

RT: How do you see the youth approaching tango?

CD: I think we shouldn't scare them, we have to teach them something easy, so that they can start going to dance, and stay. Not that they wait for six months before they can dance.

RT: What advice would you give to young people?

CD: To go dancing, and to listen to the music, because like that they start choosing models and they start forming their own style. Otherwise they would all be clones. They should go to milongas and contact people. The woman has to be capable to follow any man, and the man capable to lead any woman. That is why I don't teach choreographies. Tango is a feeling that you dance to, and the feelings have neither sequences nor choreographies.

ReporTango interviews Cacho Dante in February 2002

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EIN INTERVIEW MIT CACHO DANTE

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In transit: an interview Caño Dante

To listen to him inevitably submerges us in his wave of recollections, memories of an *old milonguero*, with the taste of coffee, and dawns with friends. Cache Dante discovered tango like many in his time without recognizing the *how* or the *when*...

ReporTango: How did you get into tango?

Cacho Dante: Well, truth is I don't know because I was raised in the world of tango. My dad was a milonguero, my aunts, my cousins, the whole family danced tango. So I had seen them since I was a child. Everybody danced in all the parties; it was very normal. When I was 14 or 15 I began with foxtrott, rock'n roll, and all those things. But tango was always there. At that time we had the chance to go dancing at the neighborhood club. We were not old enough to go to the dancehalls in the city. So I would get bored because I had to dance with my cousin, with my friend... That limited me a bit, so my dad asked me: „Do you want to get married?“ And I said: „No“. „So then why do you keep on dancing here? You have to go to the city!“

RT: And you went?

CD: Yes, but they wouldn't let me in because I wasn't 22. So I would go with my cousin and his friends, and I would stay in the middle of the group. And that drove me crazy! I finished high

RT: Argentina is a tango, isn't it?

CD: Of course, Argentina is a tango... Although one wouldn't want it to be that way (laughs)!

RT: Speaking of Argentina. How do you see the country each time you go back?

CD: Well... each time I get more disappointed, but I think is the peoples fault. We constantly commit the same mistakes. And we resuscitate all the dead! We bring to power all those who ruined us. And afterwards we lament ourselves. I haven't voted since 1976. Because I don't believe in Argentines leading class, I think it is a mafia, politicians, unionists, military, etc. The corruption is terrible.

RT: Also in tango?

CD: I don't think there is so much corruption in tango yet, because there is still not a lot of money in it! The day there is a lot of money, you'll start seeing corruption. Corruption is among us. There are improvised instructors. But more from a necessity to work, than from another reason. But people would start deperating them. And not only in Argentina, but in the whole world. There is going to be a natural deperation.

RT: Since you had the opportunity to travel and see other places, where do you think tango is going? Where is it going to end up?

CD: The tango, the youth, is going to innovate the way we did it in our time with *Pugliese*, because the *milongueros* who had ten years more than us, said we were a disaster because we danced making pauses and with silences they were not used to. But look: at this time music changed. Because music changed and it was also a change in the dance. We displayed ourselves by the elegance of the woman, not by the steps we did.

Because the *milonguero* doesn't dance for those who are looking, he dances for himself, he doesn't care if the others like it. It is enough that the woman you're dancing with likes it. So I think the youth is looking for a new way. There are even some who are trying to interpret *Piazzolla*, and I think that is great! Because the fact that I can't doesn't mean that others can't. I see them as very elegant with a series of new steps. I think tango is progressing a lot and it makes me very happy. I think that way it will never die. The only thing missing for my taste is new orchestras, new poets. There are even some small orchestras: *El Arraque*, *Color Tango*, etc... And I feel comfortable with all this. Because the one who doesn't change in the life, dies...

RT: And with respect to authors and poets, might there be a renewal?

CD: I believe that with the material we have now, with what is going on in Argentina now, do you know the tangos that could be made (laughs)!

school and I left everything! I was the only son and my dad had hopes that I would go to the university. What university?!

You can imagine, I got into the milongas, and I never left! Until the dictatorship arrived and started running after us. They would take us to the police station from 1 am until 9 am. It was like this every day. So they began making us fear going to the milongas, because they said that the tango milonguero was promiscuous. Because this thing of being embraced and dancing every day for the military guys was promiscuous. They wanted a very distant tango, „letting air through“, and that people go dancing once maybe twice a week, not the way we went - a gang of bums going every night. When people went in the morning to work, we would come back from the milonga. There was a time when they would find me and simply take me to the station without even asking me for my documents or anything. So I began changing neighborhoods, I kept on going down until I reached Pueyrredon Street. And there they would also get me. I was already a known face. They would ask me what did I work on, if I was a pimp, if I was a gambler. And I began retiring. Since I was born in Parque Chacabuco, I began again going to the neighborhood clubs. There were many, but I still didn't convince them.

Also, the *milonguero* had another lifestyle; it was a philosophy of life. He was even dressed differently. And during that time the neighborhood girls went with their mothers, and as soon as they saw us enter they would say: „With that one you don't dance!“ There was no discussion! No was no. I remember we would get together with a bunch of lazy folks, we would buy smelly bombs and we would throw them under the chairs of the old women to see if they would leave. So I got tired and I stop-

ped dancing. And after more or less twenty years, I began dancing again. It was around 1988.

RT: And what made you go back to the milonga?

CD: By Chance. I was standing in Corrientes Avenue, in the corner of a store which sold shirts, and somebody touches my back, and it was *Eduardo [Arquimbau]*. He told me he had a dance academy right there. There I met *Celia Blanco*. And there was a guy who worked with him, who had been president of the Club Premier, *Tito* was his name, and I began going in the afternoons to drink a coffee. I got hooked dancing.

Which wasn't the same thing as in my time. Tango had lost a lot, there were many years of prohibition, and then tango came back through shows and television and then people did that sort of dance, but it is all right. As democracy became more established, the milongas began opening and plenty of young people started getting into it, and I got hooked also.

Until one time *Susana Miller* grabbed me and together with some people, she asked me to teach them. We were in the *Viejo Correo* and she asked me to teach her and I said: „What am I going to teach you?“ She was already teaching with *Oswaldo [Zotto]* in *Brujas*. She said: „I want to teach these type of things because otherwise they will get lost.“ She convinced me and [we] were over three months trying to decode this, to see how to best teach it. And like that, people started getting into it. I began first in a club called *Azocar*, then in *Almagro*, which was a total hit, until *Susana Miller* said: „We have to go to Europe, we have to get out and show this.“ I said: „Look,

RT: Do you think you have your own method?

CD: I have tried to do a method that is progressive that prepares the body. First I prepare it musically, I begin marking the differences between the orchestras, the tempos, the double tempos. The person listens to the music through the ears, transmits it to the heart, and interprets it with the feet. It doesn't go from the ears to the feet. And the other thing I always say is that in the dance there is the woman, the music, and the space. I teach with those two pillars. Then it is easier. From the first step they go to the dance floor. I give them different possibilities of how to manage on the dance floor. Big, small, and medium steps. The change of direction. There are simple and fundamental things they can do with the dance. That is why there are plenty of people who go to the practicas. In general, young people or people who want to experiment with new steps. They go and they all have fun together.

But a very different thing is to go to the dance floor, to the milonga. And one has to adapt. Sometimes people tell me I have to do a demonstration, and I don't have any preparation to do anything because I don't know how to prepare choreographies. I am used to dancing among all the people. It depends on the space and the woman. Sometimes they ask me: „What did you do?“ And I have no idea. Because I did something that the music or the woman were asking me to do.

they go by, you should question your dancing because perhaps something is going on." And it is true.

RT: How do you see the teaching level of your colleagues?

CD: I think they are not missing ability, but I think they are teaching things that are not possible in the dancehall. Because in the successful dancehalls there are plenty of people, that is why you dance tight, because it is crowded. Teaching people how to dance in a big space and with a choreography is a lie, everybody dances in the space they have left, not in the space they need. I think that is the mistake: in teaching the students things that then are not possible to do. Because they realize they know plenty of things, but the truth is this is not the reality for the dancehall. And if one studies, invests money, and then goes to Buenos Aires, which is something like the Mecca for those who learn tango abroad, and you cannot apply any of the tango you learned, it is a fraud! It is as if they have been swindled. Argentineans should stop being so shady. Sometimes I have students and after six months I see their ads in the magazines saying they teach tango!

Unfortunately tango is not like, for example, martial arts, or other disciplines in which you have to pass by a federation that gives you a certificate saying that you are ready to teach. I don't teach steps. I teach every person to do their own dance, their own sequence, so that they know what to do.

once a woman gave me her address in Germany, and told me she had an academy (I thought she was making this up so I would dance with her all night) and I wrote it on some napkin that I must have somewhere." Susana called her and it was *Brigitte [Winkler]*. She gave us the opportunity to do tango in Berlin. You can imagine that when I arrived I said: „What am I doing with these people since I dance so differently?" But they got really hooked. When we were leaving, a man asked how tango was danced in Argentina. I explained to him that tango was how we danced it and not the way they were doing it. He couldn't believe it and said: „Well, if it is like this, I'll pay for your ticket." He was evidently a wealthy man. One day he came to Buenos Aires to see if it was true and said: „The only one who did not lie to us was Cacho, because here they don't dance the way we do." Then by word of mouth we started getting work. And for seven years I have been going to Europe and to the US to teach.

RT: And you never imagined you could live from this?

CD: Nooo! What am I going to imagine? Imagine, I was going to milongas, and it had been twenty years since I hadn't gone. The last thing I could imagine was that I would be teaching tango!

RT: Your wife didn't dance at all?

CD: No, no. She was never interested. Because I met her when I retired from tango. She is not interested in milonga. She does dance, yes, at parties sometimes, but she is not interested. She

doesn't go to milongas. That is why I don't understand when many people who live from tango don't go to the milonga. It is as if I taught swimming but never got in the water. How can one transmit experiences to the students so that they go to dance if one doesn't go to dance? It is different if you learn to do shows only. But truth is I don't understand the others. I don't understand how come they don't have the need to go to the milonga to dance. Then they teach a fantasia, they don't teach things that you can do in the ballroom. You cannot start on one side, go to the center and then go back. You continuously bump each other. Or stop whenever you feel like, and you have a line of people behind you waiting to go. Or do a boleó and hurt a person.

RT: Why do you think this occurs? Lack of respect, lack of knowledge?

CD: I think it is the instructors fault, because students do what they are taught. And one must be very careful with what one teaches. Because we must not only teach, but also be models for the students. Especially when one teaches the social dance, because the tango show is a totally different technique, which I respect tremendously, and I recognize is better all the time. There are all the time more professionals; they are always looking for perfection. The social tango we do is very different. Because the social tango is done by somebody who is 20, and somebody who is 80. The thing is to be able to have fun socially and to be in contact with all the people, including those with different cultural, political, or religious beliefs. To be able to get together and have a good time. A place where you can go after the pressures from work, from every day, and you can

embrace a person, listen to some music, and be able to have a good time. That is why I always make that distinction with tango. Our thing is more like a hobby.

RT: You mentioned you also had an experience as a tango DJ.

CD: Yes, when I was very young, but only for one year although I learned a lot. You have to keep 70% of the people dancing, that's what's most important, and you have to be creative. Listen to dance floor energy. You have to know how to perceive. And not look at the records, but look at the dance floor. You have to see what people like. Suddenly they like all d'Arienzo or all Biagi, and well - that's ok. But you have to know how to perceive this. Not to wrap up yourself looking at the records.

RT: And the older milongueros, did they give you advice?

CD: Yes, I learned a lot going to milongas. When I was young I listened to the old guys: „No, do this step, do that other step.” I listened to everybody, I wanted to do everything. And one day one man asked me: „Kid, I am going to ask you a question: for whom do you dance? For the men or for the women?” „I dance for myself,” I told him. „Then why do you listen to these people? You want to know if you are dancing well? You sit a little further back, if 4 or 5 girls look at you, you are dancing well. Now, if you want to know if you are dancing very well, you hide way back and if you have 4 or 5 girls who are searching for you with their eyes, you are dancing very well. Now, if you are sitting at the corner of one table and look somewhere else when