

# TANGO AUSTRALIS

June 2020



Photograph from the blog of South Australia's extraordinary tango woman, Tricia Miller

TANGO AUSTRALIS Journal is published by Southern Cross Tango 50 Kauri Parade, Seacliff, South Australia 5049 E: [sctango@bigpond.com](mailto:sctango@bigpond.com) Web: <http://www.southerncrosstango.com.au>

Editor: P Jarvis. E: [pmjarvis@me.com](mailto:pmjarvis@me.com)



## Tricia Miller, tango hero

As Australians were shutting down social lives, cancelling cruises, grumbling about café, pub closures and not being able to dance tango, cocooned safely in our homes, Adelaide Tanguera, Tricia Miller, was packing her bags to travel, as a volunteer, to work with a Samaritan's Purse team at the heart of the corona virus epidemic.

We have known Tricia for many years, and have watched her grow in self-confidence as she put in the hard work to become a very fine tango dancer. Tricia dances with Southern Cross Tango, performing with Adrienne and Andrew, and assisting in teaching classes. Dedication and strength of purpose are needed to become a fine tango dancer, and Tricia has these in abundance. She climbs fearlessly, too. Compassion and empathy are required to be an effective teacher, and she has these too.

We don't usually talk about faith and love, the less obvious qualities that took Tricia to Cremona, and brought her safely home again, at the end of her tour of duty.

In the blog Tricia wrote during her time working in Cremona, she quotes a young nurse, who wants to remain anonymous. The nurse adapted a well-known biblical passage, 1 Corinthians 13, to fit the time, and we include an extract of it here:

*If I... 'have not loved, I am nothing...Love is patient with the constant barrage of beeping monitors and alarming ventilators. Love is kind when it waits for the late stragglers to hurry to 'Get on the bus!' Love persists in joy and celebration, clapping every time a patient is discharged.'*

Samaritan's Purse is a non-profit Christian organization providing emergency relief and development assistance to suffering people around the world. When the Samaritan's Purse team arrived in Cremona, a city near Milan in Italy, there had already been 2,200 deaths in the region; none of the critical Covid-19 patients at the local hospital had survived. Medical staff and resources were completely overwhelmed.

A united effort by 30 disaster response staff, Italian Air Force soldiers, and local volunteers, set up a field hospital in under 36 hours. They opened the hospital on March 20, with ventilator-equipped ICU beds, general care beds, a lab, and a pharmacy, in tents stretching across the Cremona Hospital parking lot.

Tricia made her first blog posting on April 24, 2020. She has told me she plans to add more articles.

Here us the link to her blog site:

<http://www.theyellowbird.com.au>



We are proud to publish this article, written by our own tango hero, Tricia Miller, writing in the pandemic of Covid – 19, from Cremona, Italy

## ICU

April 24, 2020

I have been toying with this post for over a week.... but I think tonight I need this more than you!

My first night shift was confronting to say the very least. The majority of my work is, by far, associated with the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). The patients there are **very** sick. They are all ventilated; some intubated and the rest have had to have tracheotomies because they've been ventilated for weeks. It is not pretty.

Let me be clear. I have worked in laboratories – the samples come in, the results go out. No patient included! Their details certainly, but not a face... not a pair of eyes... not their pain, or their fear, or their isolation.

On that first night, I came awfully close to fainting three times. In the bustle of a busy ICU I sat down hoping that no-one would notice that I was turning various shades of pale to green. I was in there to collect the blood with the appropriate tubes in hand for hospital testing and to collect a sample for our in-house testing. But as the nurses struggled to find a vein or get an “art stick” (arterial blood), I could feel myself starting to go... the last thing they needed in there was me on the floor!

As I walked out, with my first set of bloods in hand I just started to cry. It was next level of overwhelming. And in that moment, I caught myself and just figured I needed to work out a way to deal with this! I wanted to be here for these people, and I would only be in the way if I was picking myself up off the deck!

Continuing through the evening, I was acutely aware of the patients' gazes. And that first night I did not have the courage to look back and to see them.

As I started to process these thoughts and emotions, I was reminded of a conversation I had had with a chaplain I'd met in Bairnsdale, Victoria as part of the aid in the wake of the Australian bushfires. She was involved in prison visitations in England, and in talking about this work, she said,

*“I don't want to know what they've done... I just want to see them and who they are now, in front of me”.*

And I wanted to **see** these people... not as covid patients, not as cognome e nome/ data di nascita (last name, first name, dob).... but as a human being, suffering and in front of me.

The ICU became, for me, the “I-See-You”. I came here to Cremona with the expectation of a sense of fulfillment in using my professional skills to help, and I have found the greatest rewards in the brief moments of sharing in our humanity...

One evening I held D’s hand as blood was being drawn – not a difficult process in someone who is healthy, but quite a feat with most of these patients – and as I left the bedside briefly to grab another syringe, she started waving her fingers rapidly and looked straight at me! When I took her hand again, she closed her eyes and relaxed.



And then there was M.... A man-child. Just a couple of years younger than me with Down Syndrome. Beloved by the nursing staff, he had his own teddy which the nurse would offer before taking blood. But he so disliked having his blood taken and he would strain against the arm restraints, moving and making it even more difficult to get the necessary arterial blood. This particular night was harder than usual, and he

was clinging to his toy. I squatted down next to him, patting his teddy and stroking his arm. Talking gently and trying to assure him that we were nearly finished... and when we were done, I gave him the thumbs up and he kinda screwed up his face and shook his head a little and held tight to his hedgehog. It was like he was trying to tell me it really hurt.... Bless!

Tonight, I’m writing this because we lost a guy yesterday. He’s not the first, since I’ve been here. It has not been uncommon to come in of an evening and find there’s one less in ICU. But this guy was not old (early 60’s) and I thought he would make it. His wife rang the evening before, and face-timed him. She face-timed her husband, who was not conscious, to say goodbye... No words!

It was a merciful release, really. But for me it was like a movie ending tragically when I thought it was going to have a happy ending.

I have followed, every night, the statistics around the world, in Italy, in Lombardy and in my home of South Australia. And it is easy to see statistics and percentages; to make comparisons and to extrapolate. It is easy to file that away, to forget the individual, the family and the community.

*No one believed. They listened at his heart.  
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.  
No more to build on there. And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.*

– *Out, Out, Robert Frost*

As human beings, we find ways to deal with sorrow, suffering, difficulty... we laugh, we joke, we run, we hide... but I just wanted to **see** this one, to sit with it a moment. To let my cheeks be wetted.

## Milonga, a story with elements of confusion

We dance to its music. We love it, call it the happy face of tango. Skillful man; cheeky woman. Early in his tango career, my partner, Richard, was taken in hand by an immigrant to Melbourne, a man from Uruguay who shared his love of this dance form and some of its secrets. Result was, that, when we got to Buenos Aires as new tango dancers, about 30 years ago, we knew how to dance real milonga. In those days the old guys were the only people dancing this style. It wasn't popular again - yet. When that catchy music played, young dancers cleared the floor for the traditionalists to strut their stuff. Those old guys quickly recognized that my partner also knew what he was doing, and they were curious to know where, and how, he had learned to dance this way. They knew we were not locals. It was the start of new friendships, oiled with respect. I got lots of invitations to dance. That respect gave us new confidence when we returned to Melbourne to dance again. We knew we were doing the real thing, regardless of what anybody else said.

Where did the dance form of *milonga* come from, when did it begin? What is this music, with the lurking beat that never goes away... with its infinitely variable dance steps, its excitement...the story in motion, that stays in motion. Relentless, without pauses – three steps to two beats. This dance is old, predating the tango. It has reflections and carries memories of Africa, black spirit and soul, at the heart of the music, in the rhythm, and in its embodiment in the dancers.

Music, dance, song - hard to tease out where one ends and another begins. In tango, they are not separate. They evolved together. We carry music, song and dance, in our hearts and collective memory, when we travel. Immigrants take musical instruments with them as they travel from their homelands. They dance together in their new worlds, make music with others, sing familiar songs. We pass them from generation to generation; we share them with friends. This music in our hearts accompanies us throughout our lives. It is there to comfort us, be with us in quiet moments. Its melodies and rhythmic patterns help us to move freely, to walk with confidence. It soothes the heart, and inspires us. It stays in our memory when we are old, when other things are fading. The music is still there, with us, part of us.

Tango culture emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when music and dance from Africa encountered a rapidly growing and changing urban society, a fusion of the culture of slaves, European born migrants, and *criollas* (Europeans born in Argentina). Gauchos drifted in to the growing city, bringing with them manly foot stamping patterns of dance, and vocal trilling, like that of Andalusia and North Africa. Trilling became Carlos Gardel's vocal signature. *Habanera* arrived with black Cuban sailors, a cultural fusion of African slaves that bounced back and forth from southern Spain, infecting the world with its catchy rhythm. Its beat became that of the milonga and the earliest tangos, the emergent style called *canyengue*. Dancers inserted African candombe steps into *habanera* from around 1850-1860, and the pace quickened to become *milonga*.

*Milonga* is an African word meaning argument, but it is also related to the European *melange*, meaning a mix or a mess. *Canyengue* comes from Central Africa, the imperative form of a Kongo verb, *kanienge*, meaning to melt into the music. I read in a tango translation published on the internet, a translation of '*canyengue*', as meaning 'of the slums'. This reflects an attitude still prevalent in some quarters today, a white-washing that wants to rewrite the history of

tango, denying the role of Afro-Argentines. When I dance *canyengue* style to early tango music, I carry the idea of melting into the music – it is beautiful imagery.

The dancers were young, black, white and of mixed blood. Argentina has names for different racial combinations. Male competition was always present: who was the strongest, fittest, the best dancer. Personal style, playing with rhythms and beat, newness and innovation, all counted. Women brought elasticity and smoothness (later to be known as *tango liso*).

Friction between tradition and change resulted in 'milonga', the embryo form of the dance that would become tango.

Robert Farris Thompson, a Professor of History at Yale University and expert in the culture of the Kongo and the history of the tango, describes the parent dance form as 'ecstatic and transcendent', combining 'strong designs'. Here are elements of early dance that he described in Tango, the art history of love, with my comments in brackets...

- Line dancing, males on one side females on the other, avoids problems with the sexes mixing (Argentine chacarera is an example). Circle formation dances are more formal, relating to noble dances of antiquity (Argentine *Zamba*?)
- Dancing in the distance, dancing without touching. (We do this in mirroring exercises in improvisational dance, and when we practise organic lead and follow tango moves at a distance, connected by energy flow, torso direction, etc..) In the African form, if a woman is confronted by someone she finds unattractive, she calls out '*tatuka*'. This means, 'stay distant, get lost'. (We might adapt this as we adjust to life with Covid-19 and other novel viruses. Maybe akin to a reaction to a guy not getting the message from a rejection to an initial *cabeceo* approach in tango.)
- Dancing without embracing, frees the body for expressive movement. (Free tango dancers can try polycentric expressive moves. i.e. maintaining one percussive beat with shoulders, a different one with the hips. Like patting your head and rubbing your tummy with a circular movement – good for brain training)
- Multicentric dancing, assigning different time signatures to different parts of the body (dancing in harmony with all the beats). (Try this, if you want a new dance challenge – it is hard.)
- Embodied percussion – the dancer follows different patterns of meter, and also becomes a percussion instrument, incorporating finger snapping, hand clapping, slapping different parts of the body to create different sounds. (This one is fun, but don't overdo it, when you dance milonga. Too much foot stamping is obtrusive and gets boring. Be creative. Surprise partners and those who watch with just enough innovation to keep things interesting.)
- Periodic dancing, call & response, (merged as lead and follow in tango)

Just to confuse things, the first appearance of reference to *milonga* was not as a dance. It was an improvised song of itinerant musicians. Before creating the first romantic tango song, and becoming a tango idol, Carlos Gardel played guitar, and travelled around singing these country milongas in a popular duo with Uruguayan Jose Rozzano. On the last interview of his life, composer Sebastian Piana talked about these singers, who were also poets, and his belief that they would have ad-libbed their poetry to popular rhythms, like the *habanera*. Such songs, took on elements of gaucho stamping and Afro-Argentine *candombe* - syncopation, staccato and upbeat – and added sassy immigrant influences.

On recordings of early tango music, you may see the description '*Tango Milonga*' or *tango criolla* or *danza criolla*, describing transition music, when *milonga* was in flux, developing the form and structure that would become *tango*. Tango's evolution continued, reflecting diverse cultures and changing social conditions of the Rio de la Plata region and its people.

Carlos Gardel's recording of *Mi noche triste* (1917), marked the birth of romantic sung tango, a change of direction from the vulgar lyrics of early songs (and trust me, some were truly eye-poppingly vulgar). As the new *tango* emerged from the old *milonga*, and the lyrics became respectable and romantic, the *tango* grew wings. Its popularity grew, and recordings garnered international popularity. Initially reluctant, because of *tango*'s black and working class origins, white middle classes followed the new fad, and the *milonga* dance faded from public eye. But black clubs and local musicians continued to play the popular rhythmic *milongas*.

Musical trios grew to become orchestras. Musicians with classical and formal training became arrangers, composers and performers. Although improvisation would remain an essential part of tango. One tango composer, Sebastian Piana, a classically trained musician, actively involved in the ongoing development of the *tango*. He was largely responsible for the re-emergence of *milonga* into the mainstream, forty years after its 19<sup>th</sup> century origins.

Sebastian Piana (1903 – 1944) was the son of an immigrant from Piedmont who had arrived in Argentina in 1890. The father was a barber, a trade inherited from his father, and a musician, a friend of Osvaldo Pugliese's father, Alfredo, and Pedro Maffia's. The father, who played guitar and mandolin, later studied piano and learned to read music. He accompanied early tango groups at La Paloma and Tontolin cafes, often took his son Sebastian to his gigs. The boy studied violin with his uncle, but he didn't enjoy it, and quit music for two years. Then he decided to play piano and studied with Antonio D'Agostino, becoming a piano teacher. He continued his studies with maestro Ernesto Drangosch.

From the age of 14, Sebastian was playing piano for the silent movies theatres and variety shows, and getting broad experience in different orchestras playing opera excerpts and fantasias.

From the age of 17, Sebastian Piana was composing and playing his own *tangos*. He won second prize for *Sobre el pucho* (1922), a tango recorded by Carlos Gardel, and had others recorded by Canaro's orchestra. With Pedro Maffia, Piana set up a music academy on Salguero Street. In 1929 he wrote *Milonga clasica*, a tango for orchestra, that would finally be entitled *Viejo ciego*. He honoured the potency of the old *candombe-milonga*. In 1939 he organized a band, *Orquesta Tipica Candombe*, but the composition responsible for the popular revival of milonga had been written earlier, in 1931: *Milonga Sentimental*, with lyrics by Homero Manzi.

Sebastian Piana said that he and Homero Manzi had given a *tango* to Rosita Quiroga to sing, but she surprised them by asking for a *milonga* instead. Piana worked with the idea of making a different *milonga*, one that kept the simplicity of the beat, but with a defined musical shape, as if it was a *tango* to be sung, but with the essence of *milonga*. He worked on the composition for two days, then gave it to Homero Manzi, who came back with lyrics the next morning

The lyrics are interesting because they are from a woman's perspective. Not many lyrics in tango are. Rosita did not sing *Milonga sentimental*, she preferred a different kind of *milonga*, but Mercedes Simone heard it, loved it, premiered it in a theatre show, and recorded it,

*Man, I love you so much*  
*Man, I wish you well*  
*Man, forget that offence*  
*It's forgiveness I tell*  
*Perhaps you'll never know*  
*Perhaps it won't seem true*  
*Perhaps you'll think it's funny*  
*When I throw myself at you*

After hearing Piana play *Milonga sentimental*, Arturo de Bassi, theatre director, created a sketch for a review, in which 'two girls and two tough guys take part. They will answer each other with the music and the lyrics of the *milonga*'. It was premiered, at Teatro Casino, and got good reviews while the show was running. Mercedes Simone's recording was gaining popularity too at the time, and the lyricist Homero Manzi got credit also. But widespread recognition really only came after Pedro Maffia did a live show at the old Teatro San Martin on Esmeralda Street, broadcast by the radio station *La Voz del Aire*. Maffia's orchestra and Edgardo Donato's both played. Maffia had developed some great arrangements for the orchestra he had put together for the occasion, and had Rosita Montemar singing. They performed *Milonga sentimental* again, and this time it became a popular hit.

Canaro's orchestra played *Milonga sentimental* in the 1930s. Milonga's second wave of popularity was surging. Piana wrote other milongas: *Milonga del 900*, *Milonga triste*, *Juan Manuel*, *Milonga de los Fontines*, *Pena mulata*, *Milonga de Puente Alsina*. Piana wrote music for movies too: *Vidalita*, *Arrabalera*, *Derecho Viejo*, and *He nacido en Buenos Aires*, and composed many other tangos. Some will sound familiar, as they are often played by DJs at social milongas (and here is another usage of the word – '*milonga*' is also the name of a place, a salon, where you go to dance tango, and, thanks to its current wave of popularity, also the milonga.) We did warn that there were elements of confusion in this story.

By 1938, when Canaro recorded the milonga, *Reliquias portenas*, the integration of the *habanero* beat with the orchestra sound has become smoother, the strings more active and livelier, the bandoneon avoids downbeats, and the piano and double bass bring things together.

A good milonga to listen to, to hear the evolution of the form, is the great bandoneonista Anibal Troilo's recording of *La trampera* (Cheating Woman), made in 1962. It's not an orchestral rendition, it's played by a quartet, so you can hear the elements. Troilo staggered his notes. His syncopation is black, out of Africa – he drums a fast *habanera* with his hands on the side of his bandoneon. Troilo combines jazz bass, art guitar, even some old *samba*. It is a tour de force that Thompson aptly describes as 'retrospective and new'.

## Not tripping, as we venture gingerly down the tango path in Geelong

With Covid-19 social restrictions tango teachers haven't been able to teach regular classes. We thought long and hard about what we could do for our students; how we could keep our regional tango community connected. Safety is always a high priority. Some of our students are older and at greater risk of injury if movements are done the wrong way. Being able to monitor what students do in class, and correct things, is an important part of how we work. We add new material slowly, building one skill onto another. Two steps forward, one step back. It takes time and patience.

Pre-Covid-19 Gentle Tango classes have been pleasant activities, for our dancers and for us. We love getting together, with the laughter and enjoyment of one another's company, sharing stories, working together to get fitter, learn about tango, and dance simply in a social environment. Preparing food for morning or afternoon teas, has been a nice activity – it's not just the cooking, it's the fact that you're doing it to share with others. Then, suddenly, it was all gone. We decided to proceed cautiously into the virtual tango zone. It is a work in progress, with, we have discovered, surprising benefits.

Videotapes of tango lessons have long been around, popularized by the Buenos Aires TV channel 'Solo Tango' that, in past years, showed only tango footage of clips and interviews, demonstrations and performances, all day long. It was a good resource for visitors, but, in time, Argentina's tango marketing gurus realized they were giving away a lot, for no reward. Big name teachers took to making and selling their own videos, and, today, many students around the world spend long hours in front of computer screens, scrolling through YouTube and watching video lessons. Entertaining though the footage of dance performances may be, (although some is excruciating), watching others dance choreographed routines doesn't teach how tango works. So too, with video lessons. The workings of tango are unseen, and subtle, not obvious to the observer. What happens before a step / movement begins is invisible, unless the camera focus is right, and you know what you are looking for. When you know what to look for, you can recognize the 'teachers' who have learned and take their lessons from videos. Something vital is missing.

In earlier days, up to the mid 1950s, before the current era of tango popularity, young boys were invited to male *prácticas*, where they danced as followers, for a long time – until they learned those secrets of tango, the things that are not seen, can only be felt. Girls learned to dance at home, with family members. Only after they had learned the important tango elements, were young men and young women (chaperoned, of course) permitted to go to the milongas where they could see other couples dancing. In Buenos Aires, it used to be said, 'You are a beginner in tango, for at least ten years'. That's not what today's students want to hear.

We decided to offer Gentle Tango sessions via Zoom, for a limited number of registered students. Sessions are closed, and free. We only accept dancers we have worked with before. We know their strengths and areas of challenge. We are aware of injuries, and individual ways of learning. We keep sessions simple, following the routine we established for class: chair exercises, then standing exercises, then simple patterns that can also be figures in the dance. We choose music carefully. We dance.

We wanted to offer more – and decided that we would do what we could to make it possible for all to come out of this period with new skills and new knowledge about tango.

In each session, we now present a segment on the history of tango, with a famous composition, theoretical, historic and practical components. We started with early compositions and arrangements: *Don Juan*, *El Choclo*, and *La cumparsita*. We told the story of each tango and its composer, lyrics, social context. Students listen to arrangements by different orchestras through the generations. We tease out the music's components, melody, instrument voices and improvisations, rhythmic structures. We have already shown simple moves that will work with the particular tango – and then we encourage dancers to just have fun and move, as they want, to various arrangements of different orchestras and eras. It is good to see how this liberty is helping our dancers stake their own claim to tango, helping them realize that tango is what they make of it.

In the last couple of weeks we have moved on to explore more sophisticated tangos and Osvaldo Pugliese's contribution, and become familiar with *Recuerdo* and *A Everisto Carriego*. We shared what we had been privileged to observe in BsAs, how the old tangueros danced to Pugliese's music, and we told tales of our adventures in capturing the spirit of the poet, Evaristo Carriego, in a show performance of our own.

When one door closes, another opens. We can go through that new door, and explore what lies beyond. Tango is a survivor. It has survived the Great War and Spanish flu pandemic, Great Depression, Second World War, Cold War, periods of political instability, military dictatorship, and dreadful repression and persecution of the population in Argentina. It even survived the invasion of rock 'n roll, and then the Beatles. In our time, the fire department closed all milongas in the city of Buenos Aires after a catastrophic nightclub fire claimed many lives. The city's milongas, and those around the world, are closed again now. But tango will survive. The flame will burn, if we tend it. And when the flame burns more brightly, let us hope that the tango groups that emerge are kind, compassionate and respectful.

## Untainted tango

A Spanish dancer went to a milonga in northern Italy, got infected there, and carried the novel corona virus back to Spain. When last in Italy, we too danced at the milongas, and were amazed at the number of Europeans who travel from country to country regularly, to dance at different milongas. It was 'tango without borders'. How quickly things can change when there is an unseen enemy.

This article is about our sense of smell and olfactory imagery. You may wonder what that has to do with tango. Quite a lot, actually.

We tend to associate certain memories with certain aromas. Warm bread left by the baker in the tin on our front porch, basil and mint in the garden and late summer tomatoes on the vine, fresh mown lawns and helping my father, the smell of my mother's delicious chocolate cakes just at the point when the smell changes and the cake is perfectly cooked. So many associations, and aroma triggers.



There's an obvious aspect of smell, when it comes to tango. It's nicer to dance in close, or even not-so-close, embrace with partners who smell clean. It's more important than what they look like, and even how well they dance. A crisp, freshly laundered shirt smells good, and ticks another sensory box, by feeling good against your skin, beneath your fingers.

There is a primitive element to our sense of smell. Like other animals, our sense of smell functions as a warning, of food contamination, or a storm brewing. But it's deeper than that. It warns us about outsiders, the danger of strangers. We recognize the smell of family members, and loved ones. Mothers and babies. Smell is a way we identify others. If a person doesn't smell right, it's unlikely we will establish a relationship with him / her.

Dogs have a heightened sense of smell, and this sense seems to survive long after an aged pet loses sight, hearing, and memory. Scientists have observed that dogs can detect the smell of certain diseases, well before other symptoms are obvious.

On our first visit to Argentina, we stayed at the Alvear Palace Hotel, an elegant, luxurious place, a bit of Paris in Buenos Aires. Bathroom toiletries were Hermes: *Eau d'orange verte*. I had a lovely time using them all. The industry calls it layering fragrance today, but I was just being indulgent...because I could. I went to milongas with my hair scented with Hermes shampoo and my body with the soap and lotions. My memories, to this day, of the experiences I had dancing at those milongas, are fragranced, and if I smell those toiletries again, those old memories of the dances I had come flooding back.

Before the Covid-19 closures of public sporting facilities, I stood under the shower in the changerooms of the swimming pool complex, where I was doing hydrotherapy rehabilitation exercises, washing the chlorine out of my hair. I had a little bottle of that same Hermes shampoo. I closed my eyes, and was transported to the other side of the world, dancing tango at Club Almagro, a milonga that no longer exists, with old men who are no longer alive. I heard the music, smelled the cigarette smoke and other odours in the room where we danced.

An underlying chlorine smell in the changerooms at the Waurm Ponds pool evoked another tango memory: that of the toilets at the milonga. 'Club' Almagro, at Medrano 522, was held in the rooms of a swimming club. On Tuesday nights it became a milonga, the most popular in Buenos Aires. A large swimming pool was behind a glass partition, on the other side of the toilets. To get to the ladies loo, you had to walk past the men's. There was no door to the men's, so all inside was visible. Disconcerting, and hard to keep a straight face, when the tango men strutted around the dance salon, after their bathroom visits.

For those interested in tango history, Club Almagro milonga no longer exists. The property was sold, earmarked for development. On the night of the last milonga, the crowd of tango dancers ripped up the floorboards and took them home, as a memento of all those nights of dancing on the boards. A friend has his, proudly framed and hanging on the wall in his home.

In this time of social isolation, we've cut our alcohol consumption but increased our intake of tea. Been doing lots of reading too. I read an article about the Handunugoda Tea Estate in Sri Lanka, where the pickers dress in white gloves, white shirt and shower cap, and a face mask, to snip the newest growth of *Camellia sinensis* tea buds to make Virgin white Tea.

A Chinese legend tells of a mandarin who sent maidens wearing white silk gloves to cut the white tea leaf buds with golden scissors, letting the snipped buds fall into a golden bowl where

the leaves dried naturally with assistance of divine winds. No human touch occurred in the processing, until the emperor took his first sip..

In Grasse, the French flower-growing perfume centre, it is well known that harvests of a flower, such as jasmine, from different places, smell differently, because of the sweat and oils imparted by different pickers. Makes you wonder about what remained on our hands after successive tandas at milongas.

In 'The man who mistook his wife for a hat', Oliver Sacks wrote about a man who lost his sense of smell after a head injury severely damaged his olfactory tracts. The man described the effect as 'like being struck blind'. Life lost its savour – so much of savour is smell. 'You smell people, you smell books, you smell the city...' We smell tango.

Patrick Suskind wrote the book, '*Perfume*', about a man whose body had no smell, but who had a heightened olfactory sense that he used to create perfumes that profoundly influenced human behaviour.

After months, with no sense of smell, Oliver Sack's patient noticed that his morning coffee had begun to regain its savour. When he smoked his pipe, he found that he could catch a hint of the aroma he had so loved. His neurologist tested him, but found he still had total anosmia. Sacks believed that what was happening was that the man had developed a greatly enhanced olfactory imagery, like a controlled hallucinosis – part conscious, part unconscious, in which he called up a 'smell memory' in situations he had previously associated with smell.

We've been experiencing sensory deprivation in the time we've been not able to get together and dance, or sit and drink our coffee in our local cafes. We make reasonable coffee at home, but it's not the same as being in a room, that wraps you in the smell of coffee.

Italian poet and Futurist, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, wrote a strange cookbook. I was made aware of the '*Futurist Cookbook*' when I read the last edition to be published of the fabulous, always interesting, *Smith Journal*. You might be familiar with this publication if you frequent (or once frequented) cafes where thinkers gather. I always loved reading these quality magazines, and I'm kicking myself that I didn't subscribe, and get them regularly delivered. Apparently loss of advertising revenue was the reason for the magazine's demise. Hopefully some philanthropist will help to resurrect it – and I will certainly take out a subscription.

In the summer 2019 edition, James Shackell samples and describes the weirdest food offerings imaginable, from the Futurist Cookbook. One was 'Aerofood', and it seemed to fit in an odd kind of way with this article's theme of sensory perception. The dish was a combination of raw fennel, chopped kalamata olives, kumquats, served on a platter with squares of felt, silk and sandpaper arranged at one end. You eat the food with your right hand as the left hand caresses the different textures of sandpaper, velvet and silk, whilst a giant fan blasts air at you and a waiter sprays you with carnation perfume. James Shackell described this odd combination of sensory perceptions thus: 'Without equivocation, the strangest dining experience of my life'.

Here's a Covid-19 challenge for readers. How would a writer creatively, and perhaps with a touch of surrealism, describe the total sensory experience of dancing a good tango?

## Tango post Covid-19

Face masks became a symbol of this hellish summer and autumn – with people struggling to breathe in bushfire-affected areas, smoke clouds descending on far distant cities, and then the horror of a new virus, not yet understood, spreading from China around the world.

We do not know long it will be before we can dance social tango together again. A New Zealand organizer thinks he will be able to do so soon, but we are more cautious. We are fortunate that the measures that have been taken in Australia, to keep us safely apart, have meant that most of us have not yet been exposed to the virus. COVID 19, the new strain of Corona virus, will not go away. It is mutating, experts are increasingly unsure about whether we get immunity when we have recovered from the disease, and if so, for how long. A vaccine in the short term is unlikely. There's uncertainty about how some people are contracting the disease, and how it is spreading through community transmission.

Wearing gloves may be mandatory, may even become a fashion item again, in the battle against virulent infection. No lady would go dancing in olden days without wearing gloves. Men wore them too. Perhaps there was more than fashion at stake.

Tuberculosis was once common in Buenos Aires, and it spread easily through close contact of dancing at milongas. This was explained to me when I commented on the practice I observed, of older male dancers having a clean folded white handkerchief in the palm of the hand they offered their partners.

You have to wonder whether all people are following the personal hygiene guidelines. It came as a nasty shock to see how many women visit the toilets at milongas and do not wash their hands afterwards. I have been told that this is a common occurrence in the male toilets too. Think about it – you join hands with a partner, who has been touching the hands of other partners.... Yikes!!

So, dancers, when we get finally back to dancing, we must remain vigilant. Stay away from events if sick. Keep your germs in-house. Even if you feel well, use the bottles of anti-bacterial handwash – but remember it is anti-bacterial, and not anti-viral. Handwashing with soap, is effective – but the washing has to be thorough and done for 20 - 30 seconds at least. Don't breathe on other people.

Then, we just have to wait for the excess water bills to arrive.

### **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**

**Adrienne & Andrew Gill**

Ph: 0419 309 439

E: [sctango@bigpond.com](mailto:sctango@bigpond.com)

[www.southerncrosstango.com.au](http://www.southerncrosstango.com.au)

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

### **COMMUNITY TANGO IN GEELONG (Victoria)**

Community Tango in Geelong has SUSPENDED 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, until restrictions on social gatherings are lifted. We are conducting tango meetings of small groups, by invitation, on Zoom.

Information: Pam & Richard Jarvis, [richardandpam@mac.com](mailto:richardandpam@mac.com) Mobile: 041753 1619

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