeal reality. The wings of angels keep them suspended between realms, making them an attractive space for artists, writers and film makers.

¹ Article: where angels tread, by Andrew Stephens, Spectrum, The Age, September 13, 2014.

One of my all-time favourite composition of tango music is Astor Piazzolla's *Milonga del angel*. The slow, drawn-out notes and phrasing seem to embody the pain and melancholy of loss and longing, and the sweetness of love. I use Sarah McLachlan's rendition of the song 'Angel' in creative and improvisational tango dance classes.

An orchestra leader and a singer were known as *Los Dos Angeles* (the Two Angels). Angel d'Agostino created his first orchestra in 1920, to play jazz and tango. Angel Vargas started his career in the early 1930s. The two angels met in 1932, but did not formally become a team until 1940, when Vargas joined the orchestra led by D'Agostino. In six years, they recorded 94 sides together, before Vargas left to pursue a solo career.

In curating an exhibition, *Heavenly Creatures* (2004) at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melissa Keys traced history of angels in Australian art, noting that many artists used them to explore their own personal needs and identities. Joy Hester's angels are *allegories of redemption and despair*, reflecting moral outrage at the horrors of war. As a young mother, Mirka Mora rediscovered the purity of a child's imagination. She painted *Angel and Child* in 1981. Her angels oscillate between dark melancholic angels and light life-affirming, bright, elevating euphoric beings. Heide's director, Jason Smith, thinks Mora's angels are related to her lifelong imaginings, a deeply felt sense of a loss of a childhood, and the swiftness at which it can be corrupted.

John Percival believed *Delinquent Angels* to be one of his greatest achievements as an artist. The delinquent angels are an exploration of the artist's psyche. A black angel in Brenda L. Croft's *Jesus wants me for a sunbeam* (1998), referred to her father's experience in Alice Springs, where children were forcibly removed from their families.

Who knows, one day, a tango composer or a poet might be inspired to write a song or poem dedicated to an Australian tango angel.

Exercising the brain with tango

What happens in our brains, when we learn, remember and dance tango steps? This is of increasing interest to medical and scientific researchers around the world. Dancing may reverse aging in the brain. Dancing tango certainly makes you feel younger and more alive. Does it also create new neural pathways in the brain? Pam and Richard Jarvis, who conduct the Tango Project in Geelong in conjunction with Dementia Australia, are hopeful. They observe how students follow verbal instructions, retain information, learn tango steps, remember combinations and figures, and make decisions about what to do. They do exercises, set different tasks, choose music to relax or stimulate students, and help students learn patterns of steps and navigate a dance floor.

Tango Project classes and regular classes of tango students cater for a wide range of abilities. There are as many individual modes of learning as there are students. Some people focus well,

listen to instructions, watch demonstrations, concentrate, and try to do what is asked of them. Good students ask for help when they need it, and practise between classes.

Some students are easily distracted, talk when they should listen, and chat when they should concentrate. Generally, talking is a distraction, but a few choice words can aid the learning process. The old 'slow, slow, quick, quick, slow' of ballroom dancing is helpful when introducing different rhythmic patterns to known step sequences. Some students respond better to the counts of 1-2, 1-2-3, whilst others get the idea with the instruction to take 'long, long, short, short, long' steps.

An excellent exercise for students in any tango class is to develop a sequence of 8 steps to be danced to a count of 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, and then have them adapt this sequence to different rhythmic combinations, using single and double-time steps at different counts. Sounds easy? It's not. It is surprisingly difficult, but it is a very good brain and body exercise, and a useful skill for improvising.

Observing and applying what works best with individual students is an essential part of successfully teaching the multiple skills of tango. Effective teaching methodology and psychology, taking account of individual differences, is as relevant to a tango lesson as it is in a school classroom. It is not enough for a tango teacher to ask students to watch a demonstration of steps or a figure, and then expect students to be able to do it

A recent travel article, by Paola Totaro, *Brought to Heal, Secret potions in an ancient Neopolitan pharmacy*², describes a 16th century apothecary in Ospedale degli Incurabili, with cabinets holding ceramic jars, decorated with colourful Old Testament scenes, not one of them labelled. Medical historians think that the early pharmacists learned by heart the content of the jars by memorizing their position and placement on the shelves. Note: there were 500 jars in that ancient apothecary. Imagine the brain-power involved in remembering all that.

Being grateful for what we have

Gratitude: state of being grateful; kindness awakened by a favour being received; thankfulness

The Australian reprinted a Wall Street Journal article: *How to raise more grateful children*³. The self-esteem movement has a lot to answer to, it said. When kids are raised to feel entitled to everything, they are left feeling grateful for nothing. And it's not only kids who are showing a lack of gratitude

Gratitude is a way of seeing the world; it can be cultivated at any age. Grateful people

² The Weekend Australian, March 3 – 4, 2018

³ The Australian, Friday March 2, 2018, *How to raise more grateful children* by Jennifer Breheny Wallace

experience hassles and annoyances, but they tend to view setbacks differently, and can reframe challenges in a positive way. Being thankful makes people happier. Being seen to have a positive disposition makes people more attractive and likeable. Almost every religion includes gratitude as part of its value system.

It's nice to dance tango with people who have a positive disposition, who feel grateful for the gift of tango, and who can happily turn a few setbacks on the dance floor into positives. It's nice when students let their teachers know that they are grateful for the care and attention they receive in classes, as they learn to dance tango.

It's very nice when you have a beautiful tango experience with a partner: one of those 'sigh, sigh, floaty, feet-not-touching-the-floor' kind of experiences. The natural thing, for a person used to expressing gratitude, is to say, 'thank you' to their partner. But, with tango in Buenos Aires, some things are different. If you murmur 'thank you' or '*gracias*' to your partner after a great tango during a *tanda*, it is quite likely that you will be taken back to your seat, or even abandoned on the dance floor. Because, you see, at a Buenos Aires milonga, saying 'thank you' before the end of the *tanda*, means, 'thank you, I've had enough'. It's a polite way of signifying that you want out of this dance relationship.

The all-important tango shoe

Women tend to think that the most important thing about a tango shoe is the heel height. A more important factor to consider when buying tango shoes is whether the shoe allows sufficient room to allow a spreading movement of your toes. Open-toed shoes are favoured by most experienced female tango dancers. The other reason concerns ventilation for hot, sweaty tango feet.

That spreading movement of the toes is a primitive reflex that underpins your movement responses. The plantar grasp reflex causes the foot to grasp an object that stimulates the sole of the foot, but it is the other foot reflex we are most interested in, as it is such an important reflex for dance. When we place our weight forward, onto the balls and toes of our feet, the toes spread naturally. Our shoes must allow room for this. The spreading action of the toes improves muscle tone of the torso, and ensures that the spine lifts away from the floor as soon as the feet experience the floor's counterthrust. This reflex is what contributes to an effortless sense of lift from the floor, or what is called 'soft feet' in tango.

For a listing of international guest teachers touring Australia in the coming months, & Australian & NZ tango school links go to:

Gotanz Connect Australian & New Zealand Tango Directory - Meg Thomson –
gotanzconnect@gmail.com <https://www.gotanzconnect.com>

Facebook: <http://fb.me/anzdirectory> Mob: 0419 826 061

International Guest Teachers visiting Adelaide

ANNABELLA DIAZ- HOJMAN & EZEQUIEL FARFARO

Adelaide Tango Seminar 1-3 June, 2018

Presented by Siempre Tango Adelaide.

Workshop program details coming soon.

CECILIA GONZALEZ

Adelaide Tango Seminar 7-10 June 2018

Southern Cross Tango is proudly presenting an intensive and engaging Tango Seminar with international guest teacher Cecilia Gonzalez in Adelaide from Thursday 7 June – Sunday 10 June at Unley RSL (29 Arthur St, Unley).

After the workshops, we will celebrate with a beautiful afternoon of social dancing at **Tango by the Sea Milonga** on Sunday 10 June, 4-8pm at Henley Sailing Club, 1 Seaview Rd, West Beach. Music by DJ Andy. Special guest Cecilia Gonzalez.

Workshop topics to be announced soon. Bookings and info:

sctango@bigpond.com www.southerncrosstango.com.au

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



Tango in Australia

Tango Links & information at www.southerncrosstango.com.au

Tango in Australia

DARWIN

northerntango@gmail.com <http://sites.google.com/site/northerntango>

QUEENSLAND

General listings of tango schools & milongas throughout Queensland

<http://www.tangonut.com/news.html>

CANBERRA

Tango Social Club of Canberra – includes a listing of tango teachers in Canberra

<http://www.tangocanberra.asn.au>

SYDNEY

General listings of tango schools & milongas throughout Sydney:

Tango Australia <http://www.tangoaustralia.com.au/p/finding-tango-school.html>

SYDNEY continued

Sydney Tango Calendar

<http://www.sydneytango.com.au/WebModules/Calendar/Calendar.aspx>

Port Macquarie <http://www.argentinetango.com.au/argentinetangoportmacquarie.html>

Port Macquarie Tango – tango.wendy@gmail.com

Bowral <http://www.tangoencanto.com>

Newcastle <https://tangonewcastle.wordpress.com>

MELBOURNE

Melbourne Practica Group Inc. www.melbournepractica.org

Melbourne Tango host milonga 2nd Sunday of month @ Czech House, Queensberry St, Nth Melbourne

<http://www.melbournetango.com>

Project NFT (Neo Fusion Tango) (Hawthorn) Rod – rjh@keypoint.com.au

Robles Dance Academy – <http://roblesdance.com>

Dianne's TANGUERIA (Richmond) – tangodi@icloud.com.au 0418 331 638

Tango Bajo – Bill Jarman (South Yarra, Windsor, Gardenvale) – tangobajo@gmail.com - 0419

826 061- www.australiantango.com.au Facebook: www.facebook.com/TangoBajo

Tango Escencia – Rina & Nadim Sawaya (Richmond, Lower Templestowe)-

rina@tangotherapyaustralia.com.au - www.tangoescencia.com.au Tango Melbourne –

reneefleck84@gmail.com tangomelbourne.com.au

Tango Tambien (Woodend, Gardenvale/Brighton, Clifton Hill) – Leigh Rogan –

info@tangotambien.com – www.tangotambien.com

Victoria Tango Australia –Leonel - www.victoriatango.com.au - leonelcolque@hotmail.com

Viva (Fitzroy) – Christian Drogo – www.vivadance.com.au info@vivadance.com.au

GEELONG - Community Tango in Geelong – richardandpam@mac.com

www.facebook.com/CommunityTangInGeelong - www.southerncrosstango.com.au

HOBART

Tango Milongueros tangomtas@gmail.com www.tangomilonguerotasmania.com & Facebook

Tasmanian Club de Tango: tasmaniantangoclub@hotmail.com & www.tastangoclub.com

PERTH

Champagne Tango www.champagnetangoperth.com info@champagnetangoperth.com

Perth Tango Club - <http://perthtangoclub.com>

Mi Serenata <http://miserenatatango.com>

Tango in Adelaide

TANGO ADELAIDE CLUB

Club Milonga (1st Saturday of the month) – *Saturday 7 April*, 8pm – 12 at Chandelier Room, Druids Hall, 2 Cassie St Collingswood. \$10.

www.tangoadelaide.org

TANGO SALON

Comme Il Faut Milonga – *Sunday 15 April*, 4pm – 8pm at Mt Osmond Golf Club. \$10. www.tangosalonadelaide.blogspot.com

SIEMPRE TANGO

Weekly Practica - *Thursdays* 8pm - 9.30pm at North Adelaide Community Centre, 176 Tynte St, Nth Adelaide. \$5. **Super Thursday**, Thursday 26 April, 8-11pm at 176 Tynte St, North Adelaide. \$10. www.siempretango.net.au

SOUTHERN CROSS TANGO

Weekly Practica – *Tuesdays* 8pm – 9.30pm at Roxy Centre, 1-80 Anzac Hwy, Everard Park (\$10pp or \$5pp for beginner students). **Tango by the Sea Milonga** – *Sunday 8 April* 4-8pm at Henley Sailing Club, 1 Seaview Rd, West Beach. \$15. **La Calesita Milonga** – *Saturday 28 April* 8-11pm at Thebarton Community Centre, South Rd, Torrensville. \$15. www.southerncrosstango.com.au

Adelaide and Geelong dancers abroad at Buenos Aires CITA, March 2018



Southern Cross Tango - South Australia

MONDAY @ UNLEY RSL

8 Wk Tango Course: Monday 9 April – 28 May 2018

Beginner 7-8pm; Practica 8-8.30pm; Open Level 8.30-9.30pm (Course or Casual Class)
@ Unley RSL, 29 Arthur St, Unley

TUESDAY @ ROXY CENTRE

8 Wk Tango Course: Tuesday 3 April – 22 May 2018

Beginner/Open Level 7-8pm, followed by PRACTICA 8pm – 9.30pm
@ Roxy Centre, 1-80 Anzac Hwy, Everard Park

TUESDAY PRACTICA @ ROXY CENTRE

Weekly on Tuesdays from 3 April – 22 May 2018

8 – 9.30pm (\$10pp or \$5pp beginner students) @ Roxy Centre, 1-80 Anzac Hwy, Everard Park

WEDNESDAY @ THEBARTON COMMUNITY CENTRE

8 Wk Tango Course: Wednesday 21 March – 9 May 2018

Open 7pm - 8pm; Advanced 8pm - 9pm
@ Thebarton Community Centre, South Rd, Torrensville

PRIVATE TUITION & Special Courses @ Southern Cross Tango Studio

Private Lessons with Andrew & Adrienne Gill (by appointment)

Tango Technique Training for Women:

4 Wk Course: 7 – 28 April; 5-26 May

9-10am @ Southern Cross Tango Studio, 50 Kauri Parade, SEACLIFF
Bookings essential – Ph 0419 309 439

COMMUNITY TANGO IN GEELONG (Victoria)

Venue: Christ Church hall, corner of Moorabool & McKillop Streets, Geelong

Venue: Christ Church hall, corner of Moorabool & McKillop Streets, Geelong.

First Monday of the month: Tango for Pleasure, supper & social dancing, 7.30 – 9.30pm

Other Mondays: Open level group classes, 7.30 – 9.00pm

Thursday mornings: Body conditioning & dance training for women

Group tango lessons, private lessons, seasonal salon events.

Vic teachers: Pamela & Richard Jarvis – **0417 531 619**. E richardandpam@mac.com

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

SOUTHERN CROSS TANGO: Andrew & Adrienne Gill

Ph: **0419 309 439** E: sctango@bigpond.com

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

www.southerncrosstango.com.au