



## Argentine Tango and the Flirtatious Ocho

by Harold & Meredith Sears

There are three styles of Tango in round dancing. We might have first encountered International Tango in *Just A Tango* by the Childers, American Tango in *Tango Mannita* by the Smiths, and Argentine Tango in *Fenestra* by the Moores. Out of the three, Argentine Tango is the playful one, full of flirtation and yearning. Juan Carlos Copes once said that Argentine Tango "is a man and woman in search of each other. It is the search for an embrace, a way to be together."

The first big difference that we see in Argentine Tango, compared to other rhythms, is the dance hold. The basic closed position is called the embrace, the "tango hug," or *abrazo*. We use a relaxed upright stance. The woman has a little forward poise, with her weight on the balls of her feet. We do not have the raised rib cage, stretched torso, and contact at the hips that we have in Waltz or Foxtrot. The man's right hand is lower than in the Smooth rhythms. Her left hand is on his shoulder or even higher on his neck.

It might be easier to assume this tango hold if we picture a simple, friendly hug. When we step up to a friend and hug, we don't stand erect, pull our heads back and left, rotate our shoulders back, raise our elbows up and out, and we certainly don't hold any kind of "rigid frame." We don't do any of these things in our tango hold, either. We embrace. We hug.

We use unusual head positions in Argentine Tango, too. Generally, our eyes are not up but are level, or even cast down. He focuses on her right shoulder. She concentrates on and follows his left shoulder, and it is this visual following of the movements of his torso, as much as the tactile lead through the frame, that provides lead and follow in Argentine Tango. Now and then, you might look away. You can even look at your partner and smile — you would never do such a thing in International Tango.

There is little rise and fall. With each step we collect the free foot and brush the knees and ankles together as they pass in a smooth, slinky, level glide. One teacher asked us to develop the feel of a "great jungle cat." We are stalking, seeking, exploring each other.

The progress of Argentine Tango is interrupted with a great many in-place interactions between the man and woman. These "conversations" involve body rotation, swiveling (ocho), stops (paradas), catching your partner's foot between your feet (trap), foot flicking or pushing (leg sweep), leg hooks (ganchos), various leg crawls, rocking (gauchos), swiveling and flicking (boleos), body twists or shakes (zarandeos), and various cortes.

A figure that especially illustrates this "flirtation with the feet" is the Ocho. "Ocho" means "eight," and the lady traces a figure-8 on the floor with two fanning foot movements. Starting in banjo or closed position, the man swivels 1/8 right-face, leading the lady to step forward right outside the man fanning the left leg clockwise and turning 1/2 right-face to a loose semi-closed position. Then he swivels 1/8 left-face and leads her to step forward left fanning the right leg counter-clockwise and turning 1/2 left-face to closed position. The man swivels slow — slow. The woman does a step, fan (&/slow), step, fan (&/slow).

Most of the time, the man leads an Ocho through rotation of the upper body, without taking a step, but he can strengthen the lead by taking a step with his lead foot and then rotating, much like an Outside Swivel. However, an Ocho is not an Outside Swivel. It is closer, more intimate, more sultry. If the woman holds her attention on his left shoulder as she traces out her figure-8 and keeps herself into him, then we have an Ocho. If she looks up and left and perhaps extends her body up and back, then we have an Outside Swivel.

What sort of picture are we trying to create here—what image, atmosphere, or overtone?

- At its best the ocho becomes a bouquet of motion, tossed like eight roses, at the feet of the partner.
- ... soft and delicate. The deft, gentle manner of her very small pivots was amazing: had the floor been an apple, she would have been taking small bites.
- ... perhaps the most feminine figure of tango.

from *Tango*, Thompson, 2005

Of course, it is not only the woman who is flirting and playing with the man. With his body rotation, he is opening a path for her. He is saying, "come to me here, baby; now over here."

He can do even more. One cue that we often hear is "ocho with lift and tap." Here, the man does take the step back as he leads her forward and into the first swivel of her Ocho. He then extends his right leg in front of her and even "taps" his right foot gently against her right toe, blocking her way. He is teasing, toying with her little flirtation. She moves up to the barrier of his right leg and "lifts" her left leg to step over. She may stroke her shapely shin against his thigh. Obviously, the choreographer will have allowed more time for Ochos with Lift and Tap than for simple Ochos, maybe a whole measure for each swivel. She might even stroke up,

down, and up again, before she finally steps over for the second swivel of the Ocho, whereupon the man will slide his right foot to the left and tap the toe of her left foot, and she will toy and play with him some more. This sort of sequence can be playfully flirtatious in a way that you don't find in any other dance rhythm.

From Annette: **The following link is to a wonderful site about tango. It is well written, well presented and has a lot of links for further information. In my opinion the best tango site on the net. Well protected too, nothing can be copied, alas.**

<http://www.totango.net/copos.html>

