

KCSTAGE

\$4 October 2006

BRYAN COLLEY

ZOMBIE MASTERS

GEORGE ROMERO AND TOM SAVINI VISIT KC

THE JOY OF TANGO
SPOTLIGHT ON JON YOUNG

LIVE, DIE—BIG QUESTION: SIGNING FOR THEATRE
KIWANIS CLUB RAISES \$11,000 FOR ARTS PARTNERS

www.kcstage.com

HOW TO USE YOUR 15 MINUTES OF FAME TO EMBARRASS YOUR MOTHER

The Joy of Tango

by Kim Papineau • kpapineau@kcstage.com

Kansas City is not a bad place to be if you're addicted to the Argentine tango. On weeknights you can almost always be in bed by midnight, so it's not difficult to maintain a real job (should you happen to have one). And since there's rarely an opportunity to tango on a Friday, your spouse, your family, and your best non-dancing friends see you often enough to recognize you.

In some other cities, the tangueros don't have it so easy. Even this side of tango's capital, Buenos Aires (where the sun is rising by the time you get home and soak your bleeding feet), otherwise normal people stumble home in the wee hours, night after night, glassy-eyed, smiling, shoe bags tucked under their arms. "Work, dance, sleep," goes the mantra. "Rinse. Repeat." Erstwhile responsible citizens who are lured to live in Portland, Seattle, and other hotbeds of tango often find that work and other social activity interfere too much with dancing and therefore must be forsaken. Tango claims lives.

What makes it so addictive? As with some drugs, it might well be the lure of nirvana. Known simply as "tango moments," the dizzying heights of the dance can be life-altering. A tango moment's "only competition is a phenomenal erotic encounter of the highest tantric caliber... a mediocre one wouldn't compare," waxes one believer. Like athletes "entering the zone," tango addicts experi-

ence a "tango trance" perhaps all the more powerful for being shared between partners. Some claim clairvoyance, a universe in one moment. Nirvana.

Yet such "tango moments" are elusive even among seasoned dancers, and are often years in the making. Learning is laden with frustrations; while the basics can be learned in a month, mastery is a lifelong pursuit. (A famous Argentine tanguero, having studied the dance for more than fifty years, confided to his friend: "This year, my walk is getting a little better.")

So it must be the more pedestrian pleasures of the dance that sustain our addiction from one tango moment to the next. Those pleasures are many.

There is the human element: the joy of cuddling, the physical and emotional benefits of human touch (well supported by scientific research). There is the family-like sense of community among dancers around the world who share the passion and language of tango. (The context of the "embrace" reaches beyond the physical connection. Travelers are welcomed as friends.)

The connection between partners is rarely sexual but often breathtakingly intimate. Once, after a set of tango, a partner I had only just met told me, "I feel like I have known you all my life."

As a ballroom dancer, I found in the Argentine tango a harmony of the elements I love in other

Continued on page 18

dances. Tango is playful, like the cha cha. It shares with jive elements of humor. Like the rumba, tango is quintessentially sexy... but more demurely so. With sensuality tempered by the elegance of the waltz, tango dancers age well – like in flamenco, the most beautiful dancers are over fifty.

As a woman, and therefore usually a follower, the conversational quality of the tango (as in the West coast swing) is particularly attractive. The follower has an active role in creating the dance, influencing the timing, perhaps even the steps, and ‘adorning’ her role with taps, syncopations, shapes, and caresses.

The structure of the dance is mathematically beautiful, at once simple and mysterious. It is beguiling to both sides of the brain. It is best danced wordlessly, and can be analyzed ad infinitum. Its moods are passionate, often dramatic. In a famous lyric, tango is “a sad thought you can dance to.” (And the music, so integral to the dance, is beyond the scope of this writing.)

Because it is completely improvisational, no two tangos are ever alike. The dancers are trained in technique for moving together, and may be equipped with a ‘vocabulary’ of possible step combinations, but the choreography is created in the moment. It may be as simple as a rhythmic walk, or suitable for the stage with tangling, flying legs and dramatic shapes. What Martha Graham called “the

most beautiful dance of this century” continues to evolve, as new dancers develop and indulge their tango addiction.

Finally, the most superficial of tango’s lures can be a strong one, too: tango style. It gives us a reason to cultivate a look that’s glamorous, elegant, or eccentric; an excuse to dress well and own many pairs of fine shoes.

Kansas City has a small but vibrant community of tango dancers. We are diverse in age, ethnicity, and income. We are artists and engineers, lawyers and laborers, students and retirees. We are straight and gay, and span the political spectrum. We are a core of devotees, new and experienced, with an extended family of dancers who come out to dance once a week or once a year.

It’s easy to get involved and explore for yourself tango’s many temptations. Tango dance parties, called *milongas*, happen every Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday. All are open to the public and all begin with an introductory lesson. There are ongoing group classes, and private lessons, throughout the week with various instructors. Special events include weekend milongas, workshops with visiting instructors, and live performances by our internationally acclaimed local tango quintet, *Tango Lorca*. ▣

For more information, contact Kim Papineau at (877) 364-2779 or visit www.tangogirl.com for links to all local tango events.