

Great learning opportunities await novice tango dancers

The Tango Center, located in downtown Eugene, is a great place for beginner ballroom dancers to learn

By **Natasha Chilingirian**
Pulse Reporter

It's amazing. I've had 16 years of dance experience in individual tap, jazz and ballet, but I'm clueless when it comes to social dancing. I have performed several complicated

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK hip-hop routines in my lifetime, but at parties I always end up doing

the same little bouncing move over and over. I thought about attending the ballroom dances at Gerlinger Hall many times, but the thought never materialized. It is time to grow up and dance in public.

I chose The Tango Center, located at 194 W. Broadway, as my gateway to social dancing bliss. As I approached the venue with my escort, I noticed a plain, stark white sign on the awning that simply read, "Tango." I hoped the aura inside the place wouldn't match the dullness of what I hope is a temporary sign. Luckily the interior was soft, candlelit and welcoming. The decent-sized wooden dance floor was surrounded by cafe tables, chairs, tango posters and mirrors. Behind the

dance floor was a romantic cove full of draping fabric and furniture. A few middle-aged couples were awkwardly dancing to saucy, instrumental tango — think Shakira's song "Objection (Tango)".

When it was time for the lesson to start, the dance students formed a circle around two instructors. The space felt big and empty, most likely because only about 20 people showed up for the lesson. We began by introducing ourselves, but the atmosphere seemed a little too intimate and exposed for someone who has never tangoed before. As the evening went on, people continually showed up, and The Tango Center eventually became crowded.

The male instructor, Andrew McCollough, was downright inspiring and passionate about the connection tango provides between two people. He placed an emphasis on gazing into the eyes of your partner, which made it seem like the goal of tango is to convince someone that you are in love with them (making the dance all the more appealing).

We learned the concept of leading with our chest to gently guide our partner either front, side or back. First, we practiced guiding each other in one direction with our arms at our sides, then we added our arms — in a traditional ballroom pose, only more circular — and new stepping directions. Finally, we were allowed to "play," in tango terms, this

means starting to step in one direction then switching to another.

Switching partners — in other words, dancing with a stranger — was required during the lesson. But the prospect of meeting potential dates looked dim, since most dancers were at least baby boomers. Luckily, I ended up with a recent college graduate instead of someone's grandpa, but to be safe, I would suggest bringing a few partners of the opposite sex to this tango lesson.

I returned to my original escort for the last dance, and by then we had really started to enjoy it. Tango is sort of a sophisticated version of the slow dance. The steps are simple, so there is plenty of room to add heart and soul to the moves. McCollough had it right about focusing on connecting with your partner — it's definitely romantic. It reminded me of slow dancing at high school formals, but with more pizzazz.

The Tango Center is a nice change from the loud, bustling bar/party scene. It doesn't come off as a dating depot, but you never know — there were a small handful of college-age people. Mostly, the place served as a glimpse into the world of tango, and as a sleek, low-key setting conducive to relaxation. And I got just what I wanted out of it: confidence in my ability to dance socially.

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drone keyboards, unassuming rhythms and mellow French vocals — the band at times seems to create great music without even trying. They are catchy without using hooks, enjoyable without being enthusiastic and accessible to the point of transcendence.

The band's latest release, "Margarine

Eclipse," takes its trance style and pushes it into something bordering on the baroque. While the core sound remains unaltered, this new work is more expansive and eclectic than any of its previous releases. The arrangements, rather than maintaining a steady tone throughout each song, now weave and flow with more complexity, creating soundscapes that cover a wide history of pop music. Funk, jazz, techno, and even the light string arrangements of 1960s film sound-

tracks all make an appearance on this album, working together to make a well-textured whole.

So while Stereolab may have covered this ground before, each album sees it evolving into something more complex and interesting. On "Margarine Eclipse," the band has created some brilliantly weird pop music and what is probably one of the first great releases of the year.

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