



Stowe Tango Festival returns

The impassioned art of tango is ripe for sharing

STORY / Jasmine Bigelow

Like so many of life's worthy exercises, it starts with a breath. A deep inhale that subconsciously accentuates your sense of poise. You don't know exactly what's going to happen. On an upbeat, you're moving. But you're not thinking about your specific steps. You're probably not thinking at all. To be engaged in tango is to be connected to the music and the moment, not your mind.

Tango is a temptress turned love story. The idea arouses curiosity and a little bit of fear. You think, "Beautiful women in strappy heels and suggestive dresses? It's probably only safe when kept at a distance." So your introduction to tango starts out as a dare among friends, an experience you expect to be fodder for laughter. But what happens is you find a different kind of joy. Not one to laugh about, but one you don't want to be without.

When you shed your preconceptions, so much about tango is surprising.

Tango is not choreographed. Except by the energy that transpires when two people find the right balance of space and embrace between them. If their connection clicks, the next step—to each of them—is perfectly clear, and the result is a unified journey around the dance floor that appears to be rehearsed, but is actually beautifully improvised.

Tango transcends dance. Tango is music. For classical musicians, learning to play tango is like

learning a new language based on a familiar alphabet. It's a different way of playing the same notes. It's more dramatic. More innovative. More expressive.

Tango is a social culture. It has a storied history, and it had a heyday. Almost a century after its golden age, tango is making a resurgence. Today, in Stowe, the Argentine Tango Society (which makes its U.S. headquarters here) cultivates an emergent community of tango devotees. A community that is enigmatic, yet welcoming. Its enthusiasm for tango fuels a desire to share it with anyone who dares to explore it.

With the creation of the Stowe Tango Music Festival, tango gurus are generous with their knowledge. The festival is multifaceted, providing education and entertainment in a varied format that is digestible for everyone: workshops, concerts, milongas, dance classes, and Argentinean cultural exhibits. This kind of local access to world-class tango is a gift.

You can tango. Take that first breath. Put yourself out there. Feel intimidated. Get exhilarated. Try a step, or just watch. Tap into your curiosity. Connect. Be in the presence of a high level of passion and fervor. It's infectious. ■

ESSENTIALS: Stowe Tango Music Festival: August 19 – 22. stowetangomusicfestival.com.

"Tango is an embrace, and that's the most important thing. People need to be embraced in life, and when they find that, they don't want to leave it."

—Hector Del Curto
Stowe Tango Music Festival founder,
artistic director, bandoneonist

"Tango music embodies a sense of gesture. It is underlying with passion and a confident elegance. It has a purpose. It's powerful."

—Mary Gibson
Violinist, 2014 tango music workshop
participant

"In the tango community, you meet people of different ages and with different interests. Everyone is positive and accepting. You don't have to be 'fit' or have experience. If you can learn a few steps, you can travel the dance floor, and you can tango."

—Jisoo Ok
Stowe Tango Music Festival founder,
executive director, cellist

TANGO TANGO TANGO From top left: Tango dancers at the Tango Trail in front of Stowe's town hall. Adele Lun, a participant of the Bandoneon Intensive Workshop. The bandoneon is a type of concertina particularly popular in Argentina, Uruguay, and Lithuania. Hector Del Curto Quintet.