

**The
El Corte
Tango DJ
Manual**

Mayday DJ 2010

1 Introduction

For a number of years El Corte organizes a Mayday DJ workshop on the Sunday of the first May weekend.¹ We felt a need to restructure and update the workshop. Of course we are very grateful for Ad van den Brekel's preparatory work, which did provide an extensive summary we used for so many years in previous DJ workshops.

1.1 Purpose

This workshop is primarily set up for people who want to start (or have recently started) DJ-ing in a milonga. We want to provide these DJ's with information, experiences and tools, that will make their jobs easier. Mind you, we don't want to impose a set of rules. Use them as a guideline or a framework to test your own notions. Everybody is free to go his or her own way. The only thing we will do is hand you some material to think about, which might open doors for you, which otherwise might have remained shut.

This set up will also make this workshop interesting for experienced DJ's, because there always is a chance of getting stuck in the groove and fall into a routine way of playing the same music in the same structure over and over again. Last but certainly not least, this workshop is also for people who are interested in tango music and/or want to give their local DJ feedback, but don't speak the lingo.

1.2 What to expect?

What are the subjects we will deal with in this workshop? In the first five chapters we focus on the *art of DJ-ing*: circumstantial situations, classification of tango music, structuring a milonga and do and don't for tango DJ's.

In the final four chapters we treat some *miscellaneous* aspects of tango DJ-ing: sound engineering, laptop DJ-ing, copyrights, suggested reading and important tango orchestras.

¹ I think El Corte started the DJ workshop in 1995 or 1996.

1.3 Feedback

If you want to give us feedback, we would like that very much. You can send it to a.degraaff@hetnet.nl. Finally a word of thanks, because we could not have written it without the support and feedback of countless tango DJ's, tango teachers and dancers from all around the world.

Nijmegen,

May-July 2005

Last update: December 2009

Arnoud de Graaff

Eric Jeurissen (supervisor)

2 Circumstantial conditions

2.1 Introduction

A DJ can make or break a milonga. However, even before starting to play music, there are some circumstantial conditions, a DJ should pay attention to. Success or failure of a milonga depends on it. Not all these circumstantial conditions can be influenced. Some things you just have to accept and learn to live with or work around them. The conditions that do contribute to the success of a salon are: dance space, dancefloor, lighting, time, popularity, special activities and dancers.

2.2 Dance space

Is there a single hall to dance or are there more rooms? How is the dance floor situated? Where is your workspace and how is it situated? To start with the last question: the DJ's workspace is best situated close to the dance floor. A place which is a little bit higher than the dancefloor is good, but not absolutely necessary.

In a situation like this, a DJThe DJ has a good view of the dance floor and that is the place where it is all happening. And also to feel the atmosphere on the dance floor, a place close by is logical.

To illustrate this, I quote Brwester and Broughton: “The truth about DJ-ing is that it is an emotional, improvisational art form and here the real scope for artistry lies. A good DJ isn't just stringing records together, he is controlling the relationship between some music and hundreds of people. That's why he has to see them. That's why it couldn't be a tape. That's why it is a live performance. That's why it is a creative art. Music is a hotline to people's emotions, and what a DJ does is use this power constructively to generate enjoyment. Obviously his medium is music, but that's just a means to an end. In a very real sense his primary medium is emotion; the DJ plays the feelings of a roomful of people.”²

² Brwester and Broughton, Last night a DJ saved my life, 2006:19.

The music should be heard everywhere, but maybe not in all places as loud as on the dance floor.. Most dancehalls have a space for dancing and a space for lounging (drinking, talking, sitting down and meeting people to dance with and maybe a little flirting). If possible, the sound volume should be a little less in the lounge area than in the dance area. If people have to shout, the music is too loud.

The way a space is arranged with tables, chairs and other furniture is also essential for traffic and communication. See to it that there are not too many obstacles. It hinders people in mixing freely and may cause a salon to be static.

Tables and chairs should be situated at the side of the room in a way that makes it possible for people to mix freely. If this is not possible, you can try to create more dynamics in a static crowd by playing cortina's, specials or shorter series of tangos, valsas and milongas.

Too many tables and chairs will also cause a milonga to become static. People come in and form groups and tend to stay in this group, which has a tendency to claim a table and chairs. If there are chairs or couches for approximately 40% of the dancers, this usually will be enough to prevent a milonga from becoming too static. The reason is that if dancers want to sit they have to choose a seat which is vacant. They can't claim a chair as their own.

In some traditionally orientated milongas in Buenos Aires this is different. Every visitor is assigned a chair on entering the milonga. Contacts are realized via the game of the eyes and a nod of the head.³

2.3 Dance floor

What is the quality of the floor? How big is the floor? Are there obstacles on the dance floor?

³ Cabeco refers to the manner of asking each other to dance; that is not verbally but via the eyes and a nod with the head. In Buenos Aires cabeco is a natural phenomenon. Outside Argentina, in the western world it seems out of place, although some milonga organizers make brave but futile attempts to introduce cabeco in the western world.

The roughness or texture of a floor will determine if it is fit for dancing or not (and it will also influence the way you dance too!). Most times the roughness of a floor can be treated, although not all dancehall owners are happy if you do. Always ask if it is allowed to make the floor more slippery (in case it is too strewn) or less slippery (when it is like an ice rink's floor). Recently I encountered a milonga organizer who advised (via his website) the dancers who were interested to come to his milonga to bring 'slippery' shoes, because he knew his floor was a bit rough.

Try to adapt the music to the state of the floor. Don't play 'big' or very fast music on a slippery floor, for it invites people to dance big or too fast and accidents are waiting to happen. The bigness of a floor is relative. If there are many dancers on a small floor it is crowded. In this case, play 'intimate' music. If there are few dancers, there is enough space and you can play 'big' music like Osvaldo Pugliese.

Some dancehalls have obstacles on and around the dance floor, which can't be removed. Think about a row of pillars. Obstacles can create tricky situations during a milonga. Sometimes it is wise to fill the space around or between obstacles with tables and chairs, but this is not always possible. If there is enough space to dance around the obstacle, no such actions are needed.

2.3 Lights

Is it possible to adjust the lights to the atmosphere of the night, the music you are playing or an atmosphere you want to create or change? Are there colour lights?

The lights play an important role in creating an atmosphere. By playing with lights you can accentuate the music or trim down the effects that music has on an audience. Colour lights (if available) do enlarge these possibilities, but there is also downside to this; it may create a restless atmosphere if you use them too often.

Red lights usually symbolize romantic, even 'sexy' music like Fresedo's and Calo's slow lyrical tangos. However, too much and too long red lights subconsciously irritates your audience. This is the case with all types of colour lights: too long and too much is annoying. It

is wise to vary colour lights regularly. Blue and green neon lights have a cool feeling, which you can use for tango nuevo's and neotango's. When there are no colour lights and/or dimmers, the possibilities of playing with lights are limited, but it is not impossible. You can decide to use or not to use a certain light. Or you can aim a lamp in another direction or move it to another place. Experiment with lights. DJ-ing is more than only playing some music. A DJ also has a responsibility for creating an atmosphere people enjoy. DJ-ing can be, just like pop concerts, a multi media experience.⁴

2.5 Time

What is the duration of a milonga? When is the heart (high point) of the event? On what day of the week is it organized? Which season? Most milongas have a fixed time of beginning and ending. So as a DJ you know how many time you have. You can make a scenario that you can adjust depending on what sort of responses you get. Or you can improvise all the way. Whatever you like!⁵

Open ended milongas will make it more difficult but do pose a greater challenge. Will you slowly let it go down (until the last dancing couples leaves the floor) or do you create a climax at a certain time, after which people go home?

Most milongas will take from 3 to 8 hours. Whether a milonga is a short one or a long one does make a difference. A long milonga has a different dynamic than a short one.

An all night milonga does require a long stretch of concentration. To stay alert for 6 to 8 hours in a row is mentally exhausting. Take care in

⁴ In progressive rock it is quite normal to use lights to enhance the effects of the music. This is certainly not a new concept. As early as 1911 the Russian composer Alexander Skryabin used “colored lights to flood the concert hall during the performance of his symphonic poem *Prometheus*.” (Eduard Macan, *Rocking the classics. English progressive rock and counterculture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997:63).

⁵ To be honest, I don't consider a DJ who just puts on an at home prepared scenario as a real DJ. How can you foresee what a milonga will be like, when you prepare a scenario at home?

preparing yourself for it (maybe a draft scenario, you can improvise with or to fall back on when it doesn't go the way you want it to go). See to it that you are rested as you start.

The main characteristic of a long milonga is that the audience you start with will not be the same you will end with. Dancers can be divided into three groups:

- The early birds: they arrive early and leave on time (family, job, other activities and obligations, etc.).
- The latecomers: they arrive late and usually stay until the end.
- The diehards: they don't want to miss anything, they will be there from the first until the last tango.

Somewhere in the middle of a milonga you will notice a 'changing of the guards'. The early birds (are planning to) leave and the latecomers (start to) arrive. This will create some unrest. For a DJ this creates a challenging dilemma. At the same time he has to create a musical climax for the early birds and create rest for the newcomers who start to dance.

A short milonga has a different dynamic. The 'changing of the guards' effect will be much less prominent or even absent. Usually you will be able to make one musical arc from begin to end. In longer milongas there will be more musical arcs.

If you use special music to break the habits of dancers, use them in the beginning sparingly or not at all.⁶ Later in the evening, when the dancers have built up confidence and acquired a dancing routine, you can play specials more often.

The day of the week a salon is taking place is also important. A salon on weekdays will often end earlier than in a salon in weekends. In weekends you can expect the atmosphere to be more relaxed than on weekdays. This effect will be intensified when the day(s) before were also spent dancing. The El Corte brunch salon is a good example.

⁶ About breaking the habits: see chapter 4 and 'DJ Arnoud wil ondeugend zijn' in La Cadena, September 2004 (nr. 99). For DJ's who read dutch: La Cadena published a series of interviews with (mostly Dutch) DJ's in the period April 2003 till December 2004.

The season certainly has an effect on what a milonga will be like. In the summer you can dance outside, while in winter this is not advisable. Less dancers will come to a milonga when it rains.

2.6 Popularity

It is difficult to estimate in advance how many people will come to a salon. There are a lot of complicating factors:

- What is the weather like?
- How was the advertising?
- Is there another salon (or another competing event) close by?
- What is the reputation of the salon?
- Is the salon well organized?
- Is the dancehall easy to find?
- Is there a good parking facility?

Suppose all traffic lights are green and a lot of people come to dance: for a DJ there are some pitfalls. What are those pitfalls you should pay attention to?

- Don't play too big, energetic music. You are inviting dancers to bump into each other. Too much bumping spoils everybody's fun, for a collision tends to influence far more than just four dancers. Certainly at the busiest time of a milonga you will have to play not too energetic and big music. Stick to rhythmical mainstream music from la epoca de oro.
- If you use specials, use them sparingly. Specials tend to excite dancers and afterwards you will have to cool them down again. To calm a crowd you can play D'Agostino and orquestas tipicas from the thirties. Also milonga camperas and some special pieces of music will do the trick.
- Don't play too much unfamiliar music in the first few hours. Stick to music everybody knows and appreciates. Think about Calo, De Angelis, Troilo, D'Arienzo, Di Sarli and Canaro. You will build up a lot of goodwill and that will give you enough opportunity for creating a more exciting atmosphere later on.

2.7 Special activities

Are there any special activities, like a dance performance, a speech, a live orchestra a lottery or something else? There should be a balance between special activities and dancing, for dancing is what most people come for. Too many special activities will ruin a milonga and leave the dancers frustrated.

Some organizers do not realize this. They love to hear their own voice (for too long) as they announce a show pair, etc. If you know this, you can tell them the effects it will have on a milonga.

Here are some points that might be useful:

- Keep the breaks between the sets of an orchestra to a maximum of 15-20 minutes.
- In case of a live orchestra: know their schedule by heart, for dancers will ask for it. If you can get a play list, you can even tell them more. And it will prevent you from playing songs they performed.
- A DJ shouldn't try to compete with the orchestra and/or dancing performers. They are the stars. So don't play music they are performing to or any other similar music. Don't attract attention by playing (too much) specials.
- Play good danceable music that even might sound a bit boring (compared to the live orchestra).

2.8 Dancers & visitors

Sometimes a milonga is a dancers only affair, but on other occasions other non tango dancing visitors will show up. The dancers and other visitors will influence the atmosphere. They can make or break a milonga. Are they in a good mood or energy or are they tired? Do they arrive with expectations or do they have an open mind?

Try to 'read' the audience and try to play music they want to hear. Doing so you will sometimes be able to sustain a good energy or change a tired atmosphere.

Visitors are another story. Ask them what they expect. Sometimes you can please them with some specials. Many people know Piazzolla's Adios Nonino. You can also resort to playing well know tangos like La Cumparsita and El Choclo.

2.9 Conclusion & some cases

So DJ-ing is a lot more than only playing music. There are much more things you will have to pay attention to than you might have thought. However if you are alert and creative, you will notice things that threaten the success of a milonga. By DJ-ing a lot at different milongas, you will build up experience in DJ-ing as well as controlling (if possible) circumstantial conditions. Never hesitate to give the organization feedback in a professional way (that is respectful, constructive and not personal). Also realise that some of the organizers won't listen to you at all.

To conclude this first chapter I present you some cases I encountered at several milongas in several countries. The main question to you is to find a way to deal with these situations, Remember that there might be more solutions or that a situation I defined as problematic needn't be problematic for you and your milonga.

2.9.1 Case 1: Salsa versus tango?

Once I DJ-ed at the Tango Mango in Devon (England) and I played Teofilo Chantre's Roda Vida, which is a very 'salssa-able' piece of music. There happened to be a few good salsa dancers present, who immediately started to dance salsa. Since salsa is a stationary type of dance and tango is not, this caused a bit of a traffic jam on the dance floor. The festivals' hostess (Ruth) solved it in a brilliant way. How?

2.9.2 Case 2: Chairs, chairs and ... more chairs!

Sometime ago during an all night milonga in Edinburgh (Scotland) there was a 10 minute performance scheduled. The rest of the evening was meant dancing only. The organizers were convinced that during this performance everybody should have a chair to sit on. Before the milonga started they placed chairs and tables for the expected number of visitors. There was still enough space to dance for everybody.

What was the consequence of all those tables and chairs? And, more important, what can a DJ do to minimize this effect?

2.9.3 Case 3: A restless DJ

Once I visited a milonga in Munich (Germany) where a very restless DJ tried to create a completely new atmosphere with every piece of music he played. Can you guess what happened? And why?

2.9.4 Case 4: A milonga with many interruptions

Some organizers feel that an all night milonga should be a lot more than dancing only. So they plan dance performances, live music, a lottery (where you can win a bottle of sekt), a speech by the host and some other interruptions. As the DJ you will have to fill the gaps between all the events. What kind of music should you play in a situation like this? Why?

2.9.5 Case 5: a frustrating workshop

One time a couple of teachers gave a workshop prior to the milonga. Apparently the workshop was far too complicated, because I saw nearly all the participants leave the dancefloor after the workshop with frustration dripping off their faces. It took about 45 minutes for them to return! How did I lure them back to dancing tango?

You will find some solution on the next two pages.

Answers

Case 1: salsa versus tango

Ruth advised the salsa dancers to dance in the middle of the hall, so that the tango dancers could dance around them. A simple but perfect solution :-)

Case 2: chairs, chairs and ... more chairs!

Imagine that there is a milonga with hundred dancers and 100 chairs and everybody is putting their shoes, purses, etc on the chair where they 'land' in that milonga. After some dances they will return to their places. Result: the milonga will become static. It will be hard to make contact with people who are not sitting next to you. And cabeceo doesn't really function in the Western world. If there are fewer chairs than dancers, the dancers can't claim a chair and people who want to sit down, have no other choice than to sit down where a seat is vacant. People get more easily in contact with other. Result the milonga will be dynamic.

Case 3: A restless DJ

The DJ in Munich tried to create a completely other atmosphere with each song. This means that dancers will have to adapt to the music again and again and again. After some time this will be experienced as exhaustive. No wonder that the dancers in that milonga danced identical to each of the very different songs. That is a survival mechanism. Just too much excitement, too many stimuli, so that there was no response anymore.

Case 4: A milonga with many interruptions

Some milongas are like that: a speech, an announcement, a demo, etc. Too many interruptions make a milonga restless. Another result of an interruption is that you alert people to the time. With every interruption, people will leave. If this is what you intend, it is okay. But if this is not what you want, you might want to decide against too many interruptions.

Case 5: a frustrating workshop

If a workshop is just too difficult for the participants, the result might be that they don't want to dance for some time. By making it too difficult; dancers become uncertain about their dancing skills. There

is not really a solution to this situation, apart from giving them some time to recover and as a DJ play easy music, with enough rhythm and dito energy (D'Agostino, D'Arienzo). Also music which is often used in teaching (Di Sarli) can be helpful. But absolute no specials, neotango and unfamiliar orquestas.

3 Classification of music

3.1 Introduction

There is so much tango music and music to dance tango to, that it is easy to loose yourself in it. So a DJ you will need a system to categorize music. In El Corte we use the following classification criteria:

- Instrumental & vocal
- Rhythmical & lyrical
- Slow & fast
- Energetic & melancholy
- Regular/simple & irregular/complex
- Old & modern

3.2 Instrumental & vocal

Some tangos are music without singing. Other tangos contain also singing, where music accompanies the singing. Tangos without singing are instrumental, tangos with singing are vocal tangos or tango cantando's.

Some dancers flatly refuse to dance to tango cantando's.⁷ Of course this depends on the way a singer sings. Singing which is integrated into the music will meet less opposition than too demonstrative singing, which only uses music as a background. Too demonstrative singing can be fun for a special occasion, but it soon might irritate the dancers. Whatever you do as a DJ, it is always wise to alternate (series of) instrumental tangos with (series of) sung tangos.

⁷ The unwillingness to dance to sung tangos dates back to the early years of the history of tango. Julie Taylor writes in her book *Paper tangos* (1998: 9-10) about a “traditional rule, no longer always followed or even known, [that] dictates that Argentines not dance to a tango that is sung. Tangueros believed that while dancing they could not attend properly to the music and lyrics, or hear their own experience and identity revealed in the singer’s and musicians’ rendering of profoundly Argentine emotions.”

3.3 Rhythmical & lyrical⁸

Nearly all music is rhythmical and tango music certainly is no exception to this rule. To paraphrase George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: all musical expressions are rhythmical, but some are more rhythmical than others.⁹

So some music however is clearly more rhythmical than other music or at least the rhythm is more obvious. Rhythmical music is music in which the musicians clearly accentuate the music. For dancers it is clear when to make the next step. Especially beginning dancers are fond of rhythmical music. D'Arienzo is super rhythmical, just listen to his versions of Eduardo Arolas's *Derecho Viejo* or Enrique Delfino's *Re Fa Si* and you know what rhythmical means.¹⁰

Lyrical music is music with a less clearly accentuated pattern.¹¹ The musical theme in lyrical music is more relaxed, more freely interpreted (more rubato). Lyrical music is harder to dance to and poses more challenges to be creative. One of the best examples of lyrical music is Carlos Di Sarli after 1942.¹² His version of *Verdemar* is a good example of lyrical music. The rhythm is hidden behind lyrical music lines and romantic lyrics sung by Roberto Rufino.

⁸ When I combined the dichotomies rhythmical – lyrical and energetic - melancholy, you will find that 54% is rhythmical and energetical, 31% is lyrical and melancholy, 11% is lyrical and energetical and 4% is rhythmical and melancholy. Clearly there is a relationship between rhythmical and energetical on one side and lyrical and melancholy on the other side.

⁹ Orwell, G., *Animal farm*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945.

¹⁰ Listen to D'Arienzo CD *Tango para el mundo Volume 2(Reliquias)*.

¹¹ Lyrical can also be labeled as melodious or latent rhythmical (as opposed to dominant rhythmical).

¹² Carlos di Sarli, *El senor del tango*, changed his musical style in September / October 1942 from rhythmical to lyrical. The reason for this is not known, but it might have to do with Alberto Podesta's joining the Di Sarli orchestra.

On deciding whether music is rhythmical or lyrical, just ask yourself if the melody or the rhythm is dominant. If the melody is dominant, a song is lyrical.

3.4 Energetic & melancholy

Energetic music is music with a drive in it, it ‘pushes’ you in a direction. Melancholy music lacks this drive almost completely, so that it ‘pulls’ you in a direction. In the beginning of a milonga, at least the first two or three hours, the accent should lie on energetic music. After that melancholy music can be played more often. Too much melancholy music will depress the dancers. In my opinion at least 70 to 80 percent of the music in a milonga should be energetic.

Energetic music is music which gives you ‘dancing energy’, that is something you can find in Osvaldo Pugliese’s oeuvre: *La Yumba* is raw energy. The king of melancholy is probable Carlos Gardel. Listen to *Volver* and weep, then you will know what melancholy means.

On deciding whether music is energetic or melancholy, just ask yourself: does it give me energy or does it consume my energy?

3.5 Slow & fast

The beats per minute (BPM) or tempo determines whether a piece of music is slow or fast. Pieces of music with less than a certain BPM can be considered slow, etc. Any division of what is fast, medium or slow is arbitrary. You might use the following (arbitrary) limits, but it is only a suggestion.

Type/rhythm	Slow	Medium	Fast
Tango	< 60	60 – 70	> 70
Milonga	< 85	85- 110	> 110
Valse	< 70	70 – 80	> 80
Specials	< 60	60 – 70	> 70

A DJ program for computers/laptops usually has a BPM facility. If not or if you use CD's, then you can use your intuition or use a stopwatch and count.¹³

While DJ-ing always realize that too slow or too fast music eventually will result in an empty floor. Too slow means that dancers can not get rid of their energy and become frustrated, too fast means they will use up their energy too soon and are no good for the rest of the salon, which will also leave them frustrated. Most of the music you will play should be a normal, medium rhythm. Occasionally you can play fast or slow songs.

Slow and fast pieces of music can be used to induce another mood. Sometimes you will have to temper the enthusiasm of the dancers, otherwise it will get too hectic on the floor. A tanda of slow music can do the trick (D'Agostino). Vice versa is also a possibility. Some times, when it all gets to sleepy, you can spice it up the lot by playing a faster tanda.

Fresedo's music is generally quite slow. His tempo seldom reaches the 60 BPM. If you listen to *Vida Mia*, you realise this slow music. On the other hand Donato Racciatti's tangos are usually quite up tempo, listen to his version of R.I. Brignolo's *Chique*.

In general music of the thirties is slower than music of the forties. The difference in BPM can be more than 5-7 BPM.

3.6 Regular/simple & irregular/complex

Regular music is music with a fixed rhythm and a simple theme, which repeats itself. By far the most of tango music you hear in a milonga is simple, regular music. Most dancers (but especially beginners) appreciate this simplicity, for most of the dancers don't dance to the music but to the beat. They love it for its predictability.

There are also orchestras, who love to play with the rhythms and use several themes in their music. The result is that their music is irregular and complex, for most dancers it will soon be too complex. Experienced dancers love to play while dancing to this music, but remember that a tanda of 3 complex tangos is already quite tricky.

¹³ On internet you can find free BPM software.

The emphasis in a milonga should be placed on simple, regular music.

The king of rhythm is Juan D'Arienzo. His *El Choclo* versions (Angel Viloldo) is the most regular music I know. One of the best examples of irregular or complex music is Julio De Caro. Listen to *Floras Negras* and you will realize how complex and irregular this music is. His music is so complex and irregular that it was and still is considered by most DJ's I know as hardly 'danceable' at all.

3.7 Old & modern

Since the early fifties tango has lost much of its popularity to the emerging rock and roll, rhythm and blues and pop, which heralded the era of the youth culture.

A lot of tango orchestras folded, were lost in anonymity or continued their activities with a more condensed line up. In the fifties tango went underground, only to make a (modest) comeback in the eighties. To draw the line between old and modern tango music is risky, but it is certain that the mid fifties to early sixties meant a distinctive trend break in tango music.

However before and during the fifties and sixties there also were musicians who innovated tango (Gobbi, De Caro & Piazzolla) and in the sixties the retro tango orchestra of Miguel Villasboas produced music, which reminded of the thirties.

3.8.1 Intermezzo

So far we offered you a system to label your music collection. When you start labelling your music, you will encounter several difficulties:

- some dichotomies are subjective. Whether a song is energetically or melancholy, is a matter of taste.
- some dichotomies are continuous. It is hard to tell where to draw the line between rhythmical and lyrical. There will always be songs which can go either way

Apart from these two problems, what to do with Alfredo de Angelis? His music seems to be neither rhythmical nor lyrical and also neither energetic nor melancholy. This is clearly a problem, but also offers

you an opportunity. How about using Alfredo de Angelis's music as a neutral reference point?

Labelling your music is a process that will take a lot of time and energy, but it is worth it, because it makes your DJ-life easier. Apart from this, it also has another advantage: it gives you a tool to deal with complaints. Usually somebody who complains doesn't know what should be different, apart from the fact that it should be different music. By asking questions, like: do you want the music to be more energetic, less complex, etcetera, you can find out what he wants. A complaint is also a chance and opportunity to improve your DJ style. And quite often the people who complain and are humoured in their request, will become fans of your DJ-ing.

What does the categorization of tango music mean in reality?

We suggest some guidelines to you, but feel free to digress from them:

- Don't play too much sung tangos in a row, and certainly not more than three tandas. Also within a tanda you can mix instrumentals with sung tangos.
- Start a milonga with playing a lot of rhythmical and energetic music from the well known orchestra from la epoca de oro. Later you can also play some lyrical and melancholy music. But be careful with melancholy music; too much will depress your audience.
- Do not always play music with the same rhythm or energy. Even in a tanda it is no problem to play music with a rising beat/energy.
- Play mostly simple and regular tango and only incidentally a complex tango as a special.
- Most of the music you will play should be traditional/old music: 10% to 15% modern and special music is already quite a lot. Thematic milongas (neo tango, etc.) are a different story.

Is this system to categorize tango music and tango orchestras the only way to do it? Of course not. Any DJ should feel free to categorize music the way that suits him best. Our minds work in different and mysterious ways and this is especially the case with DJ's.

Other ways to categorize tango music are:

- Danceable versus non danceable (salon fahig or not salon fahig)
- Native, Argentine versus foreign, non Argentine
- Extravert and introvert
- Consonant and dissonant music
- Diegetic versus mimetic music

Let's explain introvert ~ extrovert, consonant ~ dissonant and diegetic ~ mimetic music.

3.8.2 Introvert & extravert

A few years ago I have started to categorize music and orchestras in 'introvert' and 'extravert'.

Introvert orchestras can be found mostly among the older orchestras (twenties and thirties) with a small line up (usually orquesta tipicas). Their music can be characterised by its intimacy and modesty, which usually has a calming effect on dancers and which invites dancers to dance in small steps (ideal for overcrowded milongas). The most striking characteristic of introvert orchestras is their seemingly 'uneventfulness'.

Introvert orquesta's are: Bachicha (Juan Bautista Deambroggio), Eduardo Bianco, Francisco Canaro (early period), Alfredo Carabelli, Angel D'Agostino, Carlos Di Sarli (early period), Edgar Donato, Francisco Lomuto, Juan Maglio, Orquesta Tipica Brunswick, Orquesta Tipica Petrucelli, Orquesta Tipica Victor, Juan Bautista Guido, Roberto Zerrillo, Juan De Dios Filiberto, Anselmo Aieta, Antonio Bonaveno, Enrique Santos Discepolo, Agesilao Ferrazano, Los Provincianos, Francisco Pracanico, Francisco Spaventa, etc.¹⁴

¹⁴ You can find a lot of introvert orquestas on the CD '20 Orquestas olvidables' (EBCD116): Anselmo Aieta, Manuel Pizarro, Julio Pollero, Orquesta Tipica Cayetano Puglisi, Enrique Di Lorenzo, Juan De Dios Filiberto, etc. Also the DBN/ EMI Reliquias release 'Recordando Orquestas' and the Harlequin releases 'Buenos Aires to Berlin' (HQ CD 61) and Buenos Aires to Madrid' (HQ CD 88) contain recordings from introvert orquestas.

Extravert orchestras are dominant in their music. Their musical style aims at grandness. It is music which can be described as ‘eventful’. These orchestras regularly use (de)crescendo’s, whereas introvert orchestra’s are mostly ‘linear’ in their music. The musical line ups of extravert orchestras are greater (the gran orquesta’s). The extravert orchestra’s usually date back to the forties and fifties. The rise of D’Arienzo at the end of the thirties meant a great stimulant for extravert music. The extravert orchestras music has an energizing effect on dancers and invites them to dance in a more spacious way.

Examples of extravert orchestras are: Juan D’Arienzo, Alfredo De Angelis, Miguel Calo, Pedro Laurenz, Florindo Sassone, Osvaldo Pugliese, Miguel Villasboas, Anibal Troilo, etc.

When DJ-ing I usually start a milonga with extrovert orchestras from the forties. These orchestras have a lot of drive. Towards the end (but not at the end itself) of a milonga I occasionally play some introvert tandas. At that time dancers usually have spent a lot of energy and welcome music with a more sedate pace. Introvert orchestras can also function to cool down an overexcited crowd.

3.8.3 Consonant & dissonant music

Music in general and tango specifically can be also be divided into consonant and dissonant music.

Consonant music is, by definition, music that makes concords. A concord is “a chord that is pleasing or satisfactory or pleasing in itself without others to follow”. Dissonant is the opposite; that is ”not in harmony, harsh toned, incongruous”.¹⁵

Examples of consonant music are (in classical music) Mozart, Beethoven and Bach and (in tango) Troilo, Calo, Fresedo and De Angelis. Examples of dissonant music are (in classical music) Stravinsky, Schonberg, Schnitke and Glass and (in tango) Julio De Caro, Piazzolla (seventies) and Pugliese.

Consonant music tends to appeal to the emotional side of the human brain, whereas dissonant music appeals to the rational side of the human brain. It could very well be argued that consonant music has a

¹⁵ Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1979: 210, 216, 299-230.

calming effect on listeners and dancers, where as dissonant music has an 'upsetting' effect.

Of course we realize that

- it is hard to define and label music as consonant and dissonant
- consonant and dissonant is a social construct which can be different in different cultural settings and times
- it is hazardous to label an artist (with a complete oeuvre) as consonant or dissonant. In most situations there are exceptions.

3.8.4 Diegetic versus mimesic music

In film music the terms diegesis and mimesis are often used to describe its character. Diegesis refers to a (fictional) world in which situations and events are narrated rather than enacted. Mimesis is the opposite of diegesis; it refers to a world where situations and events are enacted rather than narrated.

So diegetic music is music which **tells** a story. Mimesic (or extra diegetic) music is music that **is/enacts** a story. Diegetic music is more an indirect sort of music in which the musicians tell about events and situations, as opposed to extra diegetic music, in which musicians demonstrate directly music. In tango I would label Pugliese diegetic, but D'Arienzo as extra diegetic or mimesic.

3.9 Where to find music

I am often asked where I find all these tango music and special music. Hardly an chained salon or International Week in El Corte passes without this question. So how can you find good danceable music? Also the question to what are good tango music labels pops up regularly. To the first question there are more than one answer. The second question will be answered in § 3.10. But first, where to find (tango) music, suited for milongas?

3.9.1 Knowledge is everything

If I hear something nice I ask the DJ what he is playing. Most DJ's I know are more than willing to share their knowledge. My advice is to make notes (and empty your pockets before putting your clothes in the washing machine). It is just too easy to forget. In time you will

build a system of knowledge about tango music, tango styles and tango musicians/orchestras. There are also some very good books on tango. Just to name a few: Birkenstock & Ruegg, Sebastian & Labrana and Ludwig'.¹⁶

Surfing on the internet can also be very helpful. There are a lot of tango sites. My advice is to go to todotango.com. They have a large section of musicians, orchestras, singers and tango poets and a lot more. And if you have enough time, just google freely. Sifting through a large pile of junk, you also will find some gems.

3.9.2 Music shops

Whenever I see a music shop and I do have time, I enter this shop. Some are not interesting at all, others are excellent: Ludwig Beck, Marienplatz, Munich, Germany, Saturn, Cologne, Germany.

Before entering it might be wise to make a decision on how much you can afford or wish to spend. Don't forget your credit card!

There are also internet stores for which you really do need a credit card: iTunes store, Todotango.com, Tangostore.com, Amazon.com, etc.

3.9.3 Music lovers

Exchange information and music with other music lovers and DJ's and do so with an open mind. Notice that I am talking about music lovers and not only about tango lovers. In time you will build a network of friends, which will supply you with lots and lots of (information about) music. Ask other music lovers about their network and where they find their music.

3.9.4 Being a DJ helps

This means that you are active in music. Some dancers will ask or tell you about music you don't know. This means you can try to find out. There are even tango dancers who bring CD's to you, which is an initiative that should be encouraged at all times!

¹⁶ See Bibliography.

Do explain to them that you cannot play it right away and that you first want to listen to it at home. This gives you time to decide on what is good music and what you certainly don't want to play!

3.9.5 Accidental encounters

Sometime you just run into music quite unexpectedly. This can be a commercial on TV, a tune in a movie you are watching, music they are playing in a hotel, sauna, music shop, etc. Anything that makes you think: "Hey, I feel like dancing!" is likely to be suited for dancing. Sometimes I hear music in TV commercials which is perfectly suited for dancing. I surf to their website and ask who the performers are and if they can send me an mp3-file. Some sites will send you the music and others don't respond at all. You can always try. You have nothing to lose.

3.9.6 DJ Discussion forums

There are some DJ discussion forums on internet. You will find music and info there. I have not much experience with these groups, because I already have (more than) enough input. Discussions on the groups tend to be rather specific, technical and subjects can be trivial. Sometimes it seems that the forum members are more interested in talking about DJ-ing than in the actual DJ-ing itself ☺.

Tango music and special music which is suited for tango can be found at expected places (music shop & internet) and unexpected places. A tango DJ will have to have an extensive tango music library, which is collected over the years. When you start building yours, you soon will find out that some music labels are very good and others are really bad or have a mediocre sound quality. To help you we will list some good labels and some mediocre labels.

3.10 Music labels

Music labels that distribute good tango music are Tango Argentino (DBN), Reliquias (DBN/EMI), From Argentina to the world and RCA Victor 100 anos (BMG). They all distribute very good quality music, music that has been (digitally) improved very well.

Mediocre music labels are El Bandoneon, Harlequin, Las Grandes Orquestas del Tango, En FM tango, Music Hall, Buenos Aires Tango Club and Danza y Movimiento. Sound quality differs from mediocre at best and to downright catastrophic at worst.

3.11 Music terms

For tango DJ's it can be an advantage to know some musical terms. It is also a tool to describe and categorise music. Musical terms can be divided into four subcategories: tempo, dynamics, articulation and interpretation / expression.

Most of the musical terms are in Italian, since Italy was by far the most dominant musical source in the period that musical notation (sheet music) became widely used by musicians. In this paragraph I will discuss some of those terms.

Tempo

These tempo terms are used to describe the "speed" of the music. It varies from very slowly to very fast or in musical terms from largo (40 BPM), larghetto (50 BPM), adagio (60 BPM), andante (80 BPM), moderato (100 BPM), allegro (120 BPM), presto (160 BPM) to prestissimo (200 BPM).

Within classical tango the tempi usually vary between 50 and 130 BPM. This is however related to the musical genre. Tango's tempi usually lie between 50 and 80 BPM, valsés between 60 and 85 BPM, milongas between 65 and 110 and candombes between 100 and 130 BPM.

There are some other related terms, such as accelerando (an increase in musical tempo), animato or vivace (vivid, lively, animated) grave (slow and solemn), ritenuto (slightly slower; temporarily holding back) and rubato (free adjustment of tempo for expressive purposes).

Dynamic (relative loudness)

The dynamics of music (the relative loudness) can be described using the following terms from relatively silent to very loud: pianissimo piano (ppp), pianissimo (pp), piano (p), mezzo piano (mp), mezzo forte (mf), forte (f), fortissimo (ff) to fortissimo forte (fff).

Tango's relative loudness usually varies between piano and fortissimo. Related terms are crescendo (playing or singing with a increasing "toonsterkte"), decrescendo (opposite of crescendo: playing or singing with a decreasing "toonsterkte"), marcato (is a form of staccato; playing or singing in a louder way than the other accompanying notes. Stressed, pronounced.) and morendo (dying away of music or vocals).

Articulation

Articulation refers to mode of connecting a single musical note or between multiple notes or sounds. Simplified there are five main forms of articulation: legatissimo (125%, legato (100%), portato or non legato (75%), stacato (50%) and stacatissimo (25%). The percentage refers to the amount in which the notes are connected or disconnected. legatissimo means that two following notes have an overlapping part, where as stacato means that there is no connection between the notes, but that they are seperated by a silence.

Interpretation and expression

ad libitum

Literally at one's pleasure. In music it refers to play a musical passage in free time, rather than in strict "metronomic" tempo.

appassionata

Played with passion, with gusto.

arrastre

Dragging play of violin, the bow is dragged over the strings.

burlesco

Funny, witty, humouresque

corte

A hort and sudden break in the music. The music of D'Arienzo and Biagi is full of cortes.

glissando

This a decoration in which a musician utilizes his instrument so as to fill in the difference (which can often be quite large) between notes. In tango this term usually refers to the violin, where the violinist slides the bow over the strings from one note to another.

intermezzo

A passage of music (usually somewhat more lightly) that divides and connect larger parts or main divisions of a larger musical work.

maestoso

The playing of music or a musical fragment in a stately, dignified and majestic fashion.

pizzicato

Refers to the plucking of a string instrument. In tango music this is regularly done by violinists. They pluck the strings rather than using the bow, which gives a totally different sound.

polyphony

Literally having more than one voice. In tango polyphony refers to the at the same time playing of different melodies by different instruments.

syncopé

A syncopé is an accent which is placed on an unexpected place. The Concide Oxford Dictionary defines syncopate as "displace beats or accents in (passage) so that what was *strong* becomes *weak* and vice versa". Blues music is known for its strong syncopation, where as tango is less strongly syncopated.

virtuoso

Skilled and excelling. refers either to very skilled musicians or to a manner of playing instrument in a virtuoso way; usually fast tempo with relatively many notes in a period of time.

3.12 Analyzing music

On top of categorizing your music you can also decide to analyse several pieces of your music. Analyzing music can give you a clue on danceability of certain music, but it is a lot of work.

Bruno Nettl presents some nice insights in the how's and why's of analyzing music in his book *Folk and traditional music of the western continents*.¹⁷

According to Nettl "the best way to begin analyzing a piece of music, either when one hears it or when one sees it written out, is to find the

¹⁷ Nettl, B. (1965:16-24).

large subdivisions and the broad tendencies. Is the song made up of several large sections which contrast markedly? Are the sections of equal length? Does the tempo change considerably or suddenly in the course of the piece? Are any of its sections repeated? Or is the whole piece repeated several times? And if so, are the repetitions more or less exact, or are they variations of the first rendition? Do the sections correspond to sections or lines of the same length in the verbal text? These are the kind of questions an intelligent listener might ask himself”.

Other aspects you can focus on in musical analysis are monophony and polyphony, rhythm and tempo, melody and scale, etc.

3.12 Clustering tango music

Some tango orchestras are hard to distinguish from each other, where some others are clearly very different. And since in tango DJ-ing you just don't want too many tanda transfers which are too abrupt, it is worth to look at what orchestras "cluster" together.

Of course I realise that this is a hazardous practice, since many orchestras have different music styles in different periods. I will try to categorize as many orchestras as possible in only one cluster, but for several orchestras this is impossible, because of the "different faces they have worn over the years". Nonetheless I make an effort in grouping tango orchestras together.

The clusters are grouped around one or more of the greatest tango orchestras of the golden age of tango. In doing so I (arbitrarily) distinguish eight clusters:

- 1) The **Senor cluster**: Carlos di Sarli, Osvaldo Manzi, Osvaldo Fresedo (later period), Jose Basso, Angel D'Agostino, Florindo Sassone, Mariano Morres.
- 2) The **Yumba cluster**: Osvaldo Pugliese, Color Tango, Sexteto Mayor.
- 3) The **Laurenz cluster**: Pedro Laurenz, Manuel Buzon, Jose Garcia (y los Zorro Grises), Ricardo Malerba, Antonio Rodio, Ricardo Tanturi.

- 4) The **Pirincho cluster**: Francisco Canaro, Orquesta Tipica Don Pancho, Quinteto Pirincho, the other Canaro brothers, Roberto Firpo.
- 5) The **Rey del Compas cluster**: Juan D'Arienzo, Rodolfo Biagi, Los Reyes del Tango.
- 6) The **tango milonga cluster**: Roberto Firpo, Miguel Villasboas, Juan Cambareri, Francisco Canaro, Quinteto Pirincho.
- 7) The **orquesta tipica cluster**: Eduardo Bianco, Bachicha, Esposito, Juan Maglio, Manuel Pizzaro, Julio Polero, Edgardo Donato (older period), Sexteto Tipica Carlos Di Sarli (thirties), Adolfo Carabelli, Orquesta Tipica Victor, Juan Bautista Guido
- 8) The **neutral cluster**: Alfredo De Angelis, Miguel Calo, Anibal Troilo, Lucio DEmare.

4 Structuring a milonga

4.1 Introduction

What a DJ can do is play at random all his favourites with the implicit assumption that they are beautiful and very danceable. It might happen that a DJ who works like this, will play a lot of completely incompatible music in a row. The result will be that the dance floor is empty and the dancers are sulking at the bar. Or even worse, they might have gone home and decided never to come back. It does not work this way. A DJ will have to bring some sort of a musical structure in a milonga. In this chapter we will hand you the tools for structuring a milonga: tanda and tandacycle, musical arcs, cortinas, specials and bridge songs

4.2 Tanda & tandacycle

The Spanish word tanda stands for a group, a team or a series of something. In the world of tango tandas are the building blocks of a milonga. A tanda is a series of musical pieces that form some sort of a unity. This unity can relate to several aspects:

- Dance form: vales, milongas, tangos, candombes, specials, etc.
- Musical ‘colour’ of an orchestra
- A certain musician or singer
- The use of a specific characteristic; for example a characteristic rhythm or instrument

Royce Chan mentions on her website also some other aspects which could / should be observed in the making of a tanda:¹⁸

- Records by the same orchestra
- Recordings from the same period
- Roughly the same speed (beats per minute)
- Roughly the same sound quality and level

A generally used tanda structure is: tango - valse - tango – milonga, which we call a tandacycle. Sometimes a tanda will be replaced by

¹⁸ R. Chan, The making of a tanda, www.loksze.com (2006).

something special. The art of DJ-ing lies in the combination of tandas. Where tandas function as building stones for a milonga and a tandacycle as a greater unit of tandas, musical arc's main function is to structure a salon. A musical arc can consist out of one or more tandacycles, which function as a musical unity and present a musical trend in a milonga.

4.3 Cortina

The Spanish word cortina stands for curtain. In Latin America the expression cortina refers to a musical intermezzo. A cortina is a piece of music, which is not meant for dancing. It is used to separate tandas but also to make a bridge between two tandas. Its function is for dancers to leave the dance floor so that new combinations of dancers can be formed. At least that is the way it is in most (but not all) milongas in Argentina. The use of cortinas was (re)introduced from Argentina to rest of the world in mid nineties.

Among dancers and DJ's it is a controversial subject. Either you are in favour or you are against cortinas. We think it is important for a DJ to realise why he does or doesn't use cortinas. To do it because they also do it in Argentina is absurd. Personally I feel that it is futile to attempt to introduce this habit into a completely different culture such as Europe, but feel free to disagree. I don't like milongas with cortinas for they tend to create chaos on the dance floor and what is more; they disturb the flow I try to create.

Cortinas have a function in a milonga: to promote the circulation of dancers and people who at the moment are not dancing. It also functions as an opportunity for people to mix. The situation of the dance floor is a crucial factor for (not) using cortinas. If the dance floor is surrounded by tables and chairs, then the dancers can't easily get into contact with others at the opposite site of the dancehall, cortinas do have a function. If the dance floor isn't surrounded by tables and chairs, there is no need for cortinas. So in El Corte we do not use cortinas (although some of our guest DJ's do), but what we do sometimes is a slightly longer period of silence between two tandas. This is what we call a silent cortina, which you can interpret as a compromise between a cortina and a constant flow of music.

If you use cortinas, there are several questions to be answered:

- how long should a cortina be?
- one cortina or several different cortinas?
- abrupt or smooth cortinas?
- danceable or undanceable cortinas?
- muzak or musical cortinas?¹⁹

The average time of a cortina is usually about half a minute, but shorter or (much) longer is also not uncommon.

A second topic is whether you want to use the same cortina all night long or want to use different cortinas. Using one cortina is easy, recognisable for the dancers but also monotonous, boring or even irritating. On the other hand using several cortinas involves more work, may be confusing for the dancers, but is not monotonous. To avoid confusion (when you use different cortinas), you can resort to use cortinas from an identical musical genre or theme (e.g. soundtrack fragments of "spaghetti" westerns, hits from the sixties, chansons, etc.).

Some DJ play very abrupt cortinas, as if they want to scare the dancers away and other play more smooth cortinas so that they don't disturb the flow on the floor too much. The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle.

Danceable versus undanceable cortinas? Isn't a cortina meant to be undanceable by definition? You are right, of course, but most music is more or less danceable. So if you play swing or son in a milonga where are son or swing dancers, you can expect them to dance to it. Not really as disaster, unless you want to clear the floor.

Muzak or musical cortinas? First of all let me very briefly explain what muzak is. Simplistically put, muzak is a form of amusement music, which is used as background music and is actually not intended to be purposefully listened to. A form of non music, so to say. On the other side, there is music which is intended to be listened to. If you use muzak as a cortina (an anonymous cortina), you can use the same piece over and over again. If you use "real" music as a cortina,

¹⁹ For more info on muzak; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muzak>

playing the same piece of music over and over again is sure to be irritating. So working with cortinas isn't the most easy thing you can imagine.

About the origin of tandas and cortinas not much is known. I did find some references that suggested that tanda is a concept which might have originated in Cuban vaudeville theatre of the nineteenth century (Foehr, 2001:56):

"Guarachas first appeared in the clowning, slapstick vaudeville theatre known as buffos cubanos and buffos habaneros. The guaracha - little songs sung by a chorus called *tandas de guaracheros* - were used as bridges between acts, [...]. The biting satire was meant to reflect the idiosyncracies of the Cuban people and their government [...]. In the nineteenth century, guaracha's moral state was considered to be too rude for popular taste, as the song's subjects were often sexual and "naughty"."

So a possible explanation might be that this tanda concept somehow travelled to Argentina and was incorporated in the sainete tradition of theatre at the end of the nineteenth century and was later introduced in the milonga's from Buenos Aires.

Another often on internet repeated explanation is that Serge Vandekier offers: "There was a time, very early in tango history (1880-1920) when tango was danced in "pirigundines" also called "academias". These places were situated in the periphery of the city and required special permits from the City hall to function. Pirigundines continued to function till not too long ago although with different characteristics from the original ones. Those places, where music was played and hired women were available to dance with, were patronized by lonely males in search of fun and perhaps some romance. They normally were required to buy a ticket called "lata" (tin), because they were made of tin. Those tickets allowed the male to dance a set number of tangos, milongas or vales, or a mixture of them. For example: three tangos, one milonga and one vals. The male client gave the "ticket" to the female dancer and started dancing with her. The "Cortina" a music different from tango, announced the end of the set or "tanda". Couples separated. To

dance another tanda another ticket had to be given to the lady. This sequence continued during the evening till two or three in the morning. There are expressions in our colloquial language of Buenos Aires that refer to certain elements of those days. "Tener la lata" (to hold the tin): It means to wait a long time. "Fui al medico y tuve una lata the una hora" (I went to the doctor and had to wait for one hour). This is a reference to the time when a man had to wait for the lady, tin in hand, till she became available to dance with him. He would say then "tuve la lata" for a long time till I could dance with her."

Anoter internet source on cortinas is Nancy: "However they are managed, in Buenos Aires they have a purpose. The floor must be cleared so that the dancers can do the eye-contact, head-nodding thing to acquire their partners for the next tanda. One would not want to seek out a partner until one had heard the music and determined if the next tanda was to be tango or vals or milonga or a tanda of musica tropical or foxtrot as is occasionally done at Ideal. The cortina time is very useful if one has spotted a nice dancer or a friend on the dance floor but does not know where he/she might be sitting. As the dancers leave the floor, one can spot them heading for their table and then know where to look for the next tanda. It is the fact that many dancers will not wear their glasses to the milongas so that the women or men sitting 80 feet across the room are just a blur until you lock eyes on the floor. A few gentlemen have told me they always knew when I really wanted to dance because I would put on my glasses. When I was cooling off or avoiding music I would remove the glasses. Now, if one does cortinas, then the men should understand that one dances the entire cortina with the lady unless she indicates she would like to stop. And the cortinas should always be composed of like music, preferably from the same orchestra, usually in the same time period, not a mix of vals, tango and whatever."

4.4 Specials

Specials are also subject of some controversy, but maybe not as distinct as cortinas. A special is a piece of music to which you can dance tango, valse, etc, has certain elements of surprise (certainly not

mainstream music!) and is meant to tempt dancers to break their dancing habits.

Specials usually are pieces of ‘world music’ (klezmer, salsa, mambo, rumba, etc.), classical music (opera, etc.) or popular forms of music (jazz, blues, pop, etc.). Tango music can also function as special music. Think about Astor Piazzolla's tango nuevos or spin offs from well know orchestras like Francisco Canaro and Enrique Rodriguez. Specials function as a way of breaking of the habits of dancers, after which you can begin a new musical arc. Sometimes they also function as a sort of cortina while promoting the circulation. Specials can also be cortinas you dance to.

Finally a warning to DJ's on the use of specials: don't use a special too often and keep them special. A special (also known as an alternative tango) usually has a limited life cycle, which is logical: since a special has more distinctive characteristics, people do grow fed up with them more easily. Therefore it is wise to use your favourite specials sparingly; that is to keep them special.

4.5 Bridge songs

Certain songs can be used to initiate a new musical direction in a milonga, while at the same time they make an emotionally logic connection between two musical atmospheres. These songs are called bridge songs. For example, if you have been building up energy and momentum for some time, there will be a certain point when you will have to stop doing so. If you don't, it will backfire for sure.

A lot of bridge songs will be specials, but also traditional tangos, waltzes and milongas can function as a bridge. In the following list I will give some examples. This list is not intended to be complete; it is a personal list. Other tango DJ's surely will use other bridge songs!

4.6 Musical arc

The main task of a DJ is work up to a climax. Some DJ's will aim at a minor, intimate climax, where other aim at a dominant, extrovert climax. After the climax you can start all over again. A long milonga will contain more than 2 musical arcs, where as a short one or a practice night usually has only 1 or 2 musical arcs.

After reaching a climax you just can't just go on building up pressure. It is an overkill that leads to nothing. It might even be contra productive. After a climax it is wise to pause a little longer before starting a new tanda or musical arc. In this short break the excitement can fade away. For example, I use breaks between songs in a tanda which last about 3 seconds, between tandas 6 seconds and starting a new tandacycle 9 seconds or more.

A DJ always has a choice after a tanda: will I go on building up energy, will I keep the level of energy constant or will I create a dissonant?

In letting a milonga slowly fade away till the end, there lies a danger of dancers getting bored. The end of a salon could also be some sort of a climax. Dancers love it to go home with a fine energy or some catchy tune still ringing in their ears. If you hear people whistling or humming the theme you ended with, this means you did a good job.

And finally, most dancers appreciate it when a DJ announces the end of the salon: 'and now the last five: three tangos from D'Arienzo, La Cumparsita and something special'. The reason for this is that some people make an appointment to dance the last tanda or the last tango with each other.

4.7 An annotated playlist

So now we talked in great detail about how to structure a milonga. Let's forget about the theoretical aspects of DJ-ing theory and focus on DJ-ing in reality. Let's dig through a playlist of DJ Arnoud. In this paragraph I will describe in great length how and why I build up a milonga the way I do.

Tipo Tango in Eindhoven invited me to come and DJ on Sunday April 26. The milonga in Scala (Eindhoven) started at 17:00 and ended well after 22:00.

The dancers and the organisers were pleased with the music. Everybody danced and had a lot of fun. There was a good energy flow going round the place. I got a big applause and some lovely compliments. And what is more; I was very pleased with it myself, which doesn't happen to often. So, what did I do? And why?

1. Miguel Calo: 5 tangos (17:00-17:14)

De 6 A 7, Que Te Importa Que Te Llore, Sans Souci, Trenzas, La Guitarrita

I started with a Calo tanda. Other good orchestras to start a milonga with are: D'Agostino (with Vargas), Di Sarli, De Angelis and D'Arienzo. These are all orchestras with the right energy and most dancers know them very well. I never start with orchestras who are either too demonstrative or dramatic (like the later Pugliese), the not so well known, but very danceable orchestras (Garcia, Buzon, Malerba, etc) or with special music (non or neo tango danceable music). In the beginning I want people to dance in a familiar musical surrounding, giving them time to build up their dancing routine and self confidence.

Since it was still sunny outside, only a few people danced. I decided to play another Calo tango tanda later on in the milonga.

2. Juan D'Arienzo: 3 valsas (17:14-17:22)

Alma Dolorida, Miedo, Inolvidable

In the beginning of a milonga I focus on music which is energetic and not too slow (at least 65 bpm). I want to give the dancers energy and not empty their batteries prematurely. D'Arienzo, also known as "El Rey del Compas", is perfect for this.

Most of the orchestras will only feature once during a milonga, but D'Arienzo, Laurenz, Canaro, di Sarli, Calo and de Angelis might (and often are) played more than once during a milonga. If I play them more than once, it is never two tango, valse or milonga tandas, but always a tango and a valse or milonga/candombe tanda.

3. Ricardo Tanturi: 5 tangos (17:22-17:38)

Oigo Tu Voz, Asi Se Canta, Palomita Mia, Una Emocion, Recien

Normally I don't play Tanturi this early in a milonga, because Tanturi's style of music is rather complicated and not so easy to

dance to. I don't know why I played Tanturi this early. Inspiration, intuition, too lazy to search for other music, distracted by something or someone? I don't know, but it worked perfect. By the way, I always play Tanturi accompanied by Enrique Campos. Good singer who integrates in the orchestra. Tanturi with Alberto Castillo I hardly ever play, because for me Castillo is too dominant in his singing.

In the beginning of a milonga I often play tandas of 5 tangos (instead of 4). The reason for this is that, when there aren't so many dancers yet, the tanda structure doesn't function so well. Later on in a milonga tandas always contain a maximum of 4 tangos, 3 milongas or valsés. Sometimes I even drop one song out of a tango tanda, to accelerate the dynamics of a milonga.

4. Pedro Laurenz: 3 milongas (17:38-17:46)

Yo Soy De San Telmo, La vida es una milonga, Milonga De Mi Flor

What a pity that only so few recordings of Pedro Laurenz were made. If I had a time machine, I would try to persuade him to do record some more.

His music is great and always pleases the dancers. With Laurenz's milonga tanda, I concluded the first wave in this milonga. I worked up to a climax, after which I always open a safety valve and let some steam (energy) escape. You just can't go on building up energy for an infinite period of time. The dancers either wear themselves out or quit dancing because they are bored to death.

In a later phase of a milonga I would probably play some easygoing special piece of music (Time by Kroke or Fever by Elvis Presly for example), but in this phase I resorted to tangos from la época de oro: D'Agostino with Angel Vargas.

5. D'Agostino: 4 tangos (17:48:18:02)

A Quien Le Puede Importar, Esta Noche En Buenos Aires, Mano Blanca, Ninguna

D'Agostino with Vargas is perfect for cooling down an overexcited dancing crowd. It is a perfect combination of rhythm, energy and

relaxation. I specifically only played D'Agostino with Vargas, and not D'Agostino with another singer or Vargas with another orchestra, because separately they are less interesting than as a couple.

I choose for D'Agostino and not something special because in this phase of the milonga I am very careful in not making the dancers restless. In the first 2 hours of a milonga I will hardly ever play something special. Most of the music I play in this phase is good old tango music from la época de oro.

If I play something special in this phase I make sure that it is something that everybody likes and knows well. The first two hours of a milonga are not for experimenting. By doing it this way I build up a lot of goodwill, which allows me later on to be more creative, innovative or experimental in my DJ-ing.

6. Lucio Demare: 3 valsés (18:02-18:10)

Se Fue, Al Pasar, Dos Corazones

These are some nice waltzes, who will always work. This tanda is a good example of something I do often in a tanda; that is building a mini wave. This tanda increases in energy and rhythm. Most dancers I know like this. I always have some tandas in reserve who will work for periods of lesser inspiration, a black out or if I want to play it safe. This one of them. Always have some super tandas in reserve. One day it will save the milonga for you.

7. Ricardo Malerba: 3 tangos (18:10-18:20)

Remembranza, Magdalena, Gitana Russa

I had constructed a 4 tango Malerba tanda, but it didn't really work, so I shorten it to three tangos. There is no law that says that you must play four tangos in a tanda. If it doesn't work, fix it. Somehow I think that there aren't many people who will notice if you shorten a tanda.

Looking back on it, this tanda feels a bit out of place after the Demare tanda. Maybe I switched too abruptly to the more lyrical

Malerba orchestra. Normaly Malerba allways works, but usually I play it later in a milonga.

8. Quinteto Pirincho: 3 milongas (18:20-18:28)

El Torito, Milongon, La trampera

After Malerba I had to regain the attention of the dancers. With Malerba I had unconsciously created a dip in energy and Pirincho got the dancers back in the right energy. At least this how I interpreted it. Pirincho always works.

In every milonga a DJ will experience some down period. This used to irritate me, until I realized that it is unavoidable. Sometimes I even create a down period in my DJ-ing in order to make a more clear contrast with the next climax.

9. Donato/D'Arienzo: 5 tangos (18:28-18:42)

El Huracan (Donato), Es Inutil Que La Llores, El Romantico, Sabado Ingles, Gran Hotel Victoria

Why did I start with El Huracan? Beat me, I don't know. Probably I started to construct a Donato series, got distracted and decided afterwards to do a D'Arienzo tanda. Maybe I forgot to delete the Donato or decided when I previewed this tanda, that it was a nice combination. Normaly my traditional tandas are one orchestra tandas. The reason for this is that if you are mixing more orchestras in one tanda, you have to be very sure that it works and that they are not too different. If it doesn't work, you will make people restless. So if I play multi orchestra tandas, it usually is during the last two hours of a milonga. In chooding songs for a one orchestra tanda, I allways take care that they are (more or less) from the same period. I don't want the musical colour of an orchestra to vary too much in a tanda. Some orchestra had quite a musical evolution during their existence. The most well know example is of course Carlos di Sarli, but also Fresedo and Pugliese evolved enormously in time.

To elaborate on the evolution of music from Di Sarli; in the thirties and beginning of forties his music was rhytmical, but in 1942 the

musical style changed quite suddenly to lyrical. Maybe this was caused by Alberto Podesta joining the orchestra.

10. Rodolfo Biagi: 3 valsés (18:42-18:50)

El ultimo adios, Pajaro Herido, Lagrimas y sonrisas

I often combine D'Arienzo with Biagi. This logical for two reasons. Biagi played piano with the D'Arienzo orchestra for years and was instrumental in creating the typical D'Arienzo style of the early forties. Biagi has an even more outspoken rhythmical style and use of cortes than D'Arienzo has.

11. Miguel Calo: 4 tangos (18:50-19:02)

Que falta me haces, Que Cosas Tiene La Vida, Dulce Amargura, Saludos

The previous three tandas were rather energetic. With this tanda I changed direction, working my way to the two specials of Chantre and Ebeling.

By the way, this is one of my fail safe tandas.

12. Teofilo Chantre/Arthur Ebeling: 2 special milongables (19:02-19:11)

Roda Vida (Chantre), A Rainy Night In Paris (Ebeling)

These are the first two specials I played. Notice that the first two hours is 100% classical tango from la epoca de oro. Instead of a milonga tanda from la epoca de oro, I decided to play some special milongas (or to be more precise: two milongables).

I use special music to give more flavor to a dancing crowd. The effect is that they will have to abandon their dancing routine which works with traditional tango music, but is of no use with other non tango, but tango danceable music. This can energize a crowd, if you do it right :-). This time it worked like a charm.

13. Francisco Canaro: 4 tangos (19:11-19:23)

Al Subir, Al Bajar, Lo Pasao, La Tormenta, Que Es Lo Que Tiene La Fulana?

And after some special music, the classical tango tastes even better. A special piece of music every once in a while in a milonga is like a pinch of salt in the soup. And as a DJ you are a cook!

14. Edgardo Donato: 3 milongas (19:23-19:31)

Ella Es Asi, De Punta A Punta, Sacale Punta

The energy of Canaro felt good to dancers, I noticed just by looking at them. Que Es Lo Que Tiene La Fulana? is already introducing a bit of milongable energy. Donato felt as logical sequence; since they have the same flavor. But I realise that there is always this dilemma: will I go on in the same routine or will I create a break?

15. Jose Garcia y Los Zorro Grises: 4 tangos (19:31-19:43)

Adios Adios Corazon, Junto A Tu Corazon, Esta Noche De Luna, El Once

In the beginning hours of a long milonga, I don't want to create too much excitement. Later on the waves up to a climax and/or a special will be shorter. But at this point I wanted not to create too much energy. I decide to continue in the realm of classical tango.

Jose Garcia is one of my favourite "introvert" orchestras. Other favourite orchestras, with the same quality, are Pedro Laurenz, Manuel Buzon and Ricardo Malerba. I am often surprised that (apart from Laurenz) so many tango DJ's don't know these orchestras.

16. Enrique Rodriguez: 3 waltzes (19:43-19:51)

Tengo Mil Novias, Isabelita, Los Piconeros

Waltzes from Rodriguez are always a safe choice. I worked towards a contrast, because I wanted to play some Puglieses and every milonga needs at least one tanda of Puglieses. If you don't play Pugliese, the

dancers will notice it and either ask for it or get the feeling something was missing.

The contrast between the happy and light waltzes from Rodriguez and the darkness and dramaticism of Pugliese was what I was after. By creating this contrast, I placed Pugliese as a climax in this milonga. I use Rodriguez as a bridge to a climax.

17. Osvaldo Pugliese: 3 tangos (19:51-20:00)

Farol, Patetico, Derecho Viejo

My feelings for Pugliese as dance orchestra are a bit ambivalent. Pugliese's music is dramatic and dominant. If I play the later Puglieses, I often notice that the floor is suddenly filled with some aspirant Pablo Veron's, meaning show dancers, who use too much space in a milonga and thereby creating chaos on the floor. Dancing like Pablo Veron is okay when you are performing on stage, but in a crowded milonga it is a definite no-no.

When I play Pugliese it is always in the second half, but never close to the end or the end itself. I don't end with Pugliese, because I want to send the dancers home with a happy energy. I have a tendency to play only 3 Puglieses in a row, but with the older Puglieses (as in this tnda) 4 songs are okay too.

In this case I played only 3 Puglieses, because I wanted to make an abrupt break towards the Otros Aires version of Puglieses La Yumba.

18. Otros Aires / Stavroslantias: 2 specials (20:00-20:00)

La Yumba (Otros Aires), The death of the bull (Stavroslantias)

Most of the neo tango music doesn't feel like dancing to me. Interesting to listen to, but not for dancing. Just one man's opinion and feel free to disagree.

La Yumba is another climax in this milonga. Stavroslantias's Death of the bull is something new I wanted to try out. After the energetic and rhythmical climax of La Yumba, I did another cooling down.

19. Alfredo de Angelis: 4 tangos (20:00-20:13)

Altar Sin Luz, Bajo Belgrano, Jiron Porteno, Pavadita

With Rodriguez's happy energy, Pugliese dramatics and Otros Aires raw energy, I needed something calm, but not too calm. I chose for the most neutral orchestra I know. The De Angelis orchestra is neither energetic nor melancholy, rhythmical nor lyrical and simple nor complex. From De Angelis you can easily switch to almost all other great orchestras of la epoca de oro.

In this tanda a created a mini wave towards Pavadita, with is a good introduction to a milonga tanda. Actually I wanted to play Tangoloco and from Altar Sin Luz up untill Canaro's Candombe (in tanda 20) I was working up to this.

20. Francisco Canaro: 2 milongas and 1 candombe (20:13-20:21)

Reliquias Portenas, La milonga optimista, Candombe

So this tanda was the tanda where I wanted to have a climax in energy, after which I could make a huge contrast with this Tangoloco song (in tanda 21).

21. Tangoloco: 1 special (20:21:20:26)

Claire de lune / Adios Nonino

As the Canaros completed another wave, I needed some music to cool down the dancers. The dancers were ready for something special. Tangoloco's combination of Mozarts Clair de Lune and Piazzolla's Adios Nonino felt perfect for this. It starts very modest but goes a bit over the top in the middle and fades out quietly again. Defintely not a standard piece of music to dance to. The reason why I play special pieces of music is that I want to challenge the dancers to leave the routine in their dance style where it is, and integrate the music in their dancing in an a-typical way. I want them to break with

their habits, because I am convinced that after this their dancing gets a new dimension.

22. Carlos di Sarli: 4 tangos (20:26-20:39)

Verdemar, 9 Puntos, Comme Il Faut, El Amanecer

After the peaceful ending of Tangoloco, I wanted to create a more easygoing and romantic period in this milonga. The lyrical and well known Di Sarli's are very well suited for this. It is the perfect combination between serenity and drive. And of course the piano playing of Carlos di Sarli fitted with the piano of Tangoloco.

22. ? / Lydie Auvray: 2 special vales (20:39-20:49)

Und in Wien gibt es 10 schone Frauen (?), Tivoli (Auvray)

This tanda is a romantic special valse tanda. The first one by an unknown singer (Und in Wien gibt es 10 schone Frauen) is a slow and sexy version of Leonard Cohen's Take that waltz. Tivoli is a powerful waltz with a very romantic character.

23. Anibal Troilo: 4 tangos (20:49-21:02)

En Esta Tarde Gris, Una Carta, Toda Mi Vida, Tinta Roja

All these pieces you can find on the CD El Imortal Pichuco (El Bandoneon). Whatever combination of songs you choose from this CD, doesn't really matter. I will always work.

24. Juan D'Arienzo / Edgardo Donato: 3 milongas (21:02-21:10)

De Pura Cepa, Milonga Vieja Milonga, La Milonga Que Faltaba (Donato)

25. Boban Markovic: 1 special (21:10-21:14)

Sat

With the relatively calm De Pura Cepa and Vieja Milonga I worked towards a energetic climax, after which I played a cooling down song.

The D'Arienzo / Donato milongas is another climax in energy. I use Bobam Markovic's Balkanized version of Kroke's Time to cool down the dancers. Most dancers will realize that they dance to something they know, but what will remain a mystery.

26. Pedro Laurenz: 3 tangos (21:14-21:21)

Llueve Otra Vez, Garua, Que Nunca Me Falte

Usually I start around 40 minutes before the end of a milonga, working towards the grand finale. That is why I dropped one song in this tanda. In 40 minutes you can play two tango tandas, a milonga tanda and a valse tanda. But if you check the times of the tandas 28, 29 and 30, you can see that my calculating was a bit off this evening.

27. Edgardo Donato: 3 vals (21:21-21:29)

El Vals De Los Recuerdos, La Tapera, Quien Sera

Lovely subtle waltzes with a very happy energy. La tapera is my favorite Donato valse.

28. Francisco Lomuto: 4 tangos (21:29-21:41)

Mar De Fondo, Si Soy Asi, Tormenta, El barco Maria

Musically this is a rather challenging tanda. Mar de Fondo has a long and rhythmless intro and Tormenta has an extra in the refrains.

29. Enrique Rodriguez: 3 milongables (21:49-21:57)

Noches De Hungria, Amor En Budapest, La Calesita Se Destrozo

These are foxtrots by Enrique Rodriguez. Funny, milongable pieces of music, with a very happy atmosphere. And I definitely want the people to go home with a lot of happy energy in their body. After this tanda, I announced the last five tangos. The reason for announcing the last tanda is simple. You warn people that the end is near. Also some dancers reserve the last songs for somebody.

30. Francisco Canaroi 5 tangos (21:57-22:10)

Alma Del Bandoneon, Atorrante, Derecho Viejo, El rey del bosque, Poema

You might think: Again Canaro? Yes, but I chose for some unusual Canaro's, such as El Rey del Bosque and Poema. I wanted to end with Poema, as I heard that apart from La Cumparsita also Poema was used as a finishing song in milongas in the old days of tango.

31. Cooling down (22:10-22:24)

Decara A La Pared (Lhasa De Sela), Disamistade (Fabrizio De Andre), Via Con Me and Boogie (both Paolo Conte)

After Poema I noticed that the dancers didn't really want to leave the dancefloor. I announced a few cooling down songs. After Lhasa I choose some happy Italian songs.

... and he outro

What I tried to explain was my process of choosing orchestras and music for tandas and creating a structure in a milonga. A structure in a milonga is very important, because without a structure, nobody knows what to expect. On the other side too much structure can be very boring. I hope that you get inspired by what I wrote, but I also hope that you will be true to yourself and will go on working towards your own DJ-identity.

4.8 DJ-ing for tango teachers

When Eric approached me on monday 24-8-2009 for giving a DJ workshop for tango teachers in the Teachers Week, I was a bit puzzled, because I thought teaching tango and DJ-ing didn't have much in common. When I started thinking about this, I quickly realized I was wrong. DJ-ing and teaching tango are two of a kind.

So, on wednesday August 26 the first experimental **DJ-ing for tango teachers workshop** was incorporated in the El Corte Teachers Week. This was not a complete DJ workshop like El Corte organizes

evry first sunday of May, but a short introduction for teachers and how to incorporate DJ-ing skills and knowledge in their teaching method.²⁰

DJ-ing and teaching have a lot in common, but there are also some great differences. Let's focus on the **similarities** first.

Both teachers and tango DJ's work with a group and therefore will experience **group dynamics**. Every group has its own character, which can vary from day to day. Some groups are very easy going and others are hard to work with, some groups have tremendous energy whereas other groups are very calm or even timid, etc. This poses a challenge, because you have to adapt to a certain extent, but you also have to be tough enough to contradict or challenge them at times. When to do this and to what extent, is a matter of experience and intuition. Trust your intuition.

A second similarity is that both teachers and DJ's are **observing and stimulating** a group of dancers at the same time. As a DJ I am watching the dancers for about 80% of the time. Teachers are also observing and checking if their pupils are 'still with them' or if they do their own things (freewheeling) and don't pay attention anymore to their teachers. The same goes for DJ's: if a DJ plays music which is not fitted for the situation / atmosphere, people will stop dancing and start sulking and/or wait for better times to come.

Teachers are DJ's and in a way DJ's are teaching dancers too (DJ's 'teach' musicality). A class can be seen as a special kind of milonga. Both groups **select music** with the same pupose: to get dancers dancing. Both are concerned with creating an atmosphere in which people are happy (to learn) to dance. From time to time teachers and DJ's will have to compromise and improvise. If a teacher wants to teach too much material in asingle class, the pupils will become frustrated and restless. A wise teacher makes a compromise and decides to leave out some of the more complex material. This means forgetting about the agreed upon dance curriculum for some time and improvise what is to happen during the rest of the class. A

²⁰ For more info on the DJ workshop: <http://www.elcorte.com/learn/mayday-dj.htm>

stubborn teacher will not notice what is happening and go on giving instructions to a crowd that is no longer with him. The result is that dancers become frustrated. As a DJ I don't want to send dancers home with frustration. So I give them some happy music towards the end of the milonga. This will work for teachers too.

Both DJ's and teachers are creating a **structure** for dancers. Let's start with the structure in a class. Although I am not a teacher (and have absolutely no ambition to become one), I can imagine that classes are structured as follows: warming up, demonstration of what is to be learned (goal of class), practising with help of the teachers and finally summarizing the class / announcing next week's topic. A DJ will also maintain a structure in a milonga, because that is what dancers want: a predictable structure (knowing what and when they can expect) with a not always to predictable choice in music.

Of course there are also many **differences** between DJ-ing and teaching tango. DJ's work with a **continuous flow** of music, whereas teachers regularly will **interrupt** the music to explain and/or demonstrate things. DJ's are more or less **passively facilitating** people to dance. Teachers are actually **actively learning** people to dance.

Most DJ's will use a structure in which tango, valse, milonga and alternative tango (neotango, worldmusic, etc) are circulated in a certain way. The most common way to do this is:

tango / valse / tango / milonga / tango / valse etc.
4-8 / 3-4 / 4-8 / 3-4 / 4-8 / 3-4

For structuring a milonga there are several tools. A **tanda** is series of songs that form some sort of a unity. The unity can refer to several aspects: music genres, an certain orchestra, recordings of approximately the same period, recordings with the same speed (beats per minute), etc:

tango / valse / tango / milonga / tango / valse etc.
tanda/tanda/ tanda / tanda / tanda / tanda

Tandas can be separated by a **cortina**. A cortina (literally a curtain) is a piece of music, which is not meant for dancing. It is used to separate tandas:

tango **C** valse **C** tango **C** milonga **C** tango **C** valse etc.
(C stands for cortina)

Its function is for dancers to leave the dance floor so that new combinations can be formed. At least that is the way it is in some milongas in Argentina. The use of cortinas was (re)introduced from Argentina to Europe in mid nineties. Among dancers and DJ's, cortinas is a controversial subject.

Every once in a while a tanda will or can be replaced by something **special (alternative tango)**. Where tandas function as building stones for a milonga, a musical arc's main function is to structure a salon.²¹

A **musical arc** is a series of tandas that form a unity. You can end a musical arc with some special song, which signals a (major) change in music (and therefore also a change in atmosphere):

tango / valse / tango / milonga /special / tango / valse etc.
(The bold signifies a music arc)

One of the most problematic aspects of teaching tango is to have a good overview of the tango music in your collection. It is one thing to collect a lot of tango music, but it is another thing to find that one song your are looking for, but forgot the title and performing orchestra. Attaching labels to music will help you trimming down the number of songs where to search. If you allow me to draw an analogy with a library full of books, randomly put on shelves compared to a library where books are categorized in certain subjects, I know where you will go to borrow a book. Categorizing

²¹ In chapter 4 of the El Corte DJ manual I discuss at great length one of my playlists.

will help you save time in your process of searching a certain song or a certain type of music.

There are several ways of classifying tango music. As a teacher and also as a DJ, you will have to develop a classification system that works for you. And don't look surprised if another teacher or DJ has a completely different system, which is okay for them, but very confusing for you.

Here are some **dimensions** which you could use to classify your tango collection:

* vocal - instrumental

Is there singing which accompanies the music or do you only hear instruments playing?

* energetic - melancholy

Does the music energize you or does it consume your energy?

* rhythmic - lyrical

Is there a regular beat which is dominant or does the rhythm (beat) at times 'hide' behind the melody?

* old - modern

Is the music from the golden age of tango (epoca de oro) or even earlier or does the music originate in the sixties or later?

* simple / regular - complex / irregular

Is it easy to 'translate' the music into dancing or do you really have to re make an effort to do so?

* slow - fast

Is the music in an easygoing tempo or does it feel that you have to speed up your dancing?

* introvert - extravert

Does the music make you want to dance in an intimate way (small steps, no spectacular figures) or does it invite to dance big and spectacular?

* danceable - concertante

Does the music make you want to dance or do you want to sit down and listen to it?

After you have labelled your music song by song or orchestra by orchestra (a faster but more risky method), the question is **what**

categories are relevant for teaching. Simple question, difficult to answer, because it depends on what subject you want to teach to what level of students. A related question is **which music can be used for teaching.** Which orchestras (in which period) are fit for teaching?

For **beginners** (0-1 year dance experience) I would prefer to choose simple, rhythmical, energetic and instrumental music with a medium tempo (65 bpm for tangos; 90 bpm for milongas and 65/70 bpm for vales). In terms of tango orchestras this would mean: Alfredo De Angelis, Juan D'Arienzo, Miguel Calo, Pedro Laurenz, Lucio Demare, Francisco Canaro, Angel D'Agostino (with Angel Vargas) and Carlos Di Sarli (period from 1942 and later).

For **intermediate dancers** (1-4 years dance experience) I am thinking of the slightly more complex and lyrical and maybe a bit melancholy music, of all tempi. In terms of orchestras this would mean that you can also use orchestras such as Ricardo Tanturi, Anibal Troilo, Rodolfo Biagi, Jose Garcia, Edgardo Donato, Roberto Firpo, Osvaldo Fresedo, Francisco Lomuto, Ricardo Malerba and Manuel Buzon.

For **advanced dancers** (> 4 years dance experience) complex, lyrical, fast and irregular music should be a challenge. In terms of orchestras this would mean Osvaldo Pugliese, Horacio Salgan and Julio De Caro.

In general I think it is best to use music from **la epoca de oro** (forties and early fifties), but please do remind that I am a DJ and not a tango teacher, so my classification of tango orchestras as suited for beginners, intermediates and advanced dancers may not be 100% correct. Feel free to correct me :-)

4.9 Conclusion

Regardless of what type of tango DJ you are or aim to be; now it is up to you to build a wonderful salon.²² You have all the tools. It should be easy, but it is not. Sometime it is very hard and frustrating work. Even experienced DJ's will have nights it just doesn't work out. Some times feel catastrophic. Help, the DJ is drowning! What to do in a situation like this?

- Play it safe. Play only traditional rhythmical tangos everybody knows and loves. Have some super tandas in reserve. This gives you time to readjust your strategy.
- Don't experiment with new pieces of music you want to try out. If you don't feel happy as a DJ it is wise to keep a low profile. Don't try to attract attention at all. Some opportunities just are not meant for a DJ to give a personal touch to. So be it, accept it and wait for better times.
- Don't panic. Most dancers will give you more credit than you will expect. They will realize that you are trying to please them and still have to learn the trade. And as long as you are learning, they will keep on giving you credit. It is however another matter if you are obnoxious and don't learn anything. And most important, remember, also experienced DJ's have their off days.
- Get into contact with the dancers and ask if they like it, if they have requests, etc.

²² In general you can distinguish three types of tango DJ's: the **traditional** DJ (only plays tangos from la epoca de oro and before this period), the **eclectic** DJ (plays not only traditional tangos, but also specials/alternative tangos) and the **thematic** DJ (plays only neotango and specials/alternative tangos).

5 Do & don't

5.1 Introduction

*“Everybody wants to be a DJ,
Everybody thinks it is oh so easy.”
(Soulwax, Too many DJ's)*

*“Those who can't dance say the music is no good.”
(Jamaican proverb, anonymous)*

We conclude the part on the art of DJ-ing with some guidelines, we learned by experience.

5.2 Don't loose your concentration

Sometimes you will have to work for hours and naturally you will experience lesser periods of DJ-ing. Focus yourself on playing music people want to dance to and forget about your personal favorites.

Should a DJ dance while DJ-in? You can dance, but not too often. Dancing while playing music is risky. Dancers might interpret it that you don't take DJ-ing seriously and even find it disrespectful. On practice nights and informal salons it is okay for a DJ to dance, but only as long as the DJ manages to remain in control of the musical flow. On the other side, some dancing to feel the atmosphere, might have a function for a DJ.

Also (if you DJ with a laptop and have access to internet) don't read and answer your mail, don't play games (sound might interfere with the music you play) and don't google, etc. It is not very polite towards the dancers, because they will notice that you are not fully concentrated on DJ-ing.

5.3 Try to 'read' your audience

A good DJ respects his audience. He is there to see to it that the dancers have a good time dancing. A DJ who is able to read the signals from his audience and is able to translate them in to the musical scenario, shows his respect to the audience. But how do you

read your audience? The following points might help you reading your audience:

- How many people are dancing and how many are not? Dancers have a tendency to spread out proportionally in a space. If proportionally few people are dancing, a DJ should change his strategy.
- Who is leaving the dance floor and who is entering? If beginners leave the floor en masse, you might be playing too complex music. Vice versa; if experienced dancers leave the floor, it could be that the music is too simple, maybe even boring. Aim at a compromise.
- What are the expressions of the dancers and the people who watch? Do they look happy, concentrated, confused, etc? Are they enjoying themselves or not? By getting into an eye contact with the dancers in a nonverbal way (a wink, a nod, a smile, etc.) you will often evoke a signal of what they feel. These signals give you a lot of information. I spend more time watching dancers than selecting music to play.
- Is the dancing chaotically or in a disciplined way? Are there (too much) collisions? If so; switch to more simple, rhythmical and certainly not too big music most dancers know by heart. Avoid powerful Pugliese music for some time.
- Is there a lot of talking when a piece of music or a tanda is finished and the other has not begun yet? Maybe you will have to calm your audience a bit or maybe there is not enough energy and excitement.
- Are dancers faithful to their (dance) partners or is there a lot of switching? If so, what do you do with it?
- Are there 'chronic wallflowers', people who don't dance at all? Maybe you can ask them if they have a request or match them to somebody. Their enthusiasm when they get to dance, is very inspiring for a salon.
- What is circulation speed of dancers and loungers? A low circulation speed means that a salon is static. You can try to bring more variation in your music.

When Fatboy Slim was asked what defines a good DJ he said: “For me, it is whether they look up or not while they are playing. A good DJ is always looking at the crowd, seeing what they like, seeing whether it’s working, communicating with them, smiling at them. A bad DJ is always looking down at the decks and just doing whatever they practised in their bedroom, regardless of whether the crowd is enjoying it or not.”^{23 24}

Another nice quote on reading your audience comes from blues virtuoso B.B. King, who is always prepared to change his playlist during a concert, just to win over the audience: “I am concerned about them. Those are the people that caused me to be on the stage, and they can take you off the stage. It is kind of like in any business. Are you listening to them, pro or con? Each audience is kind of like, excuse the word, a lady. They have a right to change their mind, and they do. You have to be alert enough to tell that if you are not going very well in this direction, change it, abruptly.”²⁵

5.4 Know your music

“Boy, you have to honour the music more than your mother.”
(Omar Vega’s old teacher)²⁶

²³ Brwester & Broughton, *Last night a DJ saved my life*, 2006: 20. For DJ’s who read Dutch, Arne van Terpenhoven & Toon Beemsterboer, *Door! Dance in Nederland* might also be interesting. Especially the chapters on Michel de Hey and Ferry Corsten are revealing, even for a tango DJ.

²⁴ Fatboy Slim (born Quentin Leo Cook) is an English musician (drums), producer and DJ in the modern dance music genre. His music style is known as big beat, which is a combination of hip hop, break beat, rock, trance, house and rhythm and blues. Before pursuing a solo career, he was a member of The Housemartins and Freakpower. For more info, see Wikipedia UK.

²⁵ Kostelanetz, R., B.B. King, *The B.B. King Companion. Five decades of commentary*, 1997: xv.

²⁶ Park, C., *Tango Zen: walking dance meditation*, 2004.

A good DJ knows his music and is obsessive about his music collection. Knowing your music will consume a lot of time, if not a lifetime. If you don't know the music you are playing, how can you estimate what effects it will have on the audience? And a good DJ should always be hungry for new music. To illustrate this, I quote Brewster and Broughton (again):

“The DJ knows music better than you, better than your friends, better than everyone else on the dance floor or in the record shop. (...) A great DJ will hit a room with musical moments so new and so fresh that it is irrelevant that the music is recorded, and so powerful that they easily surpass your all time favourites. (...) The real work of a DJ isn't standing behind some record decks for a couple of hours, looking shifty and waiting for some drink tickets; the time and effort comes in a life spent sifting through music and deciding if it is good, bad or *‘Oh-my-God-listen-to-this!* ‘A DJ's job is to channel the vast oceans of recorded sound into a single unforgettable evening. (...) To become a good DJ you have to develop the *hunger*. You have to search for new records with the same zeal of a gold rush prospector digging in a blizzard. You have to develop an excitement for vinyl that verges on a fetish. You should not be able to walk past a charity shop without worrying what classic rarity you might have missed nestling among those Osmond LP's.”²⁷

5.5 Know your audience

If you know what the audience likes and what they don't like you can avoid a lot of trouble. Don't hesitate to ask the dancers. Also the organization can usually provide good info. For example if they recently provided a milonga workshop, you can play some more milonga tandas. John Woodhouse once remarked that he played for an audience which really existed, whereas many musicians play for an audience that only exists in their imagination.²⁸

²⁷ Brewster & Broughton, *Last night a DJ saved my life*, 2006: 16-17.

²⁸ John Woodhouse (1923-2001) was a famous Dutch accordion player in the fifties.

5.6 Know yourself

Knowing yourself, your weak points and your strong points is important. Be critical to yourself but not too critical, or otherwise it will spoil your fun in DJ-ing. Being aware of mistakes you made, will teach you important lessons. It is not a problem to make a mistake, but it is irritating for your audience if you do not learn from it. You might want to keep a DJ-diary in which you write down the things you learned. Also helpful will be evaluating your own playlist a few days later.

5.7 Perform in a dynamic way

Always try to aim at a dynamic performance. A DJ who plays the same type music all night long doesn't do the dancers any good. Even if the music is brilliant and very good to dance to, it will become irritating after some time. Variety is the spice of life.

A word of warning might be necessary. Some music can be extremely strong in evoking emotions with some dancers.. This can work out positive but also negative. Music can be a very effective carrier of emotions. By listening to music we also learn to deal with our feelings. It can offer solace and helps us understanding who we are.²⁹ Music is the language of emotion. Be carefull with playing (too much) superemotional music.

5.8 Look for the 'common denominator'

Most DJ's I know, happen to be experienced dancers and have also an extensive musical knowledge and experience in tango music and other types of music. This implies a risk in DJ-ing. A DJ might have an unconscious tendency to play difficult and musically interesting or special music. For beginners this is usually too difficult to dance to and they drop out. Believe me, you don't want that to happen, because without beginners a tango community has no future at all. Play simple music, music used in teaching tango, etc. and only incidentally something more complicated.

²⁹ Henkjan Honing in Prins (2008).

5.9 Do not play too loud

As I mentioned before: if you have to shout, the music is too loud. However when you have been DJ-ing for some hours, you might get used to a certain sound volume and wonder it is still loud enough. An occasional walk through the dance hall will help you place it into the right perspective. Also leaving the dance hall for a few minutes (smoking, toilet, some fresh air) will do the trick.

During a milonga you will have to adjust the sound volume constantly. In the beginning of a milonga (when there are not many visitors yet) the sound volume needed is less than what the milonga needs when it is fully crowded. Towards the end, when people start to leave, you should not forget to turn the sound volume lower otherwise it will become too loud.

So you will be constantly adjusting the volume, also because there are serious differences in sound levels between different recordings.

Not only the sound volume is an important factor, but also too much bass (low frequencies) and treble (high frequencies) can irritate the dancers. It is unpleasant for your ears. Note that in neo tango music there usually is a lot of bass. So it might be wise to adjust the sound and/or bass, or neighbours will start complaining! So, use your equalizer wisely!³⁰

Another phenomenon is that at the end of a song and the beginning of a new one, the dancers can be rather noisy. For all kind of reasons they talk and quite a lot of nice intro's of songs are overwhelmed by talking. What can you do about this? There are several solutions. You can make the breaks between songs a little longer. Or you can lower the sound volume. This usually works well.³¹

³⁰ Michiel Lombaers discusses in great length what you can do with a mixing console; see chapter 6.

³¹ Totton (2003:164) illustrates this with an example in the world of flamenco, where they sometimes completely switch off all sound to get people to quieten down and listen to the singer, when he starts his performance. His explanation: "Because they are no longer being blasted with noise, they listen."

By the way I find this a very disrespectful attitude. You are cheating yourself (not important) and others (very important) out of dancing time. And also it is lacking in respect to the DJ who is working hard to give you a good time.

5.10 Don't try to attract (too much) attention

A DJ is there at the service of the dancers and not for some ego boosting. Of course you will show your character in playing music, but be critical to yourself.

This is not an easy thing for beginning DJ's. Sometimes you find fascinating music you fall in love with. Such a blind spot can give you a bum steer. What you think is fascinating music, is a very personal thing. It is absolutely no guarantee that others will share your enthusiasm. What to do with this special piece of music that is 'haunting' you? Don't play it for some weeks and check if it still is a darling to you. Try to dance to it and register how it feels. Try it out in an informal setting (after a class perhaps) and ask what people think of it. And (sigh) sometimes you will have to kill your 'darling', but you can always listen to it at home. Or you can very carefully try to plug it by playing it over and over again and making it a hit. This is risky.

5.11 Requests

From time to time somebody will request a song. It is up to you if you will humour such a request or requests in general. If you do, you don't have to respond to it immediately. It might very well take about half an hour or more to fit the request into your scheme. A request that doesn't fit into the atmosphere at all can be ignored. Always do explain why you can't honour a request and if you can honour it, about what time they can expect their request.

*"And I get tired of dj's
Why is it always what he plays
I'm gonna push right through
I'm gonna tell him to
Tell him to play us*

Play us a slow song”
(Joe Jackson A slow song)

5.12 Exchange experiences with other DJ’s

Apart from exchanging musical experiences with other DJ’s it can be helpful to talk shop with other DJ’s about DJ-ing. Giving and receiving feedback in a respectful way has never harmed anybody yet. And two do know more than one. The advantage of asking another DJ to give feedback is that he speaks the lingo.

5.13 Be your self

“I am a DJ, I am what I play”
(David Bowie, D.J.)

You are unique in your taste and the way you structure a milonga. Be true to yourself. If an organiser asks you to DJ in a style you find difficult to tolerate, then you can say no to the offer. Or maybe try it a few times and then decide if you like it.

And if, after a few good gigs in a row, you grow too big for your breeches (that is get conceited), remember John Peels’ words: “It is obvious that disc-jockeys, as a class, are essentially parasitic. We are, with lamentably few exceptions, neither creative nor productive. We have, however, manipulated the creations of others (records) to provide ourselves with reputations as arbiters of public taste.”^{32 33}

³² Peel, John, *Margrave of the marshes*. His autobiography, London: Corgi Books, 2005:22.

³³ John Peel (born John Robert Parker Ravenscroft) was a legendary English DJ, radio presentator and journalist, who was known for his eclectic taste. Peel promoted many new artists and bands of various music styles. Among the bands which credit Peel as a major boost to their careers are: T-Rex, David Bowie, The Sex Pistols, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Fairport Convention, Pink Floyd, The Clash, The Undertones, Buzzcocks, The Cure, Joy Division and PJ Harvey.

5.14 DJ's life cycle

In a DJ's life cycle you can roughly distinguish three phases:

- learning the trade
- DJ-ing as a 'career'
- resigning as a DJ

The first two phases have been discussed in detail. In this paragraph we focus on the end of a DJ's career, for one thing is sure: you won't go on DJ-ing forever.

There are several reasons for resigning as a DJ:

- DJ-ing becomes a routine. You have been there and done it just too many times. The inspiration is gone. When you start feeling that you have to DJ again in that awful place, with always the same people, the same jokes, our advice is to quit DJ-ing there and maybe quit DJ-ing at all. Or take a sabbatical year and then decide if you want to pursue your career as a DJ. Because if the inspiration is gone and you sit there DJ-ing with all that bad energy around you, the dancers will notice it. Do a service to the dancers and to yourself and quit DJ-ing. By doing that you will change a lose – lose situation into a win – win situation. People will respect you for doing so!
- Other things in life become more important: a career, a family, etc. DJ-ing is fun but it is certainly not the most important thing in life. It was fun while it lasted, but there comes a time to make another step in life.
- DJ-ing is hard work, both physically and mentally. DJ-ing all night costs you a lot of energy. You have to stay concentrated and alert for hours. Think about reading the audience, dealing with requests, talking with guests and organizers, handling the sound system and deciding what to play next. If the task of DJ-ing becomes too strenuous, you can decide to DJ less hours or on less occasions or to quit DJ-ing at all.

So be realistic about it. When your time has come, quit DJ-ing. Don't continue DJ-ing because you have done it for many years, for the money, the prestige or because you feel an obligation to the dancers or the people who hire you. It is just not worth it. After you DJ

career is over, you can still be involved in tango DJ-ing by giving constructive feedback to beginning tango DJ's or make up for all those hours of dancing you missed.

Another related topic is the reputation of a DJ. After some time dancers will start labelling a DJ: a good DJ, a traditional DJ, a neotango DJ, a DJ with a sense of musical humour, etc.

The problem with labels is that they stick to you. They can be very hard to get rid of. A label can also work as a self fulfilling prophecy. And if you want to change your DJ style after some years, this can be hard to do. A change in style which is too abrupt, will confuse, annoy, surprise, frustrate, etc. the dancers. So if you want to change your style, do so gradually. Changing your style is also a good way to avoid over exposure for dancers and will prolong your DJ life.

5.15 DJ intervision

In March 2008 I started to evaluate playlists of two of the El Corte DJ's. This is what I call DJ intervision. DJ intervision (probably a newly coined word, derived from the dutch word *intervisie*) refers to the process of improving tango DJ skills by asking a colleague to give feedback on problems and/or bottlenecks a DJ experiences.

DJ intervision aims especially on beginning DJ's, who are still finding out their DJ style. The aim is to give professional (constructive and respectful) feedback to a DJ.

My method is that after a DJ set I ask them for a playlist to evaluate (or they ask me if I want to evaluate their playlist). It is essential that I have experienced their DJ set 'live', so that I know how the dancers responded to their DJ-ing.

When evaluating their playlists I don't aim at telling them to 'do this' or 'never do that' (although sometimes this does happen), but giving them feedback in such a way that they discover their own rules, which are rules that work for them (but not necessarily for you and me).

This Socratic way of giving feedback is not to answer questions (because there usually more correct answers), but to ask the questions or share an observation, which will allow them to discover their own DJ logic and hopefully will help them to develop their own DJ intuition. DJ intervision also should be a two way

communication.³⁴ It goes without saying that it never should be an
intervisor's intent to create a clone of himself.

³⁴ Socrates (Greek philosopher, who lived from 470 to 399 before Christ) was
firmly convinced that people learned to answer questions that haunted them.

Bibliography

- **Boccia**, Dan, Sound system recommendations (internet)
- **Broughton**, Bill & **Brewster**, Frank, Last night a DJ saved my life. The history of the disc jockey (New century edition), London: Headline Book Publishing, 2006
- **Broughton**, Bill & **Brewster**, Frank, How to DJ (properly), Bantam Press, 2002.
- **Brown**, Stephen. A beginners guide to tango record labels. [www. tango dj .org](http://www.tango dj .org).
- **Brown**, Stephen. Classics of tango dance music & A DJ's guide to post-golden-age recordings Tango Argentinas de Tajes.
- **Brown**, Stephen. Playing music for milongas: the DJ's role. www. tango dj .org.
- **Brown**, Stephen. The musicalizadore of Argentine Tango: Building a library, How to improve as a DJ & The dancers and the DJ, 2003-2004. www. tango dj .org
- **Brown**, Stephen. Classics of tango dance music & A DJ's guide to post-golden-age recordings Tango Argentinas de Tajes.
- **Chau**, Royce, Why do I love a cortina, The Tango Times, Spring 2007, nr 54.
- **Drake**, David, Tango DJ Responsibility, 2005 (internet).
- **Elshaw**, Keith c.s. Programming music for milongas (internet).
- **Fisher**, Veronika, A guide to tango Djing (mailed to me by author, maybe available via Tango DJ forum).
- **Foehr**, Stephen, Dancing with Fidel, London: Sanctuary Publishing Ltd., 2001.
- **Gout**, C., Muziek in zwart-wit. *Gesprekken met pioniers van de lichte muziek in Nederland*, Zaltbommel: Aprilis, 2006.
- **Herreman**, Tine. W., DJ resource and recipes (mailed to me by author, maybe available via Tango DJ forum).
- **Kovalchuke**, Oleh. Argentine tango blog (internet).
- **Lademan**, Patrick J., Argetine tango DJ basic guidelines, 2009.
- **Morrall**, Steve. Djangology (internet).
- **Muller**, P. Short guide for tango DJ's (internet).

- **Nettl**, B., Folk and traditional music of the western continents, Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.: 1965.
- **Peel**, J., Margrave of the marshes. His autobiography, London: Corgi Books, 2005.
- **Prins**, M., Taal van de emotie, in: De Gelerlander, 20-12-2008.
- **Sedo**, Melina, Heroes of the Silver Disc. Guidelines for successful DJing, www.tangodesalon.de, 2008.
- **Tango DJ Forum**, Yahoo group of tango DJ's talking shop, (internet).
- **Taylor**, Julie, Paper tangos, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1998.
- **van Terpenhoven**, Arne & **Beemsterboer**, Toon, Door! Dance in Nederland, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 2004.
- **Totton**, R., Song of the outcasts. *An introduction to flamenco*, Portland, Cambridge: Amadeus Press, 2003.
- -, Music for dancing, <http://tangoaustralia.com.au/home>
- -, DJing, 2008, <http://tangobrio.com/word/2008/01/06/djing/>