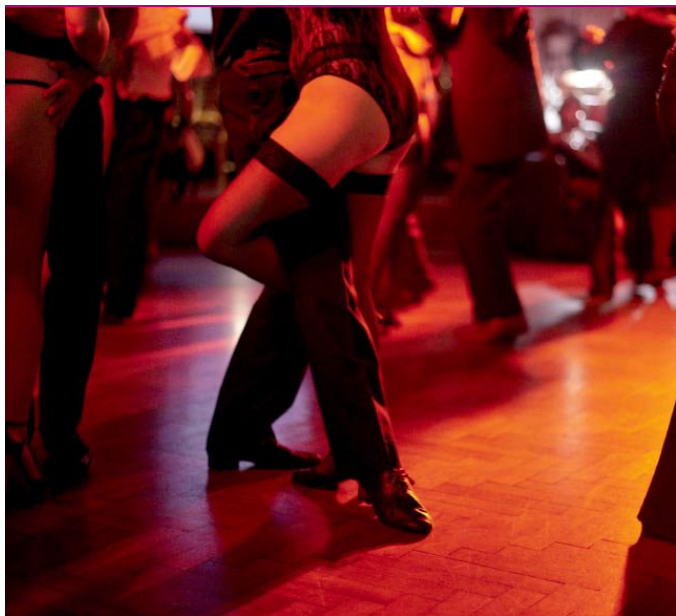


TANGO · NIGHTLIFE

»Nackter Tango«: Hints and Possibilities

How Argentine tango approaches its roots in the impoverished port districts along the Rio de la Plata — creating a fleeting intimacy among strangers. Some women even danced naked at »Nackter Tango«; and plenty more with bare skin, yes — yet hardly any surplus of men and zero orgies on the dance floor.

By Matthias Matting · Photos: Focus Magazine / Klaus J.A. Mellenthin



A fleeting intimacy among strangers: the »Nackter Tango« dance floor.

Open Relationship

They have never seen each other before. The woman, slightly over 40, wears a tightly laced corset over a tulle dress that conceals little, paired with the obligatory high heels. The man, certainly ten years younger, his hair neatly gelled, is dressed in a sharp black suit. Footprints mark his patent leather shoes — space is tight on the dance floor of this bar in a suburban district of Stuttgart.

A gentle impulse, and the woman's heels trace a figure eight across the parquet, until the man's right foot halts her almost without physical contact. A pause that feels endless, the bandoneon wailing, then her shin slides past his, fishnet stockings brushing against tailored suit fabric. Almost imperceptibly, he yields for a brief second to allow her a delicate foot gesture — a so-called embellishment (adorno) of the follower.

Just thirty seconds after the mournful music in four-four time began, both already know more about one another than hours of conversation could ever uncover.



Sensual Walking: The leader guides nearly all of the follower's movements, synchronizing closely with the musical phrasing.

A Fascinating Trend

This scene could unfold at any regular milonga (as Argentine tango dance evenings are called) — were it not for the fact that the female dancers here, at the »Nackter Tango« event organized by Swabian host Gerd Braun, are dressed in an exceptionally alluring and sophisticated fashion.

A distinct fascination must emanate from this concept — the surge of similar events across Germany is otherwise hard to explain. On May 29, for instance, 'Salon Mala Fama' opens in Nuremberg; Karlsruhe recently hosted its 'Sensual Tango'; and dancers in Berlin gather every first and third Wednesday for 'Tango Vicioso'. For early autumn, Braun is even planning a mini-festival at a hunting lodge in southern Brandenburg.

Argentine tango, the most deeply sensual of all dances regardless of what dancers wear, works only when partners commit fully to one another. The man leads, the woman follows — a dynamic that sounds deceptively simple, yet demands unconditional openness from both sides. The leader senses exactly how much guidance to give, while the follower reads his intentions almost telepathically, executing her steps with minimal delay. In doing so, she remains open to surprise at every turn: there is no fixed choreography; instead, dancers improvise seamlessly from a shared repertoire of core elements to match the music. Chest to chest, her eyes gently closed, the couple presents a picture of pure surrender.

Back to the Roots

»Nackter Tango«, the title of the event held on the second weekend of May, may sound provocative, but it points in a very deliberate direction: Braun aims to return to the authentic roots of the 'danced embrace', born in the dive bars and drinking dens of the port quarters of Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Here, amid a vibrant melting pot of 19th-century immigrants, today's tangled web of cultural influences first gave rise to the upbeat milonga, and later to the melancholic, soulful tango. The unemployed, petty criminals, and prostitutes were its original dancers.

Braun's explicit reference to the brothels along the Rio de la Plata sparked notable criticism from parts of the traditional tango community. Yet, setting aside historical human trafficking, the grueling lives of destitute immigrants and impoverished women of that era bear virtually no resemblance to modern times — nor to the lives of the more than 60 guests attending the event.

Argentine tango on this evening is danced by homeopaths, schoolteachers, entrepreneurs, and university students. Outside the dimly lit bar in the Stuttgart suburb, the parking lot is filled mostly with mid- and upper-class cars. Dancers traveled long distances, arriving from Dresden, Hamburg, Hanover, Munich, and even Zurich.



Danced Eroticism & A Game of Possibilities: A profound bond emerges between partners, sustained purely through trust. Despite casting aside taboos, the dance itself remains the true focus.

An Experiment Built on Mutual Respect

Dancers peel off their modest winter coats in a compact cloakroom; the host politely requests that guests visiting the steak restaurant next door do so in ordinary street attire. Local Swabian accents are rarely heard on this

evening — but after all, people did not come here to chat. Because solid tango experience is an entry requirement, there are no voyeurs; the ratio between men and women is well balanced. Some couples dance together all evening, while others switch partners regularly, just as the traditional tango code dictates.

Even if late at night a stray breast appears or a lady foregoes underwear beneath her fishnet stockings, the essence beneath the 'scandalous' label — as a couple from near Waiblingen describes it — is simply 'a completely normal dance celebration, with great music, just in unusual attire'.

Critics may fear a 'sexualization of tango', which UNESCO declared part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity just months ago, placing it alongside Indonesian batik and Japanese Kabuki theater. Yet that critique remains one-dimensional. Here, in the candlelight, the goal is exploring the facets of one's own sensuality through the medium of dance. True to the spirit of tango, the focus is on possibility — framed here with broad freedom and an absence of taboos.

A 41-year-old female dancer from the Rhine-Main area attending for the first time praised the atmosphere: 'Although I traveled without a partner, I felt completely safe; an atmosphere of profound mutual respect prevailed. Nothing happened that I didn't want — it was a truly liberating experience.' Another woman from Nuremberg, who also arrived on her own, described entering a 'state of suspension beyond reality': 'Yes, eroticism naturally plays an important role in such moments. Touches, gazes, smiles, racing hearts, and warmth — combined with immense lightness and inner peace. For one evening, anyone can leave behind their problems, fears, and conflicts — and just be who they wish they could be outside this room as well.'

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