

Tango dancers perform at Argentinian restaurant Gaucho



DJs Ice and Fire

Timing and tandas

Salon tango is played in tandas (groups of three or four tunes) punctuated by cortinas (non-tango musical breaks). **Carole Edrich** talks to the experts and discovers that there's a wealth of opinions on the subject

“A tanda should be danceable. Its first song is often the strongest, to get people on the floor and in the mood. While this mood might slightly change, consistency in ‘aire’ [the feel] is vital,” says Richard Slade of Menuda Milonga.

For teacher and dancer Raquel Greenberg, “aire” is also important: “In Buenos Aires I will look for the people with whom I love to dance a particular sort of tanda. We’re dancing to find

those falling-star moments, those meetings between our feelings, our emotions: to express the dance and the music is vital.”

DJ Barry James Leadbetter uses the second track to help unfamiliar dance partners get to know each other, while the third may be more obscure since by then dancers should be comfortable enough to deal with it. DJ Melina Sedó says: “The last track, ideally the one that everyone loves, has to appeal to the dancers

on an emotional basis and make them feel sorry the tanda is over.”

Detlef Engel of Tango de Salon and Andreas Wichter of Tangokombinat both fit individual tandas into the dramaturgy of the set and event. DJ Melina Sedó says she alternates more rhythmical tandas with lyrical or dramatic ones.

DJ Lynn Collins adds: “My opening tandas tend to be steady and rhythmical to energise the floor, with tracks by Canaro or D’Arienzo. The next phase [of tandas] sustains the direction with orchestras like Canaro’s, often moving to a climax. Then I might add spice and complexity from Biagi, or move into more lyrical pieces such as those

last track, which was a scratchy obscurity. I tried my best but we both walked off flat. It would have worked if only the DJ had reversed the last two tracks.”

The cortina helps shape the event too. Longer cortinas are beneficial when the room is larger or navigation is difficult, so DJs will spend time looking for the right ones. Tango Al Fresco doesn’t use them at all. Organiser Kele Baker explains: “I want to maintain a constant dance party, am sensitive to both dancers and passers-by who stay and watch and feel that the cortina breaks the mood. As someone who started with ballroom and Latin dance and is comfortable switching dance styles, I also feel that cortinas are quite jarring.”

Detlef Engel’s philosophy is that “cortinas shouldn’t be aggressive. People who want to talk shouldn’t have to shout and the music shouldn’t make them want to dance.”

But cortinas have an important purpose, says Raquel Greenberg: “They remind us to disconnect from the embrace, help us understand we have

to say goodbye and provide time to decide what we’re doing in the next tanda.”

There is no set rule to when tandas should be prepared. Danny Evans says: “The best DJs at Carablanca often prepare their music in advance, but they also improvise both the selection of tandas and the music within a tanda to suit the milonga’s mood.”

Tango Immigrant Trud Anzée Fagerheim prefers the oft-used structure: “I’m used to TTVTTM [tango, tango, vals, tango, tango, milonga], with usually four tangos and three milongas. However, four waltzes are nice at events with one tanda for each person.” Meanwhile DJ Nikki Preddy adds a couple of rock ‘n’ roll, swing or salsa tracks depending on the venue.

Lynn Collins puts it perfectly: “A good tanda has a wonderful inevitability, just like a great playlist. The two can’t be separated, because where a tanda sits is just as important as its composition. The right tanda at the right time is the ultimate dancing joy.” That latter point is the only one on which everyone agrees. ●

by Fresedo. The final phase might add drama with tracks from Orquesta Típica Victor.”

“Tandas, like stories, have beginnings, middles, ends and turning points and the tone may subtly change. If the author fails to capture his audience with the first few lines, he has probably failed, and the same is true for tandas,” says Andreas.

As all dancers know, what’s right for one couple might not be for another and a difficult set (such as by Pugliese) too early on might kill the collective mood. Richard considers that the perfect tanda depends on a multitude of factors, while Barry tells of how DJs can get it wrong: “I remember dancing to a Di Sarli/Ruffino tanda.

“The third track was a favourite, ‘Corazon’. We were dancing well and on quite a high until the

Websites

Andreas Wichter: www.tangokombinat.de/uk.htm

Barry James Leadbetter: www.tangocats.co.uk

Danny Evans’ Carablanca: www.carablanca.co.uk

Detlef Engel: www.tangodesalon.de/en/ehome.htm

Kele Baker’s Tango Al Fresco: www.dancealfresco.org

Lynn Collins: www.tangokombinat.de/uk_DJ.htm

Melina Sedó: melinas-two-cent.blogspot.com

Nikki Preddy: www.dancetango.co.uk

Raquel Greenberg: www.facebook.com/RaquelTangoLand

Richard Slade: www.menudamilonga.com

Trud Anzée Fagerheim: tangoimmigrant.blogspot.com