

argentango zum Thema MILONGA

TEIL 6

ein ARTIKEL von NEY MELO

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Etiquette: the Do's and Dont's of Inviting and Accepting

I have been thinking about writing this article for a long time, after having experienced many humorous and not so humorous episodes at the milonga. Many of us get caught up in learning the steps of the tango and then we get to the milonga and we don't know that there are certain unwritten rules about inviting and accepting or declining dances. While the cabeceo – or inviting people to dance with eye contact and a nod – is alive and well in Buenos Aires, we live in North America and as such our customs have to adapt. (It would be great if the cabeceo were used here because it empowers both men and especially women to dance with the partners they most want to dance with. But the thing is, the cabeceo only works when everyone does it). Therefore, I've put together a list of rules that, if somewhat adhered to, will make the milonga enjoyable for men and ladies alike.

The Rule of the *First and the Last*

The first and last tango of the milonga experience have a significant meaning in the mind of a milonguero/a. Ideally, you'd want to start off on the right foot; you'd want to begin dancing with a capable and smooth partner in order to prepare for the long night of dancing that lies ahead. But just as a good partner will raise you to the next level, a horrible partner will knock you down a few notches. The saying among milongueros is that it takes two good partners in a row to knock out the effects of one

him, make sure to greet both people, don't just grab him and drag him away. Yes, this happens, and yes it is rude.

Most of these rules may seem like they shouldn't need to be laid out, but you would be surprised. Anytime someone violates these rules, its because they are letting their ego get the best of them. In the end, we are all tango music lovers and we all love to dance, and we all must learn to get along at the milonga. Being aware of, sensitive to, and in tune with another person are what partner dancing is all about. Use these skills off the dance floor as well as on.

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then they are most certainly available. If they are sitting with all their attention focused on their companion, deep in conversation, eating, enjoying a drink and looking otherwise very comfortable where they are, approach with caution. See if you can catch their eye. If they look away, then save your invitation for later. Yes, this is a version of the *cabeceo*. If someone is in the midst of an animated conversation, do not hang around in the periphery of their vision, tapping your foot, waiting for the split-second when they pause for breath to interject your invitation. Ask someone else.

Ask Permission

Maybe some people will think this is very old-fashioned but I think it is nice: When you approach a couple who are dating or married and they are sitting together, it is nice to ask permission of the other when you want to ask one of them to dance. Often it is the man asking the other man for permission to dance with his lady. This is not because the man owns the woman or because the woman needs her date's permission. It is simply showing the courtesy of acknowledging the other human at the table when you come to take their companion away. I think it is rude to come up to a couple and ask one person without even saying *hello* or *excuse me* or *may I* to the other. This rule of course only applies if the couple is actually seated together. And this rule also applies to women asking permission of another woman to dance with her man. Ladies, if a gentleman is standing with his arm around his significant other and you come up and ask

bad one. Therefore, be careful about who you accept or invite as your first partner. The last tanda (a set of tangos) also has a significance. In Buenos Aires, it is said that you usually dance the last tanda with your lover or a potential lover. I take a more casual approach to this rule and I think that one should dance that last tanda with their significant other unless agreed otherwise. If you are single, then it's open game whom to dance with. However if you are dancing with someone whom you know has a significant other at the milonga, and the last tanda is announced, it is a nice courtesy to ask them if they need to go dance with that other person.

No Babysitting

Typical scenario: a lady is sitting down at a milonga and is approached by a gentleman who then invites her to dance. Rather than reject him outright, she says *no, not right now*, that she is tired, taking a break, waiting for a friend, etc. Instead of walking away, the guy decides to *sit down beside her* and wait for her to be ready to dance with him! This man has just committed what I call *babysitting*. I have seen both ladies and gentlemen commit this fiendish act. When someone says *no*, it means that you should stay away from him/her for a certain period of time. This leads me to the next rule.

The Duration of *No*

After discussing this with many milogueros and milongueras, I've come to the following conclusion. *No* means *no for a little while*. If you have been rejected, you cannot invite the same person to dance again at the beginning of the next tanda! Only after two, five, maybe more tandas later can you consider asking that person to dance again. Don't be a Stalker. Often times the person who rejected you may even track you down to claim that dance later on when they are ready – that is if they were truly tired in the first place.

The penalty Box

Rejecting someone does bring a consequence along with it. This is the rule that if you reject someone for a tango, you cannot dance that same tango with someone better who comes along. You have to, at least, wait for the next song or preferably for the next tanda. You can think of those minutes of waiting time as being in hockey's *penalty box*. Sometimes this is a double-edged sword because let's say you are in the *penalty box* but then a really amazing dancer who never asks you to dance finally asks you. You know that if you turn them down then you may never get your chance again, but if you say yes you will look like a jerk in the eyes of the first person that asked you (and then they may cease asking)! Sometimes you just can't win...

accepting invitations at the moment is to take their shoes off. This serves as proof that they really are taking a break, should anyone ask them. All they have to do is raise up the bare foot white flag. They can rest the balls of their feet from those 4 inch heels and not get hassled by potential dance partners. (On the flip side, they can also make a guy feel great if they do decide to dance when asked and say: *let me put my shoes back on for you.*)

Be perceptive

Pay attention to your potential partner's body language when you are getting ready to ask them for a dance. There are non-verbal signals that you should try to clue in to. Gentlemen, if you are headed towards a woman and she sees you and quickly turns away, reaches down to fiddle with her shoe strap, digs in her purse endlessly – it means she doesn't want to dance. If she even jumps up and heads for the ladies room, don't pursue her and grab her shoulder as she flees thinking *maybe she didn't see me*. If she notices you and maintains eye contact, or smiles, or waves, or in general looks pleased that you are headed her way, then by all means ask her! If you are not sure, go over and say hello, and judge by her reaction whether she wants to dance.

You can look around the room as well and guess which people are wanting to dance. If they are sitting or standing right by the dance floor, looking intently and wistfully at the dancers, looking around to catch the attention of potential partners, etc,

The *dance-with-me-now*-Card

Every now and then I will be invited by a lady to dance and I will politely refuse because I will be in the process of doing something that prevents me from dancing with her at the moment (getting a drink, taking a rest, on my way to the bathroom to change shirts, etc. etc.) This is when the lady will sometimes pull out the *dance with me now*-card by saying: *But I'm leaving the milonga in 5 minutes*. This makes me uncomfortable because now I feel pressured to dance with her right then and there. What makes matters worse is when I do succumb to the pressure, I dance with the person, and the person does not leave the milonga! I think a lot of people agree with me when I say that if you are going to use the "dance with me now" card by claiming that you are about to leave, then I better not see you at the coat rack at the same time as me at the end of the night.

Also, resist the urge to use excessive force when asking for a dance, ie grabbing your target and dragging him or her to the floor while exclaiming *Let's dance! Let's dance!* You should give the other person a choice of whether or not to dance with you, being polite and civilised about it. Bottom line: The dance is not enjoyable if the inviter (male or female) pressures the invitee. People want to dance out of pleasure, not duty.

The bare Foot *white Flag*

Because rejection can be hard to take, one method devised by some ladies of communicating to the men that they are not

Cutting in

I've seen old black and white movies where a Clark Gable or an Errol Flynn type will cut in between the beautiful, young starlet of the movie and her lame-duck partner who audiences forget about seconds later. Well, that only happens in the movies. I'm pretty sure that *cutting in* is banned in all milongas in all the countries in the world. Back when I was a beginner, I once had someone kindly ask me if they could *cut in*. I kindly cursed them and their family in my mind. That's how serious it is! Invitations to dance happen during the *cortinas* (the minute of ambient music that is played between the *tandas*) not when two people are standing and talking between the songs in a *tanda*.
PERIOD.

The Tanda

A DJ will usually play 3 or 4 songs of the same orchestra or style followed by a one minute *cortina*. This set is called a *tanda*. It is only when we want to stop dancing with our partner that we say thank you. Do not make the mistake of saying thank you after every tango. Try to wait until the end of the *tanda*. If we do not wait until the end, then we are conveying a message. Here is a quick breakdown of the messages:

We danced 4 songs: That was nice - I enjoyed it - Let's do it again in the near future - etc. etc.

We danced 3 songs: It was ok - Sorry, my feet hurt - Yikes! My ride home is leaving, gotta go!

We danced 2 songs: I've humored you long enough – You need to take more lessons – I thought the first bad tango was my fault, but now I see that its your fault.

We danced 1 song: It's just not happening – Maybe you should just sit and watch for a while – Please don't ask me to dance at this milonga again.

I truly believe that when women start using their power of declining dances and sending messages, then that is when the leaders will start working to improve their dance. It has to be a system of checks and balances. If we allow mediocre leaders to dance with amazing followers and vice versa, then why would they want to get better? I remember an argument that a friend and I had a long time ago. She was upset because a horrible leader basically manhandled her for a whole tanda and made her look and feel bad. I witnessed the whole thing and I didn't like what this leader did, but I also didn't like that my friend was too nice not to end the carnage early! Ladies, please use your power to say no to bad dances. It is better to sit all night, enjoy the music, and have a good conversation than to be dragged around the milonga floor like Hector was by Achilles after being slain in the movie Troy. There were many times in my tango infancy that I was rejected by good followers. I never took it personally. It only served to make me better.

I'm not saying you shouldn't dance with beginners. Everyone should do a dance or two with beginners at the milonga and look at it as community service and make them feel welcome. But there is a difference between a beginner and a bad dancer who just never gets it. There are a number of guys at any given milonga who have been dancing for a long time, they maul the ladies, and they never have any incentive to get better because they get all the dances they want anyway.

Be nice

Rejection is tough to accept. Feeling can be easily hurt. Please take this into consideration when rejecting someone. It might help to approach it as though you are going to break up with someone, making sure not to hurt their feelings but yet not giving them hope for a reunion.

For example: *Sorry, it's not you its me. Look, I am not in a good place right now, I want to just be alone for a while. I just want you to be happy. You deserve better. I know we danced last night, but that was then, this is now."*

For the rejectee, just accept it and move on. It doesn't help to reply: *But why? Just tell me why. Give me one good reason. I can change. Look, I'll be right here. Let me know if things change. But I thought we meant something. You suck.*

Trading

This is when leaders or followers end the tanda early and then finish it off with someone else. This is bad business. What makes it worse is that in order to facilitate this trade, one usually has to make eye contact and cut a deal with the new partner while still on the dance floor with the original partner! I've seen this happen at the milonga and all I can say is that this is "shady, shady, shady". Like I mentioned in rule 5, cutting in: Invitations to dance should happen during the cortinas (the minute of ambient music that is played between the tandas).