

# TIPS FOR THE TANGO.

By PHYLLIS DARE.

DANCERS'  
MOST  
COMMON  
MISTAKES.

HOW  
TO  
IMPROVE  
YOUR  
DANCING  
FIFTY  
PER  
CENT.



MISS PHYLLIS DARE.

MR. HORACE HOWARD.

The Photographs illustrating the following article were exclusively posed for "The Strand Magazine" by Miss Phyllis Dare (who first danced the Tango in "The Sunshine Girl" with Mr. George Grossmith, and who even then, when the dance was not in favour, predicted its great future success) and by Mr. Horace Howard, the well-known dancer.



At the present time the Tango reigns supreme. And yet only a few months ago a heated controversy was raging in Society on the subject of modern tendencies in dancing, and, with but a very few exceptions, the majority of English "autho-

rities" attacked and belaboured the Tango with that wild fury which so often betokens most vacuous ignorance.

However, to those of us who have studied the dance—many people who condemned it in the severest fashion seemed a little uncertain as to what the Tango really was—it has always been obvious that this wholesale abuse





FIG. 1.—EL CORTE—THE RIGHT WAY.

was so utterly and entirely unjustified that, in time, we all felt sure that there was bound to be a reaction. And now that reaction has surely arrived with a vengeance, for it is no exaggeration to say that for the next few months "everyone will be Tangoing."

This change in public opinion, I must confess, is particularly satisfactory to me, for ever since I first danced the Tango in "The Sunshine Girl" I have most enthusiastically recommended it to my friends. When first I did so I was told that Mrs. Grundy would never permit so improper a dance to be danced in our drawing-rooms. And when I pointed out that the Tango, as properly danced to-day, has been shorn of all its objectionable features, I was politely but acidly told that I was "too up-to-date in my ideas."

Still, all's well that ends well, and, although

I admit that the original Tango was undoubtedly unsuited to the ballroom, as the dance should be danced to-day it is surely one of the most attractive and graceful ballroom dances that have ever been "all the rage." Whether it will appear yet awhile at the State

Ball and at hunt and county balls, which are proverbially conservative, I should not like to say. The fact remains, however, that every dancing enthusiast is now "doing it," and, this being so, and as one who was one of the first to realize its many attractions, I hope and think I may be able to unravel not a few Tango tangles for those who call this dance "the Tango tease"—because they find they cannot master it as quickly as they conquer the dear old waltz and polka.

What are the worst faults that Tango enthusiasts usually commit? Well, first and foremost, I think that they do not show a sufficiently discerning judgment in selecting



FIG. 2.—EL CORTE—THE WRONG WAY.



a teacher. The name of Tango teachers to-day is legion, but many of them unfortunately only teach their own versions, with the result that the pupils find that, although he or she can Tango quite excellently in the particular style in which their teacher has taught them, when they enter a ballroom they discover that their partners "Tango" in an entirely different manner. The reason for this lies in the fact that, to a certain extent, the Tango is a law unto itself, and therefore when learning the dance it is advisable to select a teacher who follows out some popular and fixed method of initiating pupils into this most fascinating dance "craze."

In my opinion, there is only one really sound way of learning the Tango; and that is to take lessons from a really good exponent who has also proved herself a good teacher as well as a good dancer, and to afterwards supplement these lessons by private practice at home. It is well, too, to go to a teacher who understands the advisability of showing his or her pupils five or



FIG. 3.—EL PASEO—THE RIGHT WAY.



FIG. 4.—EL PASEO—THE WRONG WAY.

six of the most important figures first. Under this head I would place (1) El Corte, the fundamental movement of the dance—this movement once mastered, the rest is easy; (2) El Paseo, which is the peculiar walk with which it is usual to commence; (3) Media Luna; (4) Huite Croisse; (5) The Scissors; and (6) El Roueda.

It is quite unnecessary for me to explain in this article the various intricacies of these figures, and I only mention them to impress on Tango enthusiasts the advisability of selecting a teacher who will commence by putting them "wise" as to exactly how these figures should be danced.

Perhaps, of all figures, the most important and at the same time the most characteristic is El Corte. The enthusiast who has mastered the peculiar time and rhythm of this figure will have practically overcome fifty per cent. of the difficulties of dancing the Tango as it should be danced. I would emphasize, too, the all-important point of remembering to dance the Tango





FIG. 5.—THE SCISSORS—THE RIGHT WAY.

as smoothly as possible, and also as quietly and gracefully as possible. The reason why the Tango is so frequently danced in a manner which sends a cold shudder up one's back is that, in their enthusiasm to show how thoroughly they have mastered the Tango, ballroom dancers forget the value of dancing smoothly and indulge in various jerky, jumpy steps which effectually kill the true spirit of "The Tango." To dance the Tango in a jerky manner is as unpardonable an offence as to play a passage in music marked *pianissimo* with the loud pedal down.

In Fig. 1 (right) you will see a position in the dancing of El Corte which is correct in every way. In Fig. 2 (wrong) you will see the most common faults perpetrated by Tango dancers in this movement. Far too many dancers are prone to look down when learning this step, thus causing the incorrect attitude shown in the photograph, and also causing one partner—in this case it is the lady, your humble servant—to lean back too far. I admit it is a natural fault on the part of a beginner to wish to look down to see whether he

or she is moving the feet in a correct manner, but the mere action of looking down is quite sufficient to upset the grace of deportment which is absolutely essential to dancing the Tango as it should be danced.

In Fig. 3 (right) I have illustrated the start of El Paseo, the peculiar walk with which it is usual to commence, as it should be done. In Fig. 4 (wrong) I have shown—in the illustrations demonstrating the most common faults Tango dancers commit, I have purposely slightly exaggerated these mistakes so that they may be apparent to readers at once—some particularly prevalent errors. Thus, firstly, the partners are too close to each other to allow freedom of movement; and, secondly, my partner in the illustration is holding me far too tightly, thus causing the cramped position here shown, a position, by the way, which you can see in any ballroom where the Tango is danced.



FIG. 6.—THE SCISSORS—THE WRONG WAY.



Fig. 5 (right) shows an attitude which occurs most frequently in the Tango. At the moment this photograph was taken I and my partner are seen making a "tap beat" after three walking steps commencing the "Scissor" movement. In every way the photograph shows this movement as it should be executed. In Fig. 6 (wrong) you can see at a glance that we are again too close to each other, and that, as a result, our knees are touching, a fault which obviously causes the movement to appear ungainly and awkward.

At all times I would ask Tango dancers to see to it that they are quite sure of their balance, that they are keeping their knees supple, and—this is most important—that they are not holding each other too tightly. Again, at all times the arms should be held loose, and the Tango danced slowly and to the time of the music. Not for a single instant do I agree with those who say that the Tango should be danced against the time of the music, although I know not a few capable exponents who hold this belief. Personally, I repeat that experience



FIG. 8.—THE MOVEMENT SHOWN IN FIG. 7 INCORRECTLY CARRIED OUT.

has taught me that it is quite an erroneous one.

But to proceed to the most common Tango mistakes. In Fig. 7 (right) will be seen the first movement preparatory to commencing the "Scissor" figure. I and my partner are dancing the way we should dance correctly in every respect. In Fig. 8 (wrong) we have illustrated a pose which is seen very frequently indeed in the ballroom. In the first place, my partner is leaning forward too far, and as a result is



FIG. 7.—ANOTHER MOVEMENT IN THE SCISSORS—THE RIGHT WAY.

dragging me with him, and is also allowing his knees to touch—and touch stiffly. I grant that this movement will not at first be found too simple, but, after all, is any real satisfaction to be derived from learning a dance the intricacies of which can be mastered in ten minutes?

Let me here say a few words about Tango music. Every Tango enthusiast, of course, knows that the music of this dance is founded on the Habanera. There are dozens and

dozens of Tango tunes, but one of the best for beginners to study the marking of time from is "El Choclo." Still, even in this popular tune there is a considerable lack of melody, and therefore perhaps the best advice to give to Tangoists in their early days is to see to it that the time of the tune from which they study the





FIG. 9.—A FREQUENT POSITION IN THE TANGO—THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AND—

various movements is absolutely correct. And also never to confuse Tango movements with ragtime movements—a mistake, by the way, which, strangely enough, is quite a common one.

Fig. 9 (right) shows a pretty position which often occurs in the Tango. I am not attempting to give a name to each position mentioned in this article, as so many people christen the various positions in a different manner. A glance at the pose here shown should, however, be quite sufficient to show Tango dancers exactly the attitude they should adopt.

Fig. 10 (wrong) shows a particularly common fault in this movement—namely, that the dancers are turning their toes up. At first this is what one might almost term a “natural” fault; but, at the same time, it is a particularly serious one, for the toes turned upwards rob the movements of the

dancers of the last shred of grace. Bad habits are easy to acquire in the learning of the Tango, but I would mark this particular fault as quite one of the worst, usually committed by moderately efficient dancers.

I would mention, by the way, that I have met wildly enthusiastic experts who declare that to dance the Tango really well one should master anything between seventy to eighty steps. My own idea, however, is that if a dancer can thoroughly command a dozen, he or she will be able to derive quite as much amusement out of the dance as so-called experts who are continually inventing new steps, every one of which is more or less of a close relation to one of the dozen steps the less versatile performer has at his or her “feet” ends. Besides, it must be admitted that the Tango is not an easy dance to master thoroughly, and even the learning of a dozen steps is no small undertaking.

Fig. 11 (right) provides, I think, a particularly graceful attitude, in which my partner is seen standing still, while I make two or three steps in front of him, finishing with El Corte. This figure is really quite easy to learn, but, unfortu-



FIG. 10.—THE WRONG.

Original from  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



nately, in the learning of it Tango dancers are, at first, liable to fall into one or two serious errors. What these errors are can be seen at a glance in Fig. 12 (wrong). Thus my partner's feet are locked together, while I am on the turn a few inches behind him, which causes the position to look awkward in the extreme. Compare this incorrect position, which is so very frequently seen in the ballroom, with the correct position, and you will see at once what a vast difference there is between the correct and the incorrect way of carrying out this movement.

I now come to a particularly effective and very graceful movement (Fig. 13—right). In this it is necessary to turn the feet out and keep the knees open to secure a graceful result. It is also necessary for the dancers to preserve an absolutely perfect balance, and to move together in perfect time; otherwise—well, take a glance at Fig. 14 (wrong).



FIG. 11.—COMPARE THIS GRACEFUL ATTITUDE WITH THAT SHOWN IN FIG. 12.

FIG. 12.—A POSITION WHICH LOOKS AWKWARD IN THE EXTREME.

This photograph, which I have purposely very much over-exaggerated, shows the appallingly ugly pose which results from dancers not carrying out the advice given. And yet, times without number, I have seen couples dancing the Tango, each of whom has been making almost precisely the same faults as are shown in this illustration.

So far as men are concerned, I would most earnestly advise no Tango enthusiast to attempt to dance in a public ballroom before he has practised assiduously at home, and has thus been able to gain considerable proficiency and experience. In the Tango the main responsibility of initiation and guidance rests almost entirely on the male partner, for I am not exaggerating when I say that, so far as his partner is concerned, all that is demanded of her is intelligent anticipation.





FIG. 13.—A VERY GRACEFUL MOVEMENT SUCCESSFULLY CARRIED OUT.

Some people who have only seen the Tango danced on the stage still believe that many of the movements err on the side of "acrobaticism," for not a few of my friends have told me that movements they have seen in the theatre have impressed them as being far more acrobatic than graceful. To a certain extent, no doubt, this criticism is a just one; but then it must be remembered that on the stage, to secure a really good effect, a certain amount of exaggeration is absolutely necessary.

This being so,

would-be Tango experts who base their style on movements they have seen on the stage would be well advised to subdue that style before giving an exposition of it in the ballroom.

And now I think I have thoroughly covered the question as to what faults are the most common among Tango enthusiasts in ballroom dancing. I would repeat again that, comparatively speaking, the Tango is not a dance which can be "picked up" in a few minutes. At the same time, when once the groundwork has been mastered, whatever you do, please go to a teacher who will initiate you into the six figures I mentioned at the beginning of this article—it is quite a simple matter to learn many new figures. In one's early Tangoing days it is, I think, advisable also to go to a teacher who holds dancing classes; but I also think it is a mistake to attend a class until one has had a few private lessons, for at first the steps are apt to appear so intricate that, until one has thoroughly mastered them, one always runs the risk of discouragement through becoming confused in showing off one's scanty knowledge before others.

And just one last word! Please don't imagine that there is the slightest impropriety about any single movement of the Tango as it is danced



FIG. 14.—THE UGLY POSE WHICH RESULTS FROM NOT CARRYING OUT CORRECTLY THE MOVEMENT SHOWN IN FIG. 13.

to-day. It has long since been rescued from the cabarets of the Argentine and of Montmartre, and is now an original and beautiful dance which anyone can learn with a certain amount of practice.