



# **ARGENTINE TANGO IN IOWA CITY. C.R. & SE IOWA FAQ – Frequently Asked Questions – v.2.1 A Non-Technical Look The Short & The Long of It**

*The following are some of the questions asked most often about Tango in general, and Tango in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Fairfield, and the SE Iowa Corridor.*

*If you have any questions you would like answered, please email me and I'll add them to this document.  
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## **BACKGROUND**

**Q: I've never danced Argentine Tango before. Can I do it?**

**SHORT: YES**

**LONG: YES**

**Q: I'm in my 20's. Is tango for me?**

**SHORT: YES**

**LONG: YES.** Tango is a dance you can begin with and grow with over time. It is a dance you can bring your experiences to as you go through life. It is a dance where depth matters. This does not come overnight. This comes in time. Any time is the time to start.

**Q: I'm in my 50's. Is tango for me?**

**SHORT: YES**

**LONG: YES.** Tango is a dance you can bring the passion, sadness, joy, frustration, success, failure--ALL of your life experience to. Many of the best social tango dancers are well into their 50's-60's-70's. In its simplest explanation, tango is a walking dance and a turning dance. One does not need to kick high or do fancy or blatantly athletic moves to be eloquent in tango. Of course it is much more than walking and turning, as well. It is a dance where depth matters.

**Q: Is this the tango I see in ballrooms or TV.**

**SHORT: Probably Not.**

**LONG:** Most of the time on TV shows and at social ballroom dances the tangos played are American Tango. This is characterized by music with a very sharp, strict tempo. The dance tempo is often "Slow-Slow-Quick-Quick-Slow." Strict tempo music is characteristic of most ballroom music. Movements in American Tango often involve sharp head turning and outstretched arms in promenade (side-to-side) position. Partners

do not dance close together. Movie Star Rudolph Valentino is known for his classic American Tango. It is said by many that American Style tango has flash but no passion. Argentine Tango is very big on passion and connection. Dancers often dance close together. It is highly improvisational and of the moment. It may or may not be flashy. At its best, it is danced for each other. Some social ballroom and Latin dances are now including a few Argentine Tangos in the course of a dance evening.

**Q: How is Argentine Tango music different from American Tango music?**

**SHORT:** Most of the time Argentine Tango music does NOT have a strict tempo (or a strict tempo that is easily discernable), but varying tempos.

**LONG:** In the course of one three-minute tango song the tempo may or may not change, and tone of the song can often vary widely. These musical changes can be interpreted by the dancers in whatever way they want—Argentine Tango is a very improvisational and interpretive dance. It is a conversation between partners. Older tango music has a “walking tempo,” that, while not strict in the ballroom sense, is consistent and lends itself well to “milonguero” or “close embrace” style tango. Some classic tango “orquestas,” such as Juan D’Arienzo’s, are known for their prominent, steady, energetic, clear tempo. Perhaps the most distinctive instrument in an Argentine Tango orquesta is the bandoneon (similar to a concertina). The music of Tango is said to express the passion and soul of the Argentine experience. As dancers grow in their skills and sense of the music they more clearly feel and express this soul and passion in their dancing and their connection to each other as they dance. Tango is a dance where depth matters.

**LOCAL HISTORY**

**Q: When did tango start in Iowa City and Fairfield?**

**SHORT:** Tango is everywhere all the time.

**LONG:** Organized efforts at bringing Argentine Tango to Iowa City were happening in the mid-1990’s, while it was brought to more public note in 1998 or early 1999. Oscar Lara, then a Professor at the University of Iowa, got together with some interested folks including Nora, Juan, Kameron, Adriana, Kate & Casey, Greg & Jane, and others, and began providing informal instruction. The early meetings were held above the dearly departed Great Midwestern Ice Cream store in downtown Iowa City. It had a nice wooden floor and a pleasant atmosphere for intimate dancing. Tango in SE Iowa is now danced at **The Iowa City Senior Center** (Iowa City Tango Club), **The Wesley Center**, both in Iowa City, and at **Arts Ala Carte**, previously in Iowa City, now at it’s new location in Coralville, and, until late 2004, at **Morningstar Studio**, in Fairfield. In 2007 Cedar Rapids Tango Club began holding Sunday afternoon “tea milongas” at **CSPS building**. USADance (USABDA) Cedar Rapids/Iowa City social ballroom dances now periodically include a few Argentine Tangos in the course of an evening’s event.

**PRACTICA (Practice) & MILONGA (Social Tango Dance Party)**

**Q: What should I expect at my first Practica?**

**SHORT:** Expect to have a good time learning & practicing Tango in an informal setting.

**LONG:** Practicas are informal teaching and practice sessions. It is where folks come regularly to either receive instruction (guided practica) in the foundations of tango (opening, walking, frame, turning, pivots, ochos...), or practice and help each other work on dance exercises, elements or moves learned in classes, workshops, from videos, and the like (open practica). It is a chance to dance with other dancers to better learn how to lead strong, or how to follow better. It is a relaxed, informal, but animated evening. It may become a high point in your week.

**Q: What should I expect at my first Milonga?**

**SHORT:** Expect a great social evening among others of all skill levels who want to dance or listen to Tango.

**LONG:** Expect to have fun listening and dancing to authentic classic Argentine Tango music, as well as more contemporary tango music. It is a chance to put into practice what you learned in practice! Expect to meet new people, share dances with them if you wish, and enjoy an evening where, if you are fortunate, you will be swept away by the passion and connection of Tango.

**Q: Where are Practicas and Milongas held?**

**SHORT & LONG:** Practica is held Tuesday nights at Iowa City Senior Center – 28 S. Linn Street 7:30PM-9:30PM – hosted by Iowa City Tango Club partnered with the Center. There is no charge for this Practica. Iowa City Tango Club holds a Milonga on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month. A Milonga is held at the Wesley Center, 120 North Dubuque, Iowa City—2 blocks North of Downtown Iowa City on the 4th Saturday of each month, sponsored by Gail Ireland. Cedar Rapids Tango holds a Milonga on the 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday afternoons at CSPA in CR.

**Q: Is there a cost?**

**SHORT:** Depending on the nature of the event, there is either a requested donation (free or nominal), or cost (nominal).

**LONG: Practica:** Iowa City Tango Club practicas are No Charge. **Milonga:** This event is generally \$5.00 per person. The goal is to provide a low cost, enjoyable evening of practicing or dancing. All Practicas and Milongas are open to the public. You and your friends are welcome, no matter what your level of dancing is.

**Q: Do I need to know how to dance before coming to a practica or milonga?**

**SHORT:** Definitely not.

**LONG:** Practicas have folks of all skill levels in attendance. Milongas in Iowa City are dancing events, although there may be a short lesson before the dance begins. Newer dancers tend to work on what they've learned, and more intermediate dancers are very supportive of new dancers, and will frequently ask them to dance. Don't be alarmed!

We were ALL beginners once! Be pleasantly surprised! Again, the range of dance skills at our milongas can vary greatly, and that's OK. In larger communities where tango has many followers, milongas are strictly dancing, listening, socializing, with no teaching component. If there is any teaching at a milonga in our SE Iowa region, apart from a pre-milonga class, it is not done on the dance floor, but in an "off-line" area away from the dance floor.

**Q: Can I bring friends?**

**SHORT:** Yes.

**LONG:** Yes. The more the merrier.

**Do I need to bring a partner to practica or milonga?**

**SHORT:** No

**LONG:** No. If you have a partner who wants to learn tango, or who already dances tango, by all means, bring him or her. Because tango is both a personal and a social dance, dancing with others in practices and at dance parties is encouraged. Although dancing with someone you don't know may feel awkward at first, remember tango is a dance of paradoxes. It is an introspective and reflective dance, and yet a very expressive and social dance. Dancing with others is a great way to learn and perfect how to Lead or Follow. There is no second-guessing or anticipation in Tango. The Leader Leads, the Follower Follows. Dancing with a variety of partners is also a great way to hone these skills and make new friends.

**Q: What about clothes?**

**SHORT:** Yes, please remember to wear clothes!

**LONG:** Seriously, for Practicas (practices) folks will dress informally; jeans, regular or dress slacks, jeans, or skirts or dresses. Whatever you want to practice your dancing in (with the possible exception of shorts) is fine. For Milongas (Argentine Tango dance parties), some folks stay with casual—most, however, will "dress to impress." For women, skirts or dresses that "dance well" are often the order of the evening. For men, slacks, dressier shirts, sometimes a tie or jacket, although it is not at all required. Have fun and dress the part! Most important in either Practicas or Milongas are shoes that will help you dance well. (Self-dancing shoes??)

**Q: What shoes should I wear?**

**SHORT:** Smooth leather bottom shoes or dance shoes with smooth leather or suede bottoms work best. If what you have are sneakers or running shoes, wear them—don't let the shoes keep you from starting to learn tango! Ideally, it's best to use different shoes for dancing than your daily street shoes (this helps protect the dance floor).

**LONG:** The best shoes for dancing both in practicas and at milongas are those with smooth leather or roughed leather bottoms. These allow dancers to have good, firm

contact and connection with the dance floor, while still allowing easy pivoting and turning so important in many tango elements. Shoes with roughed leather bottoms (suede) made especially for dancing can be purchased at dance supply stores. Women often begin with shorter heels (2 to 2 ½ inches) and, as they get more skilled, move to a higher heel. For dancing, women's shoes that have a strap around the ankle to keep the shoe secure on the foot, work the best. Some men and women who have danced for some time find that bringing 2 pairs of shoes to a dance helps if their feet get tired or sore, but the rest of the body, mind and soul wants to dance on! While some folks wear sneakers, running shoes, or spongy bottom shoes—these are difficult to dance well in. It is hard to pivot or turn smoothly. If what you have are sneakers or running shoes, wear them—don't let the shoes keep you from starting to learn tango! Both men and women refrain from wearing strong scents (perfume, cologne, aftershave).

**Q: Can I help with planning the dance parties?**

**SHORT:** Absolutely.

**LONG:** We would love you to help with these great events. Drop us an email, or let us know at a Practica or Milonga that you want to help. The success of Iowa City Tango and area tango efforts depends on folks helping in whatever way they can.

**Q: I don't have time to help plan but can I help at the dance?**

**SHORT & LONG:** Yes! You can help with setup--moving furniture, tables and chairs, getting the dance floor ready, helping at the welcome table during the dance, making a favorite dish or dessert to share; or with cleanup (undoing the above!). Drop us an email, or let us know at a Practica or Milonga, and we'll find tasks that will work for you and not take much time at all.

**Q: Why don't you dance like the people in that show I saw a few years ago?**

**SHORT:** Dancers on the stage dance Stage Tango, or "Tango Fantasia," and are dancing for an audience. Social dancers dance closer, more intimate styles for each other--an audience of two.

**LONG:** There are many styles of dancing Tango. What you see in shows like "Forever Tango," Sauro's Tango," "Tango Argentino" and others is show-style, stage-style, performance tango, and is most often highly choreographed. It is indeed extraordinary to watch—all the way up in the balcony. The dance movements are bigger and more dramatic and athletic than the social styles. The stage dancers are dancing for the audience. Stage tango music generally does not work well for social dancing. In the milonguero or close-embrace social styles, dancers dance for each other—if there is a show, it is for the couple (although it is still inspiring and enjoyable to watch!). The music was written and performed by the orquestas as music for social dancing. The movements are smaller and more intimate, reflecting the closer, more intimate nature of the dance, not to mention the reality of sometimes dancing on a crowded dance floor and still respecting other dancers' dancing space. Their dances are improvisation—created

and danced in the moment. Sometimes...you may dance a tango with someone and it becomes so special as it unfolds, that you can only marvel when it is over—tango is often called “the 3-minute love affair.” (Most tango songs are 3 minutes long).

## **ARGENTINE TANGO MUSIC--WHERE TO START**

**Q: I'd like to get some Tango CDs to listen and practice to. What are some good tango “Orquestas” to begin with?**

**SHORT:** Carlos DiSarli, Juan D'Arienzo, Alfredo DeAngelis, Francisco Canaro, Pedro Laurenz.

**LONG:** Carlos DiSarli is an excellent starting point. His music has a slower tempo, the rhythm is steadier (though not strict in the ballroom sense), and yet the orchestration is very expressive and romantic. Both beginners and advance dancers enjoy dancing to DiSarli's music. Juan D'Arienzo's music has a crisp, high-energy tempo, and is another favorite of regular tango dancers. Alfredo DeAngelis has excellent orchestrations. Francisco Canaro, leader of one of the most prolific orchestras in tango, is known for both his tangos and his milongas (a fast up tempo dance which predates the tango—not to be confused with the “dance party” which is called a Milonga). Your local record store may carry some authentic tango music, although it is more likely you'll need to visit stores in bigger urban areas or do some searching on the Internet for online stores that sell Argentine Tango music CDs made in Argentina. There are numerous other excellent orchestras, Pedro Laurenz, Miguel Calo, Anibal Troilo, Osvaldo Pugliese—these are all good starters.

## **WHY**

**Q: Why do you dance tango?**

**SHORT:** It's enjoyable.

**LONG:** Must dance tango.

## **MORE INFORMATION**

**Q: Where can I find more information on Tango?**

**SHORT:** The Internet has a wealth of resources on Tango.

**LONG:** You can join the SE\_IOWA\_TANGO Yahoo Announcement Group. This is an announcement-only list that will keep you informed on Argentine Tango events in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Ames, Fairfield, and the South East Iowa Region. Announcements on major events of our midwestern tango friends in Urbana, Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis are periodically sent out. Set your browser at this address:

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/se\\_iowa\\_tango/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/se_iowa_tango/)

Then click the “Join This Group” button. You can set your profile to receive all emails, a just special announcements, a daily digest instead of individual email, or no email but access to the Yahoo group home page and archive.

**Also**, your community college, university, college, or public library may have videos that can be borrowed, as well as contact information on tango lessons or groups in your area. One other “local” place to start is “el alma del tango-the soul of the tango,” a website based in Iowa City. It includes information on tango events in the Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and SE Iowa region. It also has links to some excellent worldwide resources on Tango terminology, etiquette, history, music, video and more. Do a search on “Argentine Tango” using your favorite Internet search engine and you’ll have enough reading to keep you way too busy to dance. So don’t get lost on the Internet—get out and DANCE!

<http://soli.inav.net/~dance/tango.html>