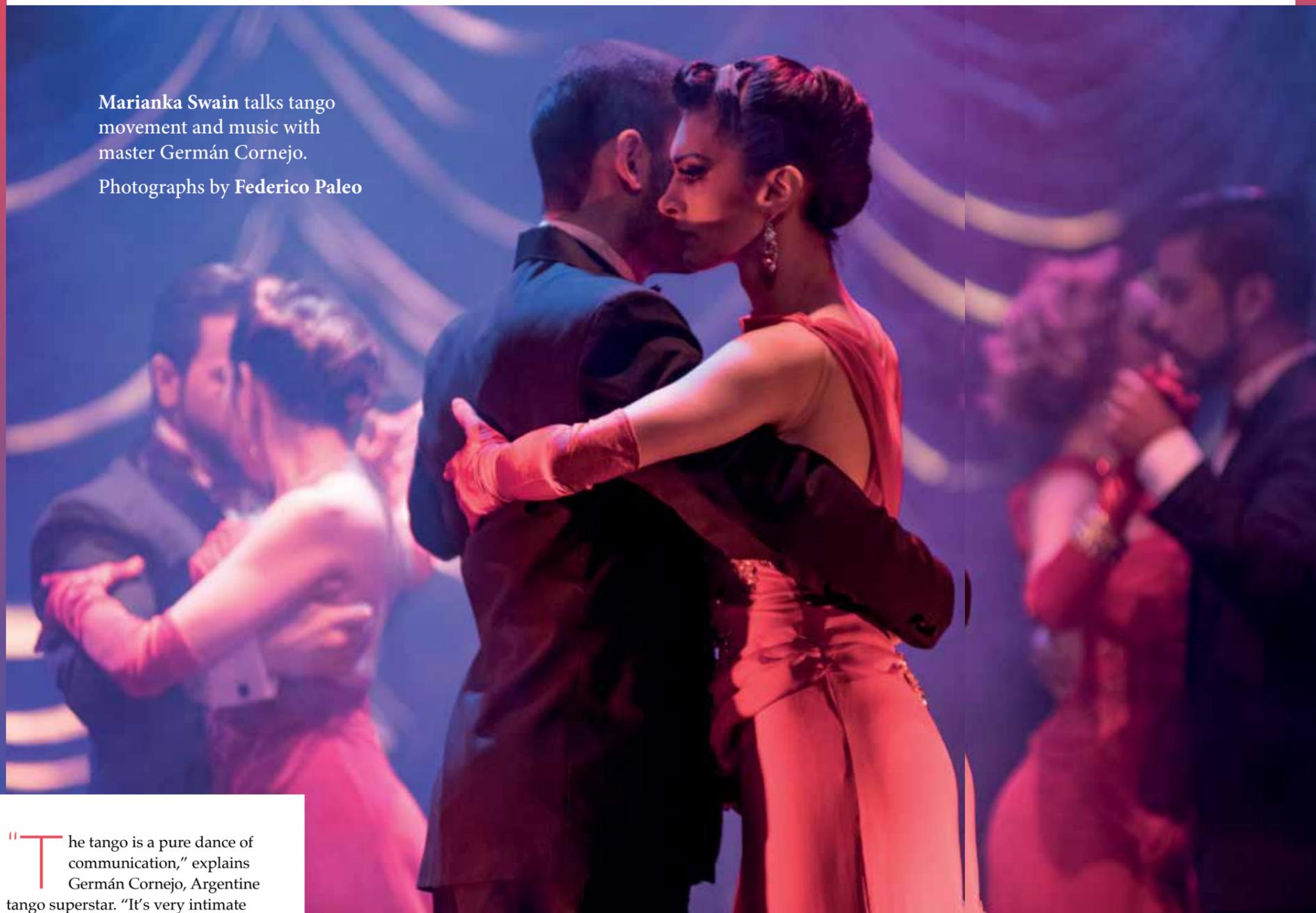


Tangoconnection

Marianka Swain talks tango movement and music with master Germán Cornejo.

Photographs by Federico Paleo



"The tango is a pure dance of communication," explains Germán Cornejo, Argentine tango superstar. "It's very intimate – when you're dancing, you feel like you're inside a bubble, with no one around you. The rhythm of the movement is given not just by the beat or melody of the music, but through the breathing. The connection is so strong that you really lose yourself in the dance."

Buenos Aires-born Cornejo's love of tango came early. "I saw a couple dancing when I was ten. They had amazing chemistry – it was intoxicating! Also the quality

of their dancing, with their legs moving really fast around each other doing the ganchos." Cornejo was immediately attracted to tango's "mix of realism, sensuality, sophistication, communication and mystery", and found that – though he studied other dance styles – only tango gave him the freedom to express himself fully.

Cornejo recalls other young people wanting to dance tango in the 1990s,

but "probably not many of my age, and for sure fewer had the conviction to make tango a lifestyle. Today, there are a lot of dance schools teaching tango to young students." Cornejo describes his mentor, Nélica Rodríguez, as "a fairy godmother, teaching me more than the steps – she showed me how to be truly professional and bring out my personality. She gave me the keys to become unique, rather than a copy



Galeassi. "We have the same values about work, family and life, we know what we want, and we work hard to achieve our dreams."

The pair now run their own company. "I normally work more closely with the creativity and musicality of our pieces, while Gisela pays attention to cleaning the sequences or steps. She's an extraordinary dancer, highly skilled and very disciplined, with the charisma of a true artist. I love that, and dancing with her makes me feel complete. I think the fact that both of us admire and respect each other as artists is the secret to our successful partnership."

Crucially, their company's shows incorporate a live band and singers. *Tango Fire* "showed tango's evolution through the decades with the band's amazing music", while *Break the Tango* mixed contemporary tango with breakdancing. New show *Tango after Dark* – which comes to London's Peacock Theatre in late February and features Cornejo and Galeassi, plus four fellow world tango champion couples – hones in on the pure form. Cornejo is working closely with his dancers to portray that tango bubble, "keeping them dancing in complete authenticity" and avoiding fake overacting.

Above: Germán Cornejo and his dance partner Gisela Galeassi. Above right: *Tango After Dark*.

of artists I admired, and she treated me with pure love and patience."

An incredibly successful international career followed, and about a decade ago Cornejo met his perfect partner: fellow world tango champion Gisela

and the breath becoming increasingly intensive through the song."

Enhancing that purity is the use of music from the great Astor Piazzolla, "portraying the contemporary, melancholy and bohemian Buenos Aires after dark, with a live band of the best musicians and two of the finest singers from Argentina". Cornejo first heard Piazzolla's album *Libertango* aged 12. "I remember crying almost all the way through, because it touched me so deeply. His compositions represent the Buenos Aires of today – that inspired me more than anything."

Composer, arranger and bandoneon Piazzolla revolutionised tango in the middle of the 20th century, creating a nuevo tango sound by blending traditional music with recognisable western forms such as jazz. But what does his music inspire in dancers? Cornejo loves the way he encompasses so many different moods. "Sometimes he takes you to a state of complete craziness, sometimes it's loneliness or sadness." It's also challenging formally. "You have to listen very well and be an experienced dancer to feel free while dancing to his music."

Cornejo works closely with a musical director to ensure the sound matches the intricacies of his choreography. "It's a long process, with a lot of changes along the way." Music is vital, he notes; when it comes to creating shows, and developing a feel for tango, it's responsible for "more than I can imagine".

Cornejo's favourite songs from ➤



Tango after Dark include “Las Ciudades” and “Balada Para Mi Muerte”, because of their “poetry and realness”. When it comes to dance numbers, he loves “Tangata”, which appears in the show’s second act. “We treat it in a contemporary way, with each couple representing one instrument through their dancing.” Another favourite is “Lo Que Vendra”, for its “perfect combination of darkness, sensuality and drama”.

Alongside Piazzolla, Cornejo recommends tango fans explore the output of masters like Osvaldo Pugliese, Aníbal Troilo, Horacio Salgán, Leopoldo Federico and Mariano Mores, “so you can appreciate how their styles were evolving – not just in the way they played, and their different formations and orchestras, but in their composition too.”

As for the use of contemporary or non-tango music, Cornejo thinks it depends on how it’s used. It’s fine if “it’s expressing an idea or showing the audience a specific concept; I was one of the first in the classic tango scene to include non-traditional music. I definitely think you need to create your own vision of the tango. Once you’ve learned the roots well in order to start from a solid tango base, your tree can

Above and below: Germán Cornejo and Gisela Galeassi in *Tango After Dark*.

grow up in the way that represents you. That’s an amazing thing.

“In my show *Immortal Tango*, I created a crossover between music from Hollywood blockbusters such as *Skyfall* and *The Bodyguard* – all played in tango tempo – and traditional tango compositions, allowing me to bring a completely new flavour to the stage. Then in *Break the Tango*, we mixed the best electric tango compositions (from Bajofondo, Otros Aires and Gotan Project) with artists like Beyoncé, Shakira and Radiohead, to create a combination of rock concert and dance show.” That musical fusion suited the blend of dance styles, with elements incorporated “from jazz, modern, ballet, ballroom, contemporary, malambo, hip hop, breakdance and circus skills”.

Cornejo also encourages individual expression within his company, allowing the other couples to contribute choreographically so they can “be themselves during their duets. I take

a lot of care of their personalities and differences, because I love to have a mix of styles in my shows – that’s extremely valuable. At the same time, in the group pieces you need unity, so I work out where I need more emphasis on everyone following the same idea.”

That central idea stems from Buenos Aires, where Cornejo frequently returns to recharge creatively. “It’s a magnificent mix of melancholy, history and poetry. The old coffee shops and bars, the nocturnal life of the city and its streets are always the starting point of inspiration for me.” That spirit is honoured in *Tango after Dark*, fuelled by “one of the greatest tango composers of all time. If people want to experience the real intimacy, raw sensuality, purity and magic of tango, performed by some of the very best in the world, it’s a show for them.” ■

Tango after Dark is at the Peacock Theatre from February 28 to March 17. Visit sadlerswells.com for details.

