

International Tango

by Harold & Meredith Sears

When we dance our Smooth rhythms, like Waltz, Foxtrot, and even Quickstep, we are regularly encouraged to flow smoothly. We take one step and let it flow into the next so that there really is no line or marker where one step or action ends and the next begins. And we rise and fall in a third dimension of soaring flow. Our goal is to float into one figure, out of that and into the next, in one continuous gliding movement.

But not in Tango. International or English Tango is a flat dance characterized by a staccato emphasis on each beat and by alternating action and rest, movement and stillness. Take the step sharply and hold it -- step and hold. In Tango, we dance many of the same pretty figures that we use in Waltz, but as one of our teachers tells us, "In Tango, you take the *pretty* out."

In addition to making the steps sharp, there is no foot swivel. Put the foot where it should be, and then turn the body on that foot. Don't rotate the foot on the floor. The foot should hit the floor and stick. Tango is sticky, jerky -- of course, not in an awkward way but in a proud, dramatic, and even haughty way. Don't smile. Don't even deign to *look* at your partner.

Let's look at a simple Tango figure, the **Walk Two**, and see how this lack of smooth prettiness plays out. First assume your usual closed or waltz position. Now, swivel a little left-face, soften the knees, and fit your four knees together: he-she-he-she. The rotation will shift the toes of your right foot to the instep of your left. The man's right shoulder will lead. Steps are a bit crab-wise and curved a little to the left. Walk heel to toe, skimming the floor. We are down. We are grounded. The hold is closer than in Waltz. He places his right arm farther around the lady, and he brings his left hand closer, bending the left elbow a bit more. She places her left arm on top of his right arm and tucks her left hand around in back and under his upper arm, fingers together, and thumb locked firmly under his arm. She puts herself well into his right arm, and you both sway left to keep your torsos up and proud -- close at the hips, but topline apart.

Now, the Walk Two is danced in two slow counts, but we mustn't use the full slow to take the step. In tight closed position, the man steps forward firmly, (lady back). Get onto the lead foot and even bring the trail foot forward. Now, hold. Your count might be to step on the 1 and then fairly sharply bring the trail foot to the lead foot on the &-count. You see, you are really beginning to take your second walking step (with the trail foot) in the very first beat of the measure. Don't draw that trail foot up smoothly over the 1 and the 2 and into the 3, but place it sharply into a touch position on the 1. Now, hold beat 2. There is tension here, and drama. Then, repeat for the second Walk. Step with the trail foot, place the lead foot in readiness, hold.

The foot placement contributes to the sharpness of the steps. We dance forward with the heel and then the flat of the foot, but with no rise and fall -- there is no feel of rolling from heel to ball to toe in a fluid sort of flow. It is almost as if we are moving straight to the flat of the foot -- Put it there! Put it there! -- no flow; discrete steps; deliberate steps. There is a stealthy, stalking quality -- step, listen for prey, step again.