

To all tango lovers:

I am happy to treat you to read the book "El Tango en la sociedad porteña 1880 – 1920" (Tango in Buenos Aires society 1880 – 1920) by Hugo Lamas and Enrique Binda, published in 2008 by Editorial Abrazos. I may be asked the reason for such treat. Fair enough, the reason is that having found the book of superlative value, very interesting as well as highly illuminating, I have deemed it necessary to promote it, and above all and because of my expertise, to do so within the community where tango is danced, where this book is not well known and where, to my modest understanding, such work would be highly appreciated.

It is its authors' opinion that theirs is a "scientific" book.

I have always heard that of "Tango, that wonderful dance of brothel origin..." The forbidden character of the word "brothel" endows the phrase with unexpected appeal, irresistible I'd rather say, which forces the statement to thoughtless and helpless repetition every time the topic is brought up. But in point of fact the statement, phrased as it usually is or in similar fashion, does not really clarify the origin, at least not to me, as I have never known for sure whether we are referring to either the dance or the music, or whether tango was born amongst the brothel clients or those people working in the brothel, etc. Furthermore, why in a brothel? People gifted for either music or dance have creative impulses anywhere. . . so. . .

I am myself a tango dancer and I have always had a particular interest in this issue; I have always been interested in the history of the movements that make up this dance as we today know it. It is evident to me the intricacies of tango dance as it travelled through history, how incredible its changes were, how amazing popular creativity is. With all this in mind, it is even harder to travel backwards and reach the knowledge of its origin. And to make matters worse, the dancers, always moved by some sort of emotional turmoil, rapidly drink in the "brothel" origin theory, to the point that today in all tango shows they re-tell the story where the brothel scenario becomes an inevitable classic. At the moment, however, and after reading Lamas and Binda with careful interest, the inconsistency of this over-repeated origin is exposed, which makes me wonder "Are we not in trouble here?" Because there arises now the need to re-formulate Argentine tango performances and, above all, let the whole world (that has so far been consuming our shows) know that it turns out we were wrong all along...

It is my opinion that not only is this a scientific work based on provable documentation, catalogued and perfectly findable, but also the first and unique serious reflection, clear, honest and thoroughly necessary, that has ever fallen into my hands so far. It is the first time that I have come across a work that breathes total and absolute honesty. Here are writers who have earnestly gone out in search of the historic "reality", in search of what "really" happened in the context of those days before and after the turn of the century. They were never trapped by that happy picturesqueness that not only tango suffers but also other popular cultural expressions. They set their endeavours to reflecting with serenity, with a genuine aim at grasping what happened, and to meeting that need we all have to get to know how it came to happen what we today experience.

But they went even further and did something else, something that was also necessary. They took it upon themselves to expose the mistake that had already taken root. Some way or other in tango dance history I have always come across this trend to recount historic facts, so that they suit the narrators or their friends, regardless of how much verisimilitude or clarity there is to the story. The story is twisted, coloured in, exaggerated, it is enhanced or shrunk without much thought as to what really happened or what actual importance the facts being talked about had. There is of course no problem here as nobody controls anything around tango, and in the end it is all about fantasies, and the more mysterious the fantasies are, the better they sell. I believe that Lamas and Binda stand out as true heroes against this trend.

Apart from many other things, the arrival in the tango community of people from all corners of the earth has resulted in an incredible source of opportunities for many who, taking advantage of Americans, Europeans or Asiatics that know little or nothing and need time to learn, attempt to set up and spread as significant their own alleged interventions, which is something that in due course muddles the issue further on, or at least it does when it comes to the history of this dance itself. I am proud to know that these two Argentines struggled so decidedly, so brilliantly, in their quest to elucidate the truth in the history of tango. Deep respect for our culture helps us to be respected as people, and this is probably the major value of this work, even larger than the admirable use of language, the thoughtful order, and the overall excellence with which the contents are arranged.

As a tango dancer with no more experience in books and literature than that of an impassioned reader of tango, I humbly express my firm conviction here that this work should be promoted and set up as the beginning of a new attitude toward the history of tango. It is a restatement that settles issues and improves the understanding we have of our own. We must promote the serious study of our history, of which this book sets an example, and to allow that knowledge to be shared by all those who love tango, those who are initiated in tango, and especially the youths who when reaching maturity will be grateful for having been respected with the truth. Historic truth must always be told, and whenever such is not known it is our duty to contribute to its quest.

The first statement of the book may be the most significant, that which Hugo Lamas and Enrique Binda chose to start their work: "The best is not to fool anybody".

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