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DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

## Argentine Dance

Argentina is in the southern tip of South America, bordered by Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, and Chile. It is the eighth largest country in the world and encompasses a diversity of land, climate, and culture. While Argentina is renown for its natural beauty, some of the world's tallest mountains, expansive deserts, and dramatic waterfalls can be found there, its cities are also very impressive and home to 90% of the country's population.

The principal indigenous peoples are the Quechua of the northwest and the Mapuche in Patagonia. Other minority groups include the Matacos and Tobas in the Chaco and other northeastern cities. Argentina's culture is also greatly influenced by its prominent immigrant population. There are large Jewish and Anglo-Argentine communities throughout the country; small communities of Japanese, Chileans and Bolivians; and enclaves of Paraguayan and Uruguayan residents. From these assorted traditions emerged many unique (and widely celebrated) folkloric and popular Argentine dance forms.

### Tango



**Tango** developed in the 1880's in the poor urban neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, and became the characteristic expression of the lower classes, many of who were recent immigrants from Europe. Tango is a dance of passion, elegance, grace, speed and intricate steps. Born in the bars, cafes, and brothels, it moved to dancing houses, then finally inside the middle and upper class Argentinean homes. Some say the word "tango" comes from the Latin word *tangere* (to touch) - the embrace is central to this dance form as partners dance very close to each other. The entire range of human feelings is expressed in tango.

Argentina developed very fast between 1880 and 1930 becoming one of the ten richest nations in the world. During that period of fast development the very rich often traveled to Europe at least once a year. It was they who introduced Argentine tango to the Parisian nobility. Tango became the craze of the time right away – from Paris, the dance and music rapidly migrated to the other big capitals, London, Rome, Berlin, and finally New York.

Tango evolved as it moved both through the societal levels within Argentina and as it mixed with other world dance cultures. The antique Argentine tango was influenced by the tango Habanera, a dance and music style that reached its peak in 1883 but died towards the end of the century. The tango Habanera evolved from the milonga (with influences from the guajira flamenca) and the tango Andaluz or tango flamenco. The milonga was danced and played by rural populations in Argentina and combined indigenous rhythms with the music of early Spanish colonists. Some aspect of the dance are also attributed to a dance called Candombe, which was danced by Africans and their descendents living in Buenos Aires and nearby Uruguay. The male Candombe dancers danced with their knees flexed, to show their dance skills with walking steps (corridas) and turns.

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*(Argentine dance, continued)*

Tango reached its pinnacle of popularity in the 1940's, the "Golden Age of Tango," during which it evolved into the form we know today. Now it is considered an integral part of Argentine culture, both in its salon (social) and exhibition (theatrical) forms. Internationally it is equally popular amongst Hispanic and crossover audiences, with a very large following in many parts of the United States, Europe, Japan, Mexico and Latin America. Styles vary in Tango: Argentine, French, Gaucho and International, and is considered one of the American 'Standards' regardless of its origin.

The tango that Marcelo and Romina perform in People Like Me 2005 is called "Fireworks." Pianist Roberto Firpo composed the original version of the music in the 1900's. Firpo was one of the fathers of the orquesta tipica that includes bandoneones (a type of accordion), piano, violins and contrabass. Marcelo and Romina dance to a version that was recorded by La Chicana, a group of contemporary tango musicians that dedicates itself to doing both traditional and original compositions. Thanks to the originality of the music, its onomatopoeic and histrionic nature, it was possible to interpret it with two comic characters dancing a tango with a humorous twist.

