

The impact of the Golden Age period on the world of the Argentine tango community

Csongor KICSI¹

Abstract: *Music and dance have been throughout the time a symbiotic connection in their development, providing people with both a way of expression and a way of life, and not least, offering a beneficial therapeutic effect on the human body and psyche. Just as art therapy have always been a manifestation and a harmonious healing alternative, compared to the traditional treatments, regardless of their form.*

But why do people choose this particular style, and what are the reasons for practicing this Argentine dance for such a long time? Do only the dance and the "Golden Age" period they represent an attraction point, or are there other reasons why people become passionate about in this Argentine dance?

Key-words: *Argentine tango music, Argentine tango Golden Age, Argentine tango community, music therapy, dance therapy*

1. Introduction

Today, various dance communities enjoy a large number of practitioners, be them communities and associations for ballroom dances, or social dances, that can be divided into several branches and styles, from salsa, bachata and kizomba, to lindy hop, swing, boogie-woogie, etc., or, for the purposes of this research, Argentine tango. All these communities represent a harmonious and pleasant environment, offering numerous beneficial effects, and combining physical activity with art (Kicsi, Ursu et al. 2018, 49).

People, through their activities, have created history, communities, and influences, aiming to attracting more people in one direction or another, through music and/or dance.

¹ National University for Physical Education and Sports, csongor.kicsi@gmail.com

Through this research we want to demonstrate the impact and importance of the “Golden Age” period in the life of dancers’ part of this global Argentine tango community, indicating their preference for both the “Golden Age” and the most representative orchestras of this period.

As well known, Argentine tango is a social dance, danced in couple at dance parties, and based on certain unwritten rules of ethics and good manners. Participants can enjoy the dance regardless of their age, ethnicity, social status and sexual orientation, as dance couples can be formed by a man and a woman, but also by two men or two women, as long as the rules and the particular principles of the dance and of the dance party - called *milonga* – are observed.

According to Brown S.A, the social Argentine tango is an improvisation dance, based on a few basic elements: the dance position – or, as it is called, "the hug", walking forward and backward, side steps, cross-legged walk, turns/pivots, disassociation, stops, weight changes, embellishments and variations of figures and sequences specific for their dance: *paradas y pasadas, boleos, ganchos, giros, baridas*, etc. (Brown 2014, https://www.tejastango.com/beginning_tango.html)

The wonderful part about musicality in dance is that it is not necessary for the dancers to learn and memorize a large number of complicated and complex sequences in order to make their dance more special, but from a certain point forward, after having acquired and learned well the essential basics of this Argentine dance, their dance will always change and improve, by mere musicality, in a more musical, more balanced and pleasant dance (Kicsi 2019, 55). This in addition to the fact that the influence of different types of music can significantly modify the interpretation and performance of the improvised dance. Just as a more rhythmic and alert music can impose faster and shorter steps and sequences, a slower and more romantic or dramatic music can suggest and inspire to slower and longer steps, with more breaks and internalized experiences (Kicsi, Ursu 2019, 104). We can very well say that this dance is like a puzzle being constructed differently every time. Women and men contribute their own style and embellishments to the dance, based on the techniques learned, and according to their own personality, which subsequently add significantly to the enthusiasm and unpredictability of the experiences. Even if the dancers follow certain conventions, the partners never know how their leader will construct the dance, how he will add an embellishment, or interpret the music. The surprises possible in this dance are what make it so special and unique. It really takes two to tango, because the dance does not only refer to the man leading and the woman following. Both partners have important

things to contribute equally - just like in a balanced conversation. (Brown 2014, https://www.tejastango.com/beginning_tango.html)

Tango is danced counter clockwise on a dance floor, much like a horse race. The dancers try to stay on the outer edge of the dance floor and away from the central space. Only when there are many dancers at a tango event, and they do not all fit into one dance course, three or more dance concentric dance courses will be formed. (Brown, 2014, https://www.tejastango.com/beginning_tango.html)

The dance events, from an organizational point of view can be open to all people, or can approach certain themes.

But regardless of the event type, the music they dance to be made by original songs, recorded by established orchestras, played in different forms, depending on the possibilities. Worldwide, at most Argentine tango events the songs are played in electronic forms (.mp3, .mp4, .flac, etc.) by a tango DJ. But there are also many tango DJ's who enchant and energize the evening by offering and playing from vinyl recordings; or in special cases, by contemporary orchestras, who generally perform songs of established orchestras, and rarely compose a new ones, so in a way they still keep to the old patterns, rhythm and style of tango. Because the way and the quality of the songs recording, together with the acoustics of the room or of the performance space, can have a major impact on both the group energy and that of each individual, which can in turn significantly influence the dance and the event. The harmony and energy are complemented by the DJ's style, more exactly by collecting and ordering the songs according to his personal orientation, to how he aims to influence the unfolding of the event (more romantic, more dramatic, or more energetic, etc.), taking carefully into consideration the style and particularities of each tango orchestra.

Among the Argentine tango styles, we should mention "tango nuevo" or in other words "electro-tango", where the name itself alludes to a new style with electronic influences, but still preserving the old rhythm of this music and dance style.

2. The typical Argentine tango orchestras

The typical orchestra, otherwise known as "sexteto tipico" or ("traditional sextet") according to Michael Lavocah, around the 1920, was a band formed by the following six elements: a piano, a contrabass, two violins and two bandoneons. Their placement on the stage was generally with the piano on the left side of the

stage, with the contrabass on the right side, and between them the bandoneons in the front row, and the violins in the back row. But according to some bibliographic sources and old pictures, it can be noticed that the contrabass was sometimes placed on the side of the piano. Together with the low notes of the piano, it provided the low notes of the orchestra (Lavocah 2012, 220).

However, starting with the “Golden Age” of tango, around 1935, the orchestras began to grow, both in terms of number of musicians and qualitatively. The typical orchestra was now formed by a piano, a contrabass, four violins and four bandoneons, and in time it continued to grow, adding more musical instruments in both in number and in variety.

Most orchestras also began to have singers, who completed and beautified the Argentine tango with their complex and deep lyrics. And while most of the lyrics are in general sad and dramatic, they are still an essential part of this mature and profound style of music and dance.

Last but not least, the conductors of the orchestras also played a major role, as most conductors were not just the orchestra leader with the conductor's wand in hand, such as Juan D'Arienzo or Francisco Canaro, but they coordinated and were part of the orchestra, such as Osvaldo Pugliese or Carlos Di Sarli with the piano, or Anibal Troilo and Astor Piazzolla with the famous bandoneon.

Most Argentine tango orchestras did not play only one style, but also *tango vals*, preserving the specific rhythm of the Viennese waltz, and *milonga*, where the African rhythm of the *habanera* can easily be recognized. According to the great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, both words *tango* and *milonga* are pseudo-African words, where *milonga* meant initially just a music, but later would also designate, under the influence of tango, a sprightly and merry dance (Borges 2016).

But there were also some orchestras that also played candombe and/or foxtrot, such as the Ricardo Tanturi, Enrique Rodriguez, Francisco Canaro orchestras, etc.

3. “The Golden Age” period of Argentine tango

The “Golden Age” of the Argentine tango music and dance, according to most of the authors, was between 1935 and 1952, therefore including a large number of Argentine tango orchestras, composers and performers (Kicsi 2019, 54). Music became ever more rhythmic, complex and richer, posing new difficulties and

challenges for the dancers, whose number also grew exponentially. This is also how the notoriety of the Argentine tango began to spread more and more throughout the world, featured also on the radio, in movies, restaurants, cafes, and not last on the theatre scenes.

In the “Golden Ag” of the Argentine tango we cannot miss extracting from the large number of orchestras and mentioning the names of the four main orchestras, or in other words, according to Michael Lavocah, the “Big Four”:

- Anibal Troilo
- Carlos Di Sarli
- Juan D’Arienzo
- Osvaldo Pugliese

These four great orchestras were the most representative among the composers and performers in the history of the Argentine tango, all four having completely different styles and particularities, inspiring and delighting both dancers and new orchestras, who either derived from these "Big Four", as former pianists or bandoneonist in them (such as Rodolfo Biagi, the pianist of Juan D’Arienzo, or Astor Piazzolla, the bandoneonist of Anibal Troilo), or were influenced by their style, taking on particularities and basic elements, in terms of compositions and interpretation.

Last but not least, even if most of the authors mention only these “Big Four” orchestras mentioned above, there is a contradiction – the mentioning of the name of Francisco Canaro orchestra, who placed behind the four, in the fifth position in the history of orchestras from the world of the Argentine tango, representing different style of music compared to the “Big Four”, less complex but instead easy to dance and interpret by any dancer in the world.

4. Research methodology and conduct

In this research participated social dancers, professional dancers, champions, instructors, organizers and DJ’s worldwide, from the world of Argentine tango, by filling in an online form containing the following essential questions: initial, sex, age, country of origin, years of tango experience, how/why they began with tango, what were the reasons to remain within the community, favourite Argentine tango orchestra, favourite period of Argentine tango music (counted by 10 years intervals), and last but not least, which dance style they (tango-waltz, milonga or tango nuevo).

All forms have been filled in and registered in electronic format, on the own responsibility of each participant in this research project, provided that their identity would not be made public, and the results would be interpreted and published for scientific purposes.

5. Presenting and interpreting the figures (Figures)

For this research paper, the questionnaires were filled in by 140 participants, out of which 85 women and 55 men, with ages ranging from 21 to 78 years, from 4 continents and 25 countries in total, with a dance experience between 1 to 30 years.

The reasons why and how they began with this Argentine dance varied greatly from one person to the other, all having their personal stories, motivations and influences: from curiosity for this particular dance, to passion, challenge or friends' influence.

By means of the following diagrams we can see how the large variety of reasons and influences is summarized in a much smaller number of factors as to why they continued the dance activity in this global community.

Based on Figure 1 (Dance/Music/Community/Culture/Other), we can conclude that although the reasons for starting were numerous, more than half of the people asked in the global Argentine tango community because of the dance itself - a percentage of 58.16%, and a number of 81 people.

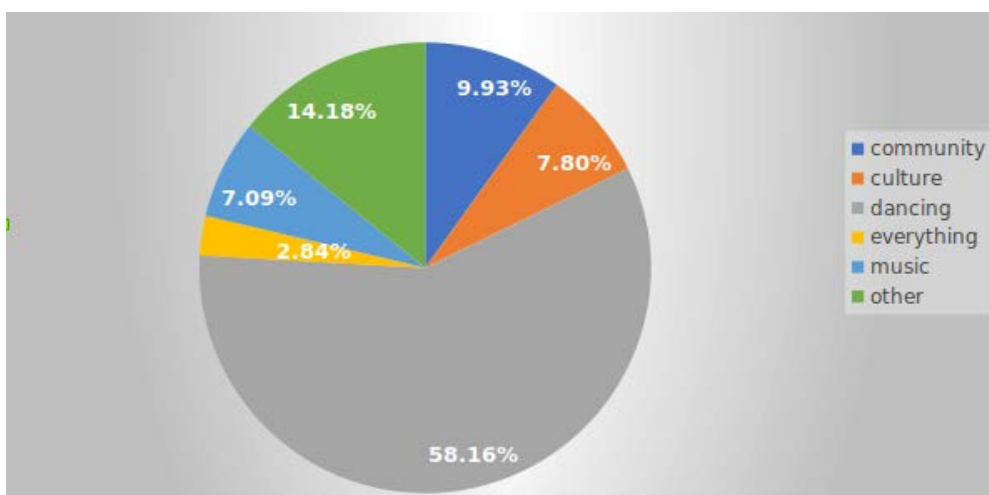


Fig. 1. *Dance/Music/Community/Culture/Other*

The rest, in a percentage of 14.18% (20 people), remained for various other personal reasons: 9.93% (14 people) for the sake of the global Argentine tango community, 7.80% (11 people) for the whole culture of this special dance, 7.09% (10 people) for tango music, and only 2.84% (4 people) did not want and/or could not choose one of the first options, and they indicated: everything.

As mentioned above, from the “Big Four” orchestras, followed by orchestra Francisco Canaro, in Figure 2 (Favourite tango orchestra), it is stated that the favourite orchestra of most dancers is the Orquesta Juan D’Arienzo - with a percentage of 25.53% (36 persons), followed closely by Orquesta Osvaldo Pugliese - with a percentage of 24.11% (34 persons).

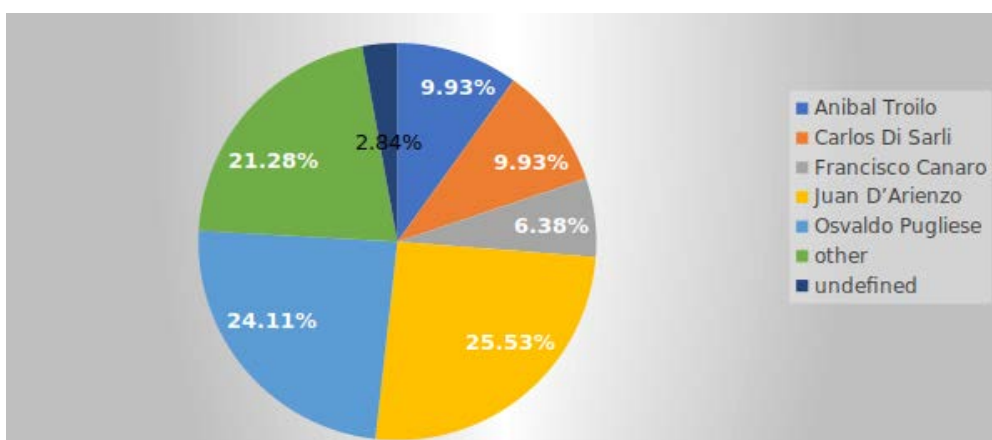


Fig. 2. Favourite tango orchestras

Therefore, we can see that a percentage of 21.28% (30 people) had as preferences other 20 old and typical Argentine tango orchestras than the 5 main ones mentioned in the third chapter, such as Orquesta Rodolfo Biagi or Orquesta Enrique Rodriguez, etc.

Last but not least, out of the “Big Four”, people chose Orquesta Anibal Troilo and Orquesta Carlos Di Sarli in equal percentages - 9.93% (14 people each), and the remaining 6.38% (8 persons) chose Orquesta Francisco Canaro, and only 2.84% (4 persons) of the participants did not yet have a favourite orchestra.

As suggested also by the title, namely that in this research paper the accent and inquiry lie with the "Golden Age" period, in Figure 3 (Favourite tango period), it is confirmed that indeed, the "Golden Age" period of the Argentine tango is the favourite of most of the dancers: a percentage of 42.55% (59 people) prefer the

period 1940 - 1950, followed by the periods 1950 - 1960 and 1930 - 1940 with an equal percentage of 12.06% (17 persons each), equal also to the percentage of 12.06% (17 persons) of participants who have not yet defined their favourite Argentine tango music period. The 6.38% (9 people), who chose the first half of the Golden Age period, 1935-1945, must also be noted here.

It should be mentioned for this figure that in the online forms the participants were asked to indicate a period among intervals of 10 years.

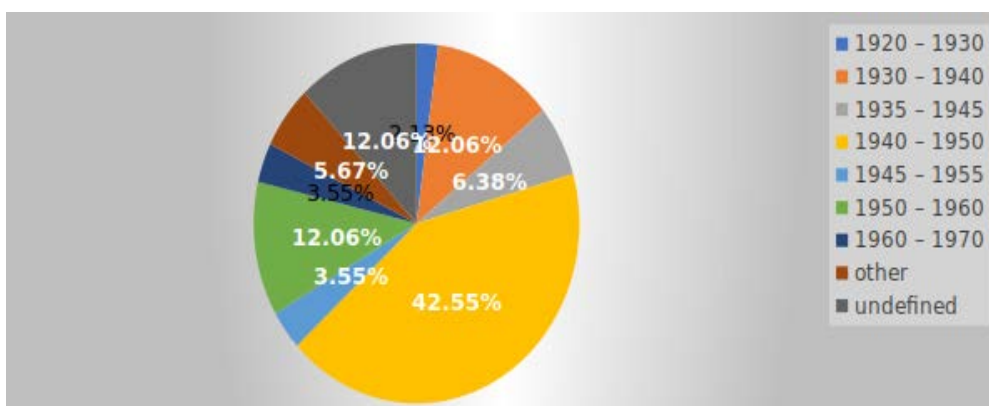


Fig. 3. *Favourite tango period*

Last but not least, since Argentine tango encompasses several dance styles, and the request to choose a single dance style, posed great difficulties for many participants, in Figure 4. (Tango Waltz/Milonga/Nuevo/All) we can see that most people chose tango, with a percentage of 60.99% (85 people). This was followed by tango-waltz, with a percentage of 19.15% (27 people), then by milonga, with a percentage of 13.48% (19 people), and last but not least 4.96% (7 people) have chosen tango nuevo. As with the other charts, we can also find a small percentage of 1.42% (2 people), who could not and/or did not want to choose a favourite dance style from the world of Argentine tango.

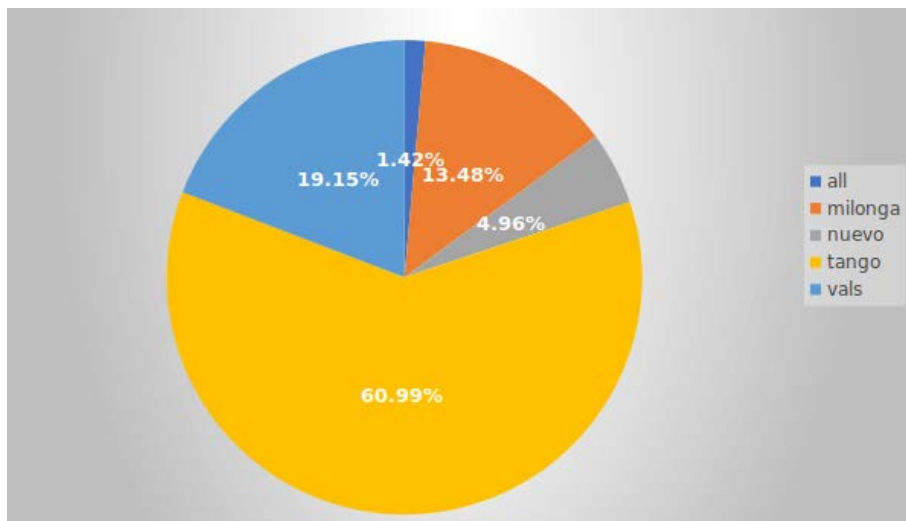


Fig. 4. *Tango/Tango-Waltz/Milonga/Nuevo/All*

6. Conclusions

Based on the research completed by filling in the online questionnaires, by 140 persons on 4 continents and from 25 countries, we can conclude that the hypothesis of the paper is confirmed, namely that the global Argentine tango community with a total percentage of 54.60%, i.e. 76 people, prefer and are passionate about the “Golden Age”, which is, as the name suggests, the most effervescent period in history of this traditional Argentine dance.

It was also confirmed, with a total percentage of 69.50%, namely 98 people, the importance and favouritism for the “Big Four” orchestras, who were great representatives and leaders of the “Golden Age”, influencing and guiding many other famous orchestras in the history of Argentine tango.

It needs to be said though that these figures do not express exclusivity, but merely preferences. Because there is always room for something new and different. People come and decide to stay in this international community, for the sake of both Argentine tango and the community itself, which is a fragment of Argentine culture but also a personal story in the life of every dancer in the world, providing interest and opportunities to both newcomers and newly formed orchestras, who constantly strive to preserve the old style and particularities of the

great orchestras of the “Golden Age” period, by reproducing and composing tango songs for dancers of this passionate and unique dance.

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