

PARISIAN TANGO
(U.S.A)

The nineteenth century Tango found its way from Buenos Aires to Paris in the first decade of the twentieth century. After being modified in the cabarets of Montmartre, the Tango became a tremendous craze in Paris (which was dubbed "Tangoville" by the press in 1912. Exhibitions dancers invented hundreds of "fantasy" steps which were beautiful to watch but overwhelming to those attempting to learn the Tango. In response to this apprehension, most teachers assured their students that less than a dozen steps were essential to the "true" Tango.

Comparing the most reliable sources from 1911 to 1915, we find that the European (especially Parisian) dance manuals were in close concordance with each other on these essential Tango figures. They often made clear distinctions between the original Tango steps and the diverse fantasies.

The following is a sampling of six of the most common "original" Tango steps. There were indeed varying interpretations of each step, but here we show the most typical forms. This sequence of steps is also typical of the original Parisian form, beginning with four steps backing the lady and concluding with a rotating step. The Europeans tended to commence the Tango with the man's right foot, while Americans usually began with the man's left. We will follow the latter custom here.

Although the Tango originated in Argentina, many Americans considered the Tango a sophisticated Parisian dance.

Music: R. Powers special cassette

As in most ragtime-era dance manuals, only the man's steps will be described. Unless otherwise noted, the lady is facing him and steps with the opposite foot.

LA MARCHA (la marche) - Back the lady 4 slow steps in waltz pos.
He begins fwd L, she starts back R.

MEDIA LUNA - Step fwd L; R to the R side; close L to R with wt (SQQ).
(demi-lune) The second of the 3 steps sweeps to the side in a half-moon shape.) Then step back R; L to the L side; close R to L with wt (SQQ).

EL MARCHA Back the lady 4 slow steps.

EL CORTE (pas de'arret) - Step fwd L; R to the R side; close L to R with wt; step back R, holding for 2 slow cts (SQQS).
During the hold, twist open into closed promenade pos, both facing LOD.

EL CHASSE (le chasse) - Promenade 2 slow steps fwd, L,R; facing ptr, step L to L side and close R to L; promenade 2 more step fwd L (SSQQS).

(Note: a longer chasse passage would have continued the SSQQSSQQSSQQ sequence.)

PARISIAN TANGO (Cont'd)

EL MEDIO CORTE (temps d'arrêt) - Promenade one more step fwd R, stopping and dipping; step back L; close R back to L with wt; promenade 2 more steps fwd L,R (SQQSS).

Note that the combined chasse and medio corte create the classic SSQQSSQQSS pattern.

EL MOLINETE (le moulinet) - He sweeps her into waltz pos (facing squarely) as he steps fwd L at her; rock back and forth (not side to side) L and R as you slowly turn CCW. She faces him as she falls back onto her R, then continues to rock back and forth. Total of 8 slow steps completing one full turn. He finishes facing LOD, ready to recommence the sequence.

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FOX TROT

A series of steps from 1915. One of the very first Fox Trot steps was a combination of two slow and four fast walks backing the lady (described by the Castles in 1914). Shortly thereafter, the Fox Trot began to borrow steps from the Tango. All of the above Tango steps were incorporated into the early Fox Trot, and some still survive today (such as the Media Luna and long version of the Chassé).

To create a typical sequence of early Fox Trot steps, replace each appearance of El March (SSSS) with the Castles' Fox Trot step (SSQQQQ), then continue the rest of the Tango sequence, danced in a relaxed, somewhat bouncy style.

Notes by R. Powers 1988

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