

Essay on the tango, When tango is danced.

My tango teacher is very soulful. Soulful because he has the courage to ask his student, a beginner, me: what is the tango; when is the tango danced.

“What do you see?” he asked to me, “in a milonga? What do you feel?”

We were in the street, just outside of the school, when he posed this fatal question to me.

“What is the tango - when the tango is danced.”

I took leave of my professor with restlessness, without idea of how to respond to him. What possible answer could I give to my maestro, who practices every day, who is inspired by tango every second of his life?

I was walking the streets near Abasto, walking slowly, by the shade of the trees, imagining ganchos and boleos, barridas and sacadas and the simple beauty of the caminata. I went to classes, practicas and milongas, watching the steps, watching the expressions of the dancers of several levels and styles. Only to understand how distant the answer was to the question that my professor had given me.

I spoke with people. They told me that tango is death, and life, the past and present, that it is a sad feeling that is danced, that is the dance of love bitter. It carries the history of Buenos Aires on its shoulders, it is an expression of the soul, a dangerous play - between sorts: man and woman. I listened to a dancer with much experience say that the tango is very difficult, and then heard a beginner that is it very easy, without thinking that neither was mistaken.

I looked for a beautiful phrase that I could finish off and condense all that to into a proclamation that I could present to my maestro. In vain. I could not conclude.

Tired of looking for answers, I went to a milonga, without the least idea of what tango could be - when the tango is danced. I invited a stranger to dance, without knowing her, knowing myself, knowing the history behind the tango that the orchestra played.

Today, I can't remember exactly what happened during this tango and the tangos that followed. And I would not recognize the woman with whom I danced that night if I passed her in the street. Or perhaps it was a man, it made no difference. Loose too is my memory of steps that we danced, how they were placed. But I know, that in this white page, without words, an inexplicable encounter occurred. Beyond our pasts. Beyond the history of the tango, the words of the song. Beyond the genre. Ay, what triviality to think that the man leads and the woman listens, when in a true tango the man also listens, leading, and the woman also leads, listening.

This encounter happened in the land of tango, where one always must be foreign. Because when one takes control of this land and thinks to know what it is, and capitalizes the sense of its soil, one can no longer listen the other, and there will never be an encounter in the present.

What is the tango, when the tango is danced?

The tango is not to know what the tango is. It is to look for it with the another. Listening to the floor, its own flesh, and the flesh of the other. It is an attempt, of not doing anything, and later doing everything.

Now, take this piece of paper and the word it holds, and destroy them, because they too will not be able to explain to you what is the tango - when the tango is danced.

for Juan of DNI // by Marco Demian Vitanza

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