Secrets to Enjoying Seattle's TangoMagic Festival

Welcome! Whether this is your 1ST festival or your 50TH, there are a few things to keep in mind so that you will have a more enjoyable time at TangoMagic. If you grew up in Buenos Aires, these things would likely already be second nature to you. If not, read on!

CLASSES
Go to the classes! Not only will you learn from great teachers, it is a good way to meet your fellow dancers and to get the early scoop on whom you will want to try to get a dance with later at the milonga.

- Arrive early enough so that you have time to register, put on your shoes, stretch, and warm up your body and your mind.

- Be honest with yourself about your current skill level for the class topic and the recommended minimum skill level for the class (see the Class Level Guide). You'll be less frustrated, and will cause less frustration for others.

- Be ready to learn. When the teacher is talking or demonstrating, pay attention to the teacher --not to your most recent mistake, or other distractions!!

GETTING DANCES and ETIQUETTE
Asking for a dance and asking to be asked to dance are art forms unto themselves. In general, it is best to ask for dances with your eyes and body language, not verbally. This “cabeceo” (“a nod of the head”) custom saves both parties the pain of a public rejection, removes the “obligation” of a verbal invitation, and empowers both men and women to dance with those with whom they would really like to dance. It requires patience, but is very rewarding.

- If you want people to ask you to dance, look around and make eye contact. If you don't want to be asked to dance, don't look around and don't make eye contact.

- If someone is not looking at you, they probably don't want to dance with you right now. If they are deeply engaged in conversation with someone and not looking at you, wait until they are more available.

- When you do make eye contact, it is generally up to the man to “ask” with a raised eyebrow and a nod of the head to the dance floor. If the woman accepts, the man may then come to her or meet her at the edge of the dance floor. If the woman declines, says “no”, or shakes her head, looks away, or ignores the eye contact, um.... that's a “no”.

- Unless you're psychic, it is best to wait until you hear the first song of the tanda before asking for or accepting a dance. Not every dancer is equally enjoyable to dance with in tango, vals, *and* milonga, or with every orchestra's musical styles. Think of it as trying to pair a fine wine with a fabulous entree.

- Tango is played in “tandas” or sets of 3 or 4 songs. Whether you begin on the first or a later song in the set or “tanda”, you will usually complete the set with the partner who has accepted your offer to dance. At the end of each set, a “cortina” or curtain is played. The cortina is usually non tango music and in the Buenos Aires tradition, the floor clears and the process of everyone looking for a new partner begins again at the start of the new tanda. A simple “thank you” at the end of the tanda will suffice, but complimenting your partner’s dance will let your partner know that you would like to dance with them again.

NAVIGATION and FLOORCRAFT

Above and beyond the complexities of dancing with your partner and the music, there is the additional complexity of dancing with everyone else in the room. We expect that the dance floors at TangoMagic will be quite crowded. It takes a lot of experience to dance well on a crowded dance floor. For everyone's benefit, here are some secrets to successful, advanced floor craft:

- Pay attention to the music. One of the wonders of tango is the appearance of the whole floor moving in unison to the music.

- Pay attention to the other dancers. When you enter the dance floor, don't "make an entrance". Instead, *join* the others who are already on the floor. Merge at the same speed at which traffic is already moving. Wait until there is clear spot, or wait until the next song. Don't try the latest "move" you just learned in class where there is no room to do it.

- Pay attention to the line of dance. In addition to the general counter-clockwise movement, there are generally two (sometimes three) unmarked "lanes" of dance that you are responsible for maintaining. The more experienced dancers will generally dance in the outer lane of the dance floor. On a good dance floor the outer lane will control the tempo of the floor. If you have difficulty dancing in the outer lane, move towards the center of the floor where you will be more comfortable.

- When possible allow a "bubble" of dance space of at least 1 body-width in every direction around you and the other couples. Leads are responsible for the safety of their follows. Many follows will dance with their eyes closed. Do not put them in a compromised position where they might be speared or go careening into the dancers around them. Follows are also responsible to for being aware of other dancers and should keep their boleos and embellishments low and refined when the floor is crowded.

- Never leave an inordinate amount of space between you and the couple in front of you. This is something you can control. If 3 or 4 couples on a large dance floor slow down it can disrupt the flow of the entire floor. Always feel that you are gently pushing on the couple in front of you. This will keep the floor moving.