

Argentine Tango and why it may just be right for you!

I am a member of EU3A's Argentine Tango Group which meets here in Edinburgh on Monday afternoons at the Counting House, West Nicolson Street, and as such have been asked to provide a few words about Argentine Tango in general and why I think this and our group in particular may just be right for you.

Now I know the reaction of most of you reading this will undoubtedly be identical to everyone else's reaction on hearing this statement for the first time. For I know you all will inevitably be thinking "Argentine Tango! All that fancy leg flicking stuff we've seen on tele. No way, Jose. That all looks far too difficult, far too complicated, far too energetic, for us!"

So self-evidently the best place to start is by completely annihilating a few popular misconceptions about Argentine Tango. For Argentine Tango as danced socially is not really like anything you may have seen on Strictly Come Dancing. For that's not really Argentine Tango. That's just a choreographed show dance.

Because Argentine Tango is at its heart just three things. It is a walking dance. It is a partner dance. And it is an improvised dance. Once you have all three, you have Tango.

So let's take the first of these, it's a walking dance. Now I know there will be some of you out there who may think you can't walk that well these days - who may think this isn't for you. But guess what. I've had two broken legs. I don't walk that well at the best of times. And it hasn't stopped me.

Add in the fact that we're going to have to teach you a new way of walking anyway. A way that's going to help ease the pressure on your spine, improve your posture and help your balance. And then throw in the fact that there's only eight steps in this walking dance. Four on either leg. One forward, one back, one to the side, and a change of weight. And suddenly this all sounds a lot less daunting than it did two minutes ago. Doesn't it?

And what about the fact it is a partner dance. Doesn't that attract some of you out there? Particularly once I tell you that you don't need any existing dance partner to be able to join our class. For we are going to teach you all both how to lead and follow. For that is the best and fastest way of bringing you up to speed. The best and fastest way of teaching you how to dance properly and well.

So which of you ladies doesn't fancy the chance of being able to glide along a dance floor being led by, or perhaps leading, a partner who like yourself actually knows what they are doing out there on the dance floor?

And which of you gentlemen doesn't fancy the opportunity of being able to dance with the best dancer in the room, regardless of age, without having to worry about anyone getting over excited about the fact they may just be young enough to be your daughter or old enough to be your mother.

Because take it from me, folks, you won't have time to worry about anything out there on the dance floor. For you'll be far too busy worrying about maintaining the connection with your partner, maintaining the connection with the music that's so essential to Argentine Tango.

And it is maintaining that connection which is key to the final and most important item of all. The fact that Argentine Tango is an improvised dance. The fact that you are not dancing any set steps or sequences which your partner has been trained like a well fed chimp to recognise and follow.

All of which helps stop Argentine Tango ever becoming a bore: for it's far too challenging for that. All of which helps stop Argentine Tango ever becoming a chore: for it's far too challenging for that.

And it's all done by the leader conducting a silent conversation with their follower. A silent conversation in which the leader by the slightest movement of their chest invite their follower to contemplate the possibility of moving in a particular way and in a particular direction, wait to see if their invitation is acknowledged and accepted and if so then the pair of them step together whereupon the whole process of invitation and acceptance starts up all over again and continues throughout the dance.

And it is this element of having to concentrate on maintaining this silent conversation which makes Argentine Tango such a successful life tool. Because when you dance Argentine Tango you are not only exercising your body without really recognising that's what you are doing, but also exercising your mind as well.

Which is why some medical researchers think that Argentine Tango may well have a role to play in helping to delay the onset of diseases such as early dementia and the like. Something that might be of particular interest to some of you reading this very article today.

But the thing about Argentine Tango that is of particular interest to me – to someone like me who is clearly elderly, overweight and unfit - is the fact that it's fun, it's good company and it's something that even at this advanced age I can still do and enjoy.

So if there are any of you out there who think you might enjoy coming along and having a go at this, why not come along and give our next taster session at 2pm on Monday coming at the Counting House, West Nicolson Street, a shot. No previous experience needed. No partner required. The only thing we need is you.

Our long term aim is to progress on to organising afternoon tea dances, milongas, open to all – all with a view to giving you the chance to mix with people other than just people of our own vintage, however excellent that vintage may be. But for that we need more bodies. Which is why we need you.

The good news is that the Counting House, which is where we meet, is not only one of the best dance floors in Edinburgh but can easily accommodate up to a hundred people. So plenty of room for you all.

So if you are at all interested, please pass your details on to our group leader, Toby Morris, at new.toby@virginmedia.com and hopefully we will be seeing a lot more of a lot of you soon.

I N D Walker: February 2019

