

HAPS Argentine Tango Class – Shall We Dance?

Documented in-depth research has revealed that of all the partner dances, Argentine Tango is the most beneficial for improving the balance of those who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's. The first heightened sensation that all students of Argentine Tango report is enhanced bodily awareness. In addition, students acquire a deeper understanding of the results of movements related both to the music and to their partners. The focus of instruction is on "leading" and "following," which enables everyone to dance together. Social interaction among students during the learning process develops a sense of camaraderie and accomplishment. Dance parties called Milongas provide opportunities to take Argentine Tango to the social dance floor.

The HAPS Argentine Tango Class dancers have named our periodic dance event, Milonga of the Open Heart. Tango music CDs are given as classroom material, and students are strongly encouraged to listen to the music outside of class. The tango pieces played at each Milonga are selected by a vote of the students. Participants learn to listen corporally to this multi-dimensional music called "Tango" — both as leaders and as followers — and to create their own dance within the framework of the Argentine Tango vocabulary.



Leaders develop the skills to invite their followers to take steps different from the leader's steps, thereby improving not only their left and right-brain functions but also their musicality.

Exercises and skills learned in class relate directly to improved posture and balance, the ability to adapt to one's partner in the dance, and the ability to adapt to one's surroundings in a more sensitive manner — resulting in fewer falls and an enhanced ability to apply learned movements to everyday life. Examples are: navigation (such as weight shifts while turning in a small area) which results in an ability to be seated with greater ease; and, isolation between the upper and lower body for improved balance, carriage, and foot placement, all of which result in an ability to walk more confidently.

Learning is always exciting; this is especially true when it builds fond memories. It is doubly exciting when what we learn can be applied to improve the quality of our daily lives. By learning how to better control our movements, we gain greater individual confidence, as well as receive the added bonus of exercise — all while participating within a welcoming group.

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We change partners frequently during classes, and individual attention is given to direct each student in tailoring their dance to their range of motion.

Through leading and following techniques acquired in HAPS Argentine Tango group classes, students learn to create their own dance and to live in the moment through the music and their partners.

The goals of the class are to have fun while making progress. Participants are encouraged to reframe their goals in terms of physical improvement by tackling new challenges in small repetitive pieces.

Particular and continuing emphasis is placed upon the students' realization that it is through mistakes that all of us learn ... and this enables class members to progress at their own pace without embarrassment, any fear of being judged, or fear of failure. The desire to improve is all that any student who attends needs.

By: Joan Bishop



The HAPS Tango class has been going strong since it was launched in 2008. The demand was so great that in February 2012, HAPS began a new **Beginner Tango Class** offered in partnership with Parkinson Foundation of Harris County.

Both the beginner and advanced classes are led by HAPS Argentine Tango instructor, Joan Bishop and her group of wonderful volunteers who are dedicated to making the tango experience fun and beneficial for everyone who attends.

If you are interested in participating in the HAPS Argentine Tango group dance classes, contact the HAPS office for more information at 713-520-8670. Beginners are welcome, and no partner is required. We look forward to seeing you on the dance floor.

Houston Area Parkinson Society (HAPS) offers services to those living with Parkinson's disease in the Houston and surrounding area. For more information on the services provided by HAPS, visit the website at www.hapsonline.org or call the HAPS office at 713-626-7114.