

March 25, 2000 - Saturday In The Studio, Argentina

Warm-up

Begin with all dancers standing in a circle. Take dancers through a series of warm up exercises based on traditional Latin dance. Including Flamenco Tango movements like *flores*, *rocas*, *braceo*, *taconeo*, and *palmas*. Every thing in the warm-up was taught separately and then ordered into a sequence of movement by stringing one thing after another. Each exercise being repeated "X" number of times (you choose) and then moving on to the next. In the end you will have made a warm-up dance.

- Flores - (flowers) Have all of the ladies do this one. Hold out both arms in front of you and begin to rotate both wrists to the inside (dentro). Next encourage the dancers to articulate the fingers by moving them one at a time in the direction of the circle. It's usually easier if you begin with the pinky or ring finger and then move towards the thumb. It is helpful to think of the fingers as petals on the flower. Next show the dancers how to circle their wrists to the outside (fuera). The fingers will also change directions. Lastly, dancers should try the flores by alternating directions between dentro and fuera.
- Rocas - (rocks) This is the masculine version of flores. Have all the gentlemen make strong fists and hold their arms in front of them. Try the circles dentro and then fuera. Now try dentro and fuera, dentro and fuera, etc.
- Braceo - (arm dance) There are many variations of the braceo. Here are a few to get you started. Variation #1: Begin with arms low and rounded in front of you (like your holding a giant egg). This will look like the ballet position en bas. Palms of hands should be facing away from the body. Initiate movement of the arms by pulling up at both elbows. The elbows continue to move the rounded arms through the center of the body (ballet position en avant) and up towards the head. The still rounded arms will pause for a moment as they frame the head (ballet position en haut). Finish this variation by taking the arms down through the side-space (through a second position) and back to the beginning position. Be sure to carve through the space with your fingertips and always keep the elbows lifted high while moving through the side-space.
Variation #2: Similar to #1 except in reverse. Begin en bas but lift elbows and arms up through the side-space. When you get to the top, frame the face again and then move arms down through the center of body. Remember when moving down always keep elbows high and lead with the fingertips.
Variation #3: Similar to #1 and #2 except you only move one arm at a time. The arm that isn't moving should be en haut framing the face. Alternate moving the right arm/left arm high into moving the left arm/right arm high, etc. The moving arms may follow the direction of variation #1 or variation #2. Try both.

NOTE: After the basic braceos are learned, try to add on the flores/rocas in the wrists while doing these braceos.

Variation #4: I call this the manzana braceo. Manzana in Spanish means apple and I use apple imagery while teaching it. Dancers begin with arms held at the center of the chest, elbows bent, and palms open to the chest. Then simultaneously reach the right arm diagonally up and the left arm diagonally down. Pretend you are reaching for apples with both hands (this will give the look of flores/rocas). Then bring the apples back to your chest in the starting position to take a bite. Repeat diagonal with the left arm high and right arm low. Bring arms in and take a bite. Continue alternating right and left as you repeat.

- Palmas - (clapping) The palma is a very specific type of clapping. It really is more of a musical instrument. You can make high-pitched claps (altas) or deep claps (gordas). You can clap straight on the beat or against it (contras). You can clap out specific rhythms in 4/4, 3/4, 6/8 time etc. But for this exercise the purpose is to introduce the idea of clapping as an instrument and to develop good listening skills. So, begin by clapping as quietly as possible, gradually getting louder and louder and louder. Then when the teacher/leader chooses begin again quietly. The dancers must listen carefully to be able to follow along and know which volume to clap. Body language in playing quietly and playing loudly also helps dancers predict volume.
- Head looks - Last in our warm-up we did a series of quick looks with the head. Emphasize to the dancers that they must really see the room when they look. This quick time movement is related to the quick accents and directness of the flamenco movement

Tango Rhythm

I taught the basic tango rhythm "slow, slow, quick, quick" like this:

- Have all dancers stand in a circle. Take two slow steps into the center of the circle and then two quick steps. Repeat rhythm twice until all dancers meet in the center of the circle. Then repeat the rhythm backwards two times until dancers arrive where they began. To finish this dance walk around yourself in a circle to the right for 6 steps, quickly change directions and circle around the left for 6 steps. Repeat the whole thing from the top as many times as you want.
- For younger children (under 8 years) I simplified the movement and took out the circling. They begin in the same circle, but I give them specific imagery rather than just rhythm. Take two giant elephant steps into the circle, and then take 2-3 little mouse steps. Repeat this sequence two times into the center and two times back. It may be difficult for younger ones to stop their momentum from quick steps and then get into the elephant steps. It is helpful to loosen the time structure of the tango just a bit and concentrate more on the quality between slow and quick time.

Quick Shapes

- Begin by walking around yourself right and then left. Make it eight steps in each direction. Then have the dancers choose a shape to put their body in. They must hold the shape for eight counts. Then pick a new shape and hold for eight counts. Then change your shape again and hold for four counts. Change for another four counts. Then continue changing in two/two counts, and four/one counts. Repeat this dance as many times as you want. Emphasize that the dancers must try to keep their balance as they hold the beginning shapes, and then they have to find quick shape transitions as the changes get faster.

Partner Dance

- Have dancers choose a partner. One person in the partnership will be person #1 and the other will be #2.
- Person #1 makes a shape of their choice and then #2 looks for the "windows" in the shape. A window is negative space. A window may be the space between the legs, or under an arm, or behind the back, etc.
- Person #2 chooses a window and then makes a shape using that window by poking an arm through, a leg through, a head through, etc. Once #2 is in place, #1 walks away to look at #2's shape. Person #1 finds a window and then chooses a shape. This positive/negative space dance can continue for as many turns as you want. We did four turns.
- To finish this dance we did something called "staying connected". Person #1 and #2 hold hands. They begin moving around each other without letting go of both hands. They must be connected by one hand at all times. Encourage dancers to try different level changes, and different facings.
- Repeat the entire partner dance from the positive/negative shapes to staying connected.
- In order to keep everyone together I would usually use vocal cues, calling out which partner should move and which should hold etc. But musical cues can work too. Then I usually give 20 counts or so for staying connected explorations.

The Tango

This dance is done with a partner.

- Walk around your partner, circling them with the "slow, slow, quick, quick" rhythm. For the younger dancers use the elephant/mouse imagery. Repeat circling four times. Switch directions from clockwise to counterclockwise each time.
- Next insert the "staying connected dance". Again giving them about twenty counts of exploration time.
- Then finish the dance with the positive/negative space dance. At the end of the fourth repetition, both partners should slowly and carefully melt down to the floor. Tell dancers to be careful not to hurt one another.

NOTE: The students really enjoyed performing their tangos for one another. An easy way to do this is to split the room in half. One half is the audience while the other half performs, then switch.

Across The Floor

The last thing we did combined the qualities of quick and sustained time. It also let the dancers move out across the floor. In order to avoid confusion, put dancers into groups before they move across the floor. You might use lines, rows, or a smaller group en mass. Divide the room using some landmark. We used the black line where the wood floor changed to a black marley floor.

- Have dancers move slow and sustained until
- Last dancers find a quick way (without running) to finish crossing the floor. They can skip, turn, gallop, slide, tumble, etc. They can do whatever they can think of as long as it is fast! We crossed the floor at least four times, sometimes switching to start with quick movement and end with sustained.