

The El Corte Tango DJ Manual

Mayday DJ 2010

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1 Introduction

For a number of years El Corte organizes a Mayday DJ workshop on the Sunday of the first May weekend.¹ We felt a need to restructure and update the workshop. Of course we are very grateful for Ad van den Brekel's preparatory work, which did provide an extensive summary we used for so many years in previous DJ workshops.

1.1 Purpose

This workshop is primarily set up for people who want to start (or have recently started) DJ-ing in a milonga. We want to provide these DJ's with information, experiences and tools, that will make their jobs easier. Mind you, we don't want to impose a set of rules. Use them as a guideline or a framework to test your own notions. Everybody is free to go his or her own way. The only thing we will do is hand you some material to think about, which might open doors for you, which otherwise might have remained shut.

This set up will also make this workshop interesting for experienced DJ's, because there always is a chance of getting stuck in the groove and fall into a routine way of playing the same music in the same structure over and over again. Last but certainly not least, this workshop is also for people who are interested in tango music and/or want to give their local DJ feedback, but don't speak the lingo.

1.2 What to expect?

What are the subjects we will deal with in this workshop? In the first five chapters we focus on the *art of DJ-ing*: circumstantial situations, classification of tango music, structuring a milonga and do and don't for tango DJ's.

In the final four chapters we treat some *miscellaneous* aspects of tango DJ-ing: sound engineering, laptop DJ-ing, copyrights, suggested reading and important orchestras.

¹ I think El Corte started the DJ workshop in 1995 or 1996.

1.3 Feedback

If you want to give us feedback, we would like that very much. You can send it to a.degraaff@hetnet.nl. Finally a word of thanks, because we could not have written it without the support and feedback of countless tango DJ's, tango teachers and dancers from all around the world.

Nijmegen,

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Last update: September 2008

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2 Circumstantial conditions

2.1 Introduction

A DJ can make or break a milonga. However, even before starting to play music, there are some circumstantial conditions, a DJ should pay attention to. Success or failure depends on it. Not all these circumstantial conditions can be influenced. Some things you just have to accept and learn to live with. The conditions that do contribute to the success of a salon are:

2.2 Dance space

Is there a single hall to dance or are there more rooms? How is the dance floor situated? Where is your workspace and how is it situated? To start with the last question: the DJ-s workspace is best situated close to the dance floor. The DJ has the best overview of the dance floor and that is the place where it is all happening. And also to feel the atmosphere on the dance floor, a place close by is logical.

To illustrate this, I quote Brwester and Broughton: “The truth about DJ-ing is that it is an emotional, improvisational art form and here the real scope for artistry lies. A good DJ isn’t just stringing records together, he is controlling the relationship between some music and hundreds of people. That’s why he has to see them. That’s why it couldn’t be a tape. That’s why it is a live performance. That’s why it is a creative art. Music is a hotline to people’s emotions, and what a DJ does is use this power constructively to generate enjoyment. Obviously his medium is music, but that’s just a means to an end. In a very real sense his primary medium is emotion; the DJ plays the feelings of a roomful of People.”²

The music should be heard everywhere, but maybe not in all places as loud as on the dance floor.. Most dancehalls have a space for dancing and a space for lounging (drinking, talking, sitting down and meeting people to dance with and maybe a little flirting). If possible, the

² Brwester and Broughton, Last night a DJ saved my life, 2006:19.

sound volume should be a little less in the lounge area than in the dance area. If people have to shout, the music is too loud.

The way a space is arranged with tables, chairs and other furniture is also essential for traffic and communication. See to it that there are not too many obstacles. It hinders people in mixing freely and may cause a salon to be static.

Tables and chairs should be situated at the side of the room in a way that makes it possible for people to mix freely. If this is not possible, you can try to create more dynamics in a static crowd by playing cortina's, specials or shorter series of tangos, vales and milongas.

Too many tables and chairs will also cause a milonga to become static. People come in and form groups and tend to stay in this group, which has a tendency to claim a table and chairs. If there are chairs or couches for approximately 40% of the dancers, this usually will be enough to prevent a milonga from becoming too static.

In some traditionally orientated milongas in Buenos Aires this is different. Every visitor is assigned a chair on entering the milonga. Contacts are realized via the game of the eyes and a nod of the head.³

2.3 Lights

Is it possible to adjust the lights to the atmosphere of the night, the music you are playing or an atmosphere you want to create or change? Are there colour lights?

The lights play an important role in creating an atmosphere. By playing with lights you can accentuate the music or trim down the effects that music has on an audience. Colour lights (if available) do enlarge these possibilities, but there is also downside to this; it may create a restless atmosphere if you use them too often.

³ Cabeco refers to the manner of asking each other to dance; that is not verbally but via the eyes and a nod with the head. In Buenos Aires cabeco is a natural phenomenon. Outside Argentina, in the western world it seems out of place, although some milonga organizers make brave but futile attempts to introduce cabeco in the western world.

Red lights usually symbolize romantic, even ‘sexy’ music like Fresedo's and Calo's slow lyrical tangos. However, too much and too long red lights subconsciously irritates your audience. This is the case with all types of colour lights: too long and too much is annoying. It is wise to vary colour lights regularly. Blue and green neon lights have a cool feeling, which you can use for tango nuevo's and neotango's. When there are no colour lights and/or dimmers, the possibilities of playing with lights are limited, but not impossible. You can decide to use or not to use a certain light. Or you can aim a lamp in another direction or move it to another place. Experiment with lights. DJ-ing is more than only playing some music. A DJ also has a responsibility for creating an atmosphere people enjoy. DJ-ing can be, just like pop concerts, a multi media experience.⁴

2.4 Dance floor

What is the quality of the floor? How big is the floor? Are there obstacles on the dance floor?

The roughness or texture of a floor will determine if it is fit for dancing or not (and it will also influence the way you dance too!). Most times the roughness of a floor can be treated, although not all dancehall owners are happy if you do. Always ask if it is allowed to make the floor more slippery (in case it is too strewn) or less slippery (when it is like an ice rink's floor).

Try to adapt the music to the state of the floor. Don't play ‘big’ or very fast music on a slippery floor, for it invites people to dance big or too fast and accidents are waiting to happen. The bigness of a floor is relative. If there are many dancers on a small floor it is crowded. In this case, play ‘intimate’ music. If there are few dancers, there is enough space and you can play ‘big’ music like Pugliese.

⁴ In progressive rock it is quite normal to use lights to enhance the effects of the music. This is certainly not a new concept. As early as 1911 the Russian composer Alexander Skryabin used “colored lights to flood the concert hall during the performance of his symphonic poem *Prometheus*.” (Eduard Macan, *Rocking the classics. English progressive rock and counterculture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997:63).

Some dancehalls have obstacles on and around the dance floor, which can't be removed. Think about a row of pillars. Obstacles can create tricky situations during a milonga. Sometimes it is wise to fill the space around or between obstacles with tables and chairs. If there is enough space to dance around the obstacle, no such actions are needed.

2.5 Time

What is the duration of a milonga? When is the heart (high point) of the event? On what day of the week is it organized?

Most milongas have a fixed time of beginning and ending. So as a DJ you know how many time you have. You can make a scenario that you can adjust depending on what sort of responses you get. Or you can improvise all the way. Whatever you like!⁵

Open ended milongas will make it more difficult but do pose a greater challenge. Will you slowly let it go down (until the last dancing couples leaves the floor) or do you create a climax at a certain time, after which people go home?

Most milongas will take from 3 to 8 hours. Whether a milonga is a short one or a long one does make a difference. A long milonga has a different dynamic than a short one.

An all night milonga does require a long stretch of concentration. To stay alert for 6 to 8 hours in a row is mentally exhausting. Take care in preparing yourself for it (maybe a draft scenario, you can improvise with or to fall back on when it doesn't go the way you want it to go). See to it that you are rested as you start.

The main characteristic of a long milonga is that the audience you start with will not be the same you will end with. Dancers can be divided into three groups:

- The early birds: they arrive early and leave on time (family, job, other activities and obligations, etc.)
- The latecomers: they arrive late and usually stay until the end

⁵ To be honest, I don't consider a DJ who just puts on an at home prepared scenario as a real DJ. How can you foresee what a milonga will be like, when you prepare a scenario at home?

- The diehards: they don't want to miss anything, they will be there from the first until the last tango

Somewhere in the middle of a milonga you will notice a 'changing of the guards'. The early birds (are planning to) leave and the latecomers (start to) arrive. This will create some unrest. For a DJ this creates a challenging dilemma. At the same time s/he has to create a musical climax for the early birds and create rest for the newcomers who start to dance.

A short milonga has a different dynamic. The 'changing of the guards' effect will be much less prominent or even absent. Usually you will be able to make one musical arc from begin to end. In longer milongas there will be more musical arcs.

If you use special music to break the habits of dancers, use them in the beginning sparingly or not at all.⁶ Later in the evening, when the dancers have built up confidence and dancing routine, you can play specials more often.

The day of the week a salon is taking place is also important. A salon on weekdays will often end earlier than in a salon in weekends. In weekends you can expect the atmosphere to be more relaxed than on weekdays. This effect will be intensified when the day(s) before were also spent dancing. The El Corte brunch salon is a good example.

2.6 Popularity

It is difficult to estimate in advance how many people will come to a salon. There are a lot of complicating factors:

- What is the weather like?
- How was the advertising?
- Is there another salon (or another competing event) close by?
- What is the reputation of the salon?
- Is the salon well organized?
- Is the dancehall easy to find?

⁶ About breaking the habits: see chapter 4 and 'DJ Arnoud wil ondeugend zijn' in La Cadena, September 2004 (nr. 99). For DJ's who read dutch: La Cadena published a series of interviews with (mostly Dutch) DJ's in the period April 2003 till December 2004.

- Is there a good parking facility?

Suppose all traffic lights are green and a lot of people come to dance: for a DJ there are some pitfalls. What are those pitfalls you should pay attention to?

- Don't play too big, energetic music. You are inviting dancers to bump into each other. Too much bumping spoils everybody's fun, for a collision tends to influence far more than just four dancers. Certainly at the busiest time of a salon you will have to play not too energetic and big music. Stick to rhythmical mainstream music from la epoca de oro.
- If you use specials, use them sparingly. Specials tend to excite dancers and afterwards you will have to cool them down again. To calm a crowd you can play D'Agostino and orquestas tipicas from the thirties. Also milonga camperas and some special pieces of music will do the trick.
- Don't play too much unfamiliar music in the first few hours. Stick to music everybody knows and appreciates. Think about Calo, De Angelis, Troilo, D'Arienzo and Canaro. You will build up a lot of goodwill and that will give you enough opportunity for creating a more exciting atmosphere later on.

2.7 Special activities

Are there any special activities, like a dance performance, a speech, a live orchestra a lottery or something else? There should be a balance between special activities and dancing, for dancing is what most people come for. Too many special activities will ruin a milonga and leave the dancers frustrated.

Some organizers do not realize this. They love to hear their own voice (for too long) as they announce a show pair, etc. If you know this, you can tell them the effects it will have on a milonga.

Here are some points that might be useful:

- Keep the breaks between the sets of an orchestra to a maximum of 15-20 minutes.
- In case of a live orchestra: know their schedule by heart, for dancers will ask for it. If you can get a play list, you can even

tell them more. And it will prevent you from playing songs they performed.

- A DJ shouldn't try to compete with the orchestra and/or dancing performers. They are the stars, not you. So don't play music they are performing to or any other similar music.
- Play good danceable music that even might sound a bit boring (compared to the live orchestra).
- Don't attract attention by playing (too much) specials.

2.8 Dancers & visitors

The dancers and other visitors will influence the atmosphere. They can make or break a milonga. Are they in a good mood or energy or are they tired? Do they arrive with expectations or do they have an open mind?

Try to 'read' the audience and try to play music they want to hear. Doing so you will sometimes be able to sustain a good energy or change a tired atmosphere.

Visitors are another story. Ask them what they expect. Sometimes you can please them with some specials. Everybody knows Piazzolla's Adios Nonino. You can also resort to playing well know tangos like La Cumparsita or El Choclo.

2.9 Conclusion & some cases

So DJ-ing is a lot more than only playing music. There are much more things you will have to pay attention to than you might have thought. However if you are alert and creative, you will notice things that threaten the success of a milonga. By DJ-ing a lot at different salons, you will build up experience in DJ-ing as well as controlling (if possible) circumstantial conditions. Never hesitate to give the organization feedback in a professional way (that is respectful, constructive and not personal).

To conclude this first chapter I present you some cases I encountered at several milongas in several countries. The main question to you is to find a way to deal with these situations, Remember that there might be more solutions or that a situation I defined as problematic needn't be problematic for you and your milonga. In this manual I

won't include the answers, but if you are curious about how I solved this or want to offer some cases you experienced yourself, you can always mail me: a.degraaf@hetnet.nl.

2.9.1 Case 1: Salsa versus tango?

Once I DJ-ed at the 'Tango Mango in Devon (England) and I played Teofilo Chantre's Roda Vida, which is a very 'salssa-able' piece of music. There happened to be a few good salsa dancers present, who immediately started to dance salsa. Since salsa is a stationary type of dance and tango is not, this caused a bit of a traffic jam on the dance floor. The festivals' hostess (Ruth) solved it in a brilliant way. How?

2.9.2 Case 2: Chairs, chairs and ... more chairs!

Sometime ago during an all night milonga in Edinburgh (Scotland) there was a 10 minute performance scheduled. The rest of the evening was meant dancing only. The organizers were convinced that during this performance everybody should have a chair to sit on. Before the milonga started they placed chairs and tables for the expected number of visitors. There was still enough space to dance for everybody.

What was the consequence of all those tables and chairs? And, more important, what can a DJ do to minimize this effect?

2.9.3 Case 3: A restless DJ

Once I visited a milonga in Munich (Germany) where a very restless DJ tried to create a completely new atmosphere with every piece of music he played. Can you guess what happened? And why?

2.9.4 Case 4: A milonga with many interruptions

Some organizers feel that an all night milonga should be a lot more than dancing only. So they plan dance performances, live music, a lottery, a speech by the host and some other interruptions. As the DJ you will have to fill the gaps between all the events. What kind of music should you play in a situation like this? Why?

2.9.5 Case 5: a frustrating workshop

One time a couple of teachers gave a workshop prior to the milonga. Apparently the workshop was too complicated, because I saw anearly all the participants leave the dancefloor after the workshop with frustration dripping off their faces. How did I lure them back to dancing tango?

3 Classification of music

3.1 Introduction

There is so much tango music and music to dance tango to, that it is easy to loose yourself in it. So a DJ you will need a system to categorize music.

In El Corte we use the following classification criteria:

- Instrumental & vocal
- Rhythmical & lyrical
- Slow & fast
- Energetic & melancholy
- Regular/simple & irregular/complex
- Old & modern

3.2 Instrumental & vocal

Some tangos are music without singing. Other tangos contain also singing, where music accompanies the singing. Tangos without singing are instrumental, tangos with singing are vocal tangos or tango cantando's.

Some dancers flatly refuse to dance to tango cantando's.⁷ Of course this depends on the way a singer sings.

Singing which is integrated into the music will meet less opposition than too demonstrative singing, which only uses music as a background. Too demonstrative singing can be fun for a special occasion, but it soon might irritate the dancers. Whatever you do as a DJ, it is always wise to alternate (series of) instrumental tangos with (series of) sung tangos.

⁷ The unwillingness to dance to sung tangos dates back to the early years of the history of tango. Julie Taylor writes in her book *Paper tangos* (1998: 9-10) about a “traditional rule, no longer always followed or even known, [that] dictates that Argentines not dance to a tango that is sung. Tangueros believed that while dancing they could not attend properly to the music and lyrics, or hear their own experience and identity revealed in the singer's and musicians' rendering of profoundly Argentine emotions.”

3.3 Rhythmical & lyrical⁸

Nearly all music is rhythmical and tango music certainly is no exception to this rule. To paraphrase George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: all musical expressions are rhythmical, but some are more rhythmical than others.⁹

So some music however is clearly more rhythmical than other music or at least the rhythm is more obvious. Rhythmical music is music in which the musicians clearly accentuate the music.

For dancers it is clear when to make the next step. Especially beginning dancers are fond of rhythmical music. D'Arienzo is super rhythmical, just listen to his versions of Eduardo Arolas's Derecho Viejo or Enrique Delfino's Re Fa Si and you know what rhythmical means.¹⁰

Lyrical music is music with a less clearly accentuated pattern.¹¹ The musical theme in lyrical music is more relaxed, more freely interpreted. Lyrical music is harder to dance to and poses more challenges to be creative. One of the best examples of lyrical music is Carlos Di Sarli after 1942.¹² His version of Verdemar is a good example of lyrical music. The rhythm is hidden behind lyrical music lines and romantic lyrics by Roberto Rufino.

⁸ When I combined the dichotomies rhythmical – lyrical and energetic - melancholy, you will find that 54% is rhythmical and energetical, 31% is lyrical and melancholy, 11% is lyrical and energetical and 4% is rhythmical and melancholy. Clearly there is a relationship between rhythmical and energetical on one side and lyrical and melancholy on the other side.

⁹ Orwell, G., *Animal farm*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945.

¹⁰ Listen to D'Arienzo CD *Tango para el mundo* Volume 2(Reliquias).

¹¹ Lyrical can also be labeled as melodious or latent rhythmical (as opposed to dominant rhythmical).

¹² Carlos di Sarli, *El senor del tango*, changed his musical style in September / October 1942 from rhythmical to lyrical. The reason for this is not known, but it might have to do with Alberto Podesta's joining the Di Sarli orchestra.

On deciding whether music is rhythmical or lyrical, just ask yourself if the melody or the rhythm is dominant. If the melody is dominant, a song is lyrical.

3.4 Energetic & melancholy

Energetic music is music with a drive in it, it ‘pushes’ you in a direction. Melancholy music lacks this drive almost completely, so that it ‘pulls’ you in a direction. In the beginning of a salon, at least the first two or three hours, the accent should lie on energetic music. After that melancholy music can be played more often. Too much melancholy music will depress the dancers. In my opinion at least 70 to 80 percent of the music in a milonga should be energetic.

Energetic music is music which gives you ‘dancing energy’, that is something you can find in Osvaldo Pugliese’s oeuvre: La Yumba is raw energy. The king of melancholy is probable Carlos Gardel. Listen to Volver and weep, then you will know what melancholy means.

On deciding whether music is energetic or melancholy, just ask yourself : does it give me energy or does it consume energy?

3.5 Slow & fast

The beats per minute (BPM) or tempo determines whether a piece of music is slow or fast. Pieces of music with less than a certain BPM can be considered slow, etc. Any division of what is fast, medium or slow is arbitrary. You might use the following limits, but it is only a suggestion.

Type/rhythm	Slow	Medium	Fast
Tango	< 60	60 – 70	> 70
Milonga	< 85	85- 110	> 110
Valse	< 70	70 – 80	> 80
Specials	< 60	60 – 70	> 70

A DJ program for computers/laptops usually has a BPM facility. If not or if you use CD's, then you can use your intuition or use a watch and count.¹³

While DJ-ing always realize that too slow or too fast music eventually will result in an empty floor. Too slow means that dancers can not get rid of their energy and become frustrated, too fast means they will use up their energy too soon and are no good for the rest of the salon, which will also leave them frustrated. Most of the music you will play should be a normal, medium rhythm. Occasionally you can play fast or slow songs.

Slow and fast pieces of music can be used to induce another mood. Sometimes you will have to tamper the enthusiasm of the dancers, otherwise it will get too hectic on the floor. A tanda of slow music can do the trick. Vice versa is also a possibility. Some times, when it all gets to sleepy, you can spice it up the lot by playing a faster tanda.

Fresedo's music is generally quite slow. His tempo seldom reaches the 60 BPM. If you listen to Vida Mia, you realise this slow music. On the other hand Donato Racciatti's tangos are usually quite up tempo, listen to his version of R.I. Brignolo's Chique.

3.6 Regular/simple & irregular/complex

Regular music is music with a fixed rhythm and a simple theme, which repeats itself. By far the most of tango music you hear in a salon is simple, regular music. Most dancers (but especially beginners) appreciate this simplicity, for most of the dancers don't dance to the music but to the beat. They love it for its predictability.

There are also orchestras, who love to play with the rhythms and use several themes in their music. The result is that their music is irregular and complex, for most dancers it will soon be too complex. Experienced dancers love to play while dancing to this music, but remember that a tanda of 3 complex tangos is already quite tricky. The emphasis in a milonga should be placed on simple, regular music.

¹³ On internet you can find free BPM software.

The king of rhythm is Juan D'Arienzo. His El Choclo versions (Angel Viloldo) is the most regular music I know. One of the best examples of irregular or complex music is Julio De Caro. Listen to Floras Negras and you will realize how complex and irregular this music is. His music was so complex and irregular that it was and still is considered hardly 'danceable' at all.

3.7 Old & modern

Since the early fifties tango has lost much of its popularity to the emerging rock and roll, rhythm and blues and pop, which heralded the era of the youth culture.

A lot of tango orchestras folded, were lost in anonymity or continued their activities with a more condensed line up. In the fifties tango went underground, only to make a (modest) comeback in the eighties. To draw the line between old and modern tango music is risky, but it is certain that the mid fifties to early sixties meant a distinctive trend break in tango music.

However before and during the fifties and sixties there also were musicians who innovated tango (Gobbi, De Caro & Piazzolla) and in the sixties the retro tango orchestra of Miguel Villasboas produced music, which reminded of the thirties.

3.8.1 Intermezzo

So far we offered you a system to label your music collection. When you start labelling your music, you will encounter several difficulties:

- some dichotomies are subjective. Whether a song is energetically or melancholy, is a matter of taste.
- some dichotomies are continuous. It is hard to tell where to draw the line between rhythmical and lyrical. There will always be songs which can go either way

Apart from these two problems, what to do with Alfredo de Angelis? His music seems to be neither rhythmical nor lyrical and also neither energetic nor melancholy. This is clearly a problem, but also offers you an opportunity. How about using Alfredo de Angelis's music as a neutral reference point?

Labelling your music is a process that will take a lot of time and energy, but it is worth it, because it makes your DJ-life easier. Apart from this, it also has another advantage: it gives you a tool to deal with complaints. Usually somebody who complains doesn't know what should be different, apart from the fact that it should be different music. By asking questions, like: do you want the music to be more energetic, less complex, etcetera, you can find out what s/he wants. A complaint is also a chance and opportunity to improve your DJ style.

What does the categorization of tango music mean in reality?

We suggest some guidelines to you, but feel free to digress from them:

- Don't play too much sung tangos in a row, and certainly not more than three tandas. Also within a tanda you can mix instrumentals with sung tangos.
- Start a milonga with playing a lot of rhythmical and energetic music from the well known orchestra from la epoca de oro. Later you can also play some lyrical and melancholy music. But be careful with melancholy music; too much will depress your audience.
- Do not always play music with the same rhythm or energy. Even in a tanda it is no problem to play music with a rising beat/energy.
- Play mostly simple and regular tango and only incidentally a complex tango as a special.
- Most of the music you will play should be traditional/old music: 10% to 15% modern and special music is already quite a lot. Thematic milongas (neo tango, etc.) are a different story.

Is this system to categorize tango music and tango orchestras the only way to do it? Of course not. Any DJ should feel free to categorize music the way that suits him/herself best. Our minds work in different and mysterious ways and this is especially the case with DJ's.

Other ways to categorize tango music are:

- Danceable versus non danceable (salon fahig or not salon fahig)
- Native, Argentinean versus foreign, non Argentinean
- Extravert and introvert
- Consonant and dissonant music

3.8.2 Introvert & extravert

A few years ago I have started to categorize music and orchestras in 'introvert' and 'extravert'.

Introvert orchestras can be found mostly among the older orchestras (twenties and thirties) with a small line up (usually orquesta tipicas). Their music can be characterised by its intimacy and modesty, which usually has a calming effect on dancers and which invites dancers to dance in small steps (ideal for overcrowded milongas). The most striking characteristic of introvert orchestras is their seemingly 'uneventfulness'.

Introvert orquesta's are: Bachicha (Juan Bautista Deambroggio), Eduardo Bianco, Francisco Canaro (early period), Alfredo Carabelli, Angel D'Agostino, Carlos Di Sarli (early period), Edgar Donato, Francisco Lomuto, Juan Maglio, Orquesta Tipica Brunswick, Orquesta Tipica Petrucelli, Orquesta Tipica Victor, Juan Bautista Guido, Roberto Zerrillo, Juan De Dios Filiberto, Anselmo Aieta, Antonio Bonaveno, Enrique Santos Discepolo, Agesilao Ferrazano, Los Provincianos, Francisco Pracanico, Francisco Spaventa, etc.¹⁴

Extravert orchestras are dominant in their music. Their musical style aims at grandness. It is music which can be described as 'eventful'. These orchestras regularly use (de)crescendo's, whereas introvert orchestra's are more 'linear' in their music. The musical line ups of extravert orchestras are greater (the gran orquesta's). The extravert

¹⁴ You can find a lot of introvert orquestas on the CD '20 Orquestas olvidables' (EBCD116): Anselmo Aieta, Manuel Pizarro, Julio Pollero, Orquesta Tipica Cayetano Puglisi, Enrique Di Lorenzo, Juan De Dios Filiberto, etc. Also the DBN/ EMI Relquias release 'Recordando Orquestas' and the Harlequin releases 'Buenos Aires to Berlin' (HQ CD 61) and Buenos Aires to Madrid' (HQ CD 88) contain recordings from introvert orquestas.

orchestra's usually date back to the forties and fifties. The rise of D'Arienzo at the end of the thirties meant a great stimulant for extravert music. The extravert orchestras music has an energizing effect on dancers and invites them to dance in a spacious way.

Examples of extravert orchestras are: Juan D'Arienzo, Alfredo De Angelis, Miguel Calo, Pedro Laurenz, Florindo Sassone, Osvaldo Pugliese, Miguel Villasboas, Anibal Troilo, etc.

When DJ-ing I usually start a milonga with extrovert orchestras from the forties. These orchestras have a lot of drive. Towards the end of a milonga I occasionally play some introvert orchestras. At that time dancers usually have spent a lot of energy and welcome music with a more sedate pace. Introvert orchestras can also function to cool down an overexcited crowd.

3.8.3 Consonant & dissonant music

Music in general and tango specifically can be also be divided into consonant and dissonant music.

Consonant music is, by definition, music that makes concords. A concord is "a chord that is pleasing or satisfactory or pleasing in itself without others to follow". Dissonant is the opposite; that is "not in harmony, harsh toned, incongruous".¹⁵

Examples of consonant music are (in classical music) Mozart, Beethoven and Bach and (in tango) Troilo, Calo, Fresedo and De Angelis. Examples of dissonant music are (in classical music) Stravinsky, Schonberg, Schnitke and Glass and (in tango) Julio De Caro, Piazzolla (seventies) and Pugliese.

Consonant music tends to appeal to the emotional side of the human brain, whereas dissonant music appeals to the rational side of the human brain. It could very well be argued that consonant music has a calming effect on listeners and dancers, where as dissonant music has an 'upsetting' effect.

Of course we realize that

- it is hard to define consonant and dissonant music

¹⁵ Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1979: 210, 216, 299-230.

- consonant and dissonant is a social construct which can be different in different cultural settings and times
- it is hazardous to label an artist (with a complete oeuvre) as consonant or dissonant. In most situations there are exceptions.

3.8.4 Diegetic versus mimesic music

In film music the terms diegesis and mimesis are often used to describe its character. Diegesis refers to a (fictional) world in which situations and events are narrated rather than enacted. Mimesis is the opposite of diegesis; it refers to a world where situations and events are enacted rather than narrated.

So diegetic music is music which **tells** a story. Mimesic (or extra diegetic) music is music that **is/enacts** a story. Diegetic music is more an indirect sort of music in which the musicians tell about events and situations, as opposed to extra diegetic music, in which musicians demonstrate directly music.

In tango I would label Pugliese diegetic, but D'Arienzo as extra diegetic or mimesic.

3.9 Where to find music

I am often asked where I find all these tango music and special music. Hardly an chained salon or International Week in El Corte passes without this question. So how can you find good danceable music? Also the question to what are good tango music labels pops up regularly. To the first question there are more than one answer. The second question is a matter of taste.

3.9.1 Knowledge is everything

If I hear something nice I ask the DJ what he is playing. Most DJ's I know are more than willing to share their knowledge. My advice is to make notes. It is just too easy to forget. In time you will build a system of knowledge about tango music, tango styles and tango musicians/orchestras. There are also some very good books on

tango. Just to name a few: Birkenstock & Ruegg, Sebastian & Labrana and Ludwig'.¹⁶

Surfing on the internet can also be very helpful. There are a lot of tango sites. My advice is to go to todotango.com. They have a large section of musicians, orchestras, singers and tango poets and a lot more.

And if you have enough time, just google freely. Sifting through a large pile of junk, you also will find some gems.

3.9.2 Music shops

Whenever I see a music shop and I do have time, I enter this shop. Some are not interesting at all, others are excellent: Ludwig Beck, Marienplatz, Munich, Germany, Saturn, Cologne, Germany.

Before entering it might be wise to make a decision on how much you can afford or wish to spend. Don't forget your credit card!

There are also internet stores for which you really do need a credit card:

- iTunes store
- Todotango.com
- Tangostore.com
- Amazon.com

3.9.3 Music lovers

Exchange information and music with other music lovers and DJ's and do so with an open mind. Notice that I am talking about music lovers and not only about tango lovers. In time you will build a network of friends, which will supply you with lots and lots of (information about) music. Ask other music lovers about their network and where they find their music.

3.9.4 Being a DJ helps

This means that you are active in music. Some dancers will ask you about music you don't know. This means you can try to find out.

¹⁶ See chapter 17 for a complete list of suggested reading.

There are even tango dancers who bring CD's to you, which is an initiative that should be encouraged at all times!

Do explain to them that you cannot play it right away and that you first want to listen to it at home. This gives you time to decide on what is good music and what you certainly don't want to play!

3.9.5 Accidental encounters

Sometime you just run into music quite unexpectedly. This can be a commercial on TV, a tune in a movie you are watching, music they are playing in a hotel, sauna, music shop, etc. Anything that makes you think: "Hey, I feel like dancing!" is likely to be suited for dancing. Sometimes I hear music in TV commercials which is perfectly suited for dancing. I surf to their website and ask who the performers are and if they can send me an mp3-file. Some sites will send you the music and others don't respond at all. You can always try. You have nothing to lose.

3.9.6 DJ Discussion forums

There are some DJ discussion forums on internet. You will find music and info there. I have not much experience with these groups, because I already have (more than) enough input. Discussions on the groups tend to be rather specific, technical and subjects can be trivial. Sometimes it seems that the forum members are more interested in talking about DJ-ing than in the actual DJ-ing itself ☺.

Tango music and special music which is suited for tango can be found at expected places (music shop & internet) and unexpected places. A tango DJ will have to have an extensive tango music library, which is collected over the years. When you start building yours, you soon will find out that some music labels are very good and others are really bad or have a mediocre sound quality. To help you we will list some good labels and some mediocre labels.

3.10 Music labels

Music labels that distribute good tango music are 'Tango Argentino (DBN), Reliquias (DBN/EMI), From Argentina to the world and

RCA Victor 100 anos (BMG). They all distribute very good quality music, music that has been (digitally) improved very well.

Mediocre music labels are El Bandoneon, Harlequin, Las Grandes Orquestas del Tango, En FM tango, Music Hall, Buenos Aires Tango Club and Danza y Movimiento. Sound quality differs from mediocre at best and to downright catastrophic at worst.

3.11 Analyzing music

On top of categorizing your music you can also decide to analyse several pieces of your music. Analyzing music can give you a clue on danceability of certain music, but it is a lot of work.

Bruno Nettl presents some nice insights in the how's and why's of analyzing music in his book *Folk and traditional music of the western continents*.¹⁷

According to Nettl “the best way to begin analyzing a piece of music, either when one hears it or when one sees it written out, is to find the large subdivisions and the broad tendencies. Is the song made up of several large sections which contrast markedly? Are the sections of equal length? Does the tempo change considerably or suddenly in the course of the piece? Are any of its sections repeated? Or is the whole piece repeated several times? And if so, are the repetitions more or less exact, or are they variations of the first rendition? Do the sections correspond to sections or lines of the same length in the verbal text? These are the kind of questions an intelligent listener might ask himself”.

Other aspects you can focus on in musical analysis are monophony and polyphony, rhythm and tempo, melody and scale, etc.

¹⁷ Nettl, B. (1965:16-24).

4 Structuring a milonga

4.1 Introduction

What a DJ can do is play at random all his/her favourites with the implicit assumption that they are beautiful and very danceable. It might happen that a DJ who works like this will play a lot of completely incompatible music in a row. The result will be that the dance floor is empty and the dancers are sulking at the bar. Or even worse, they might have gone home and decided never to come back. It does not work this way. A DJ will have to bring some sort of a musical structure in a salon. In this chapter we will hand you the tools for structuring a salon: tanda and tandacycle, musical arcs, cortinas and specials.

4.2 Tanda & tandacycle

Tanda's are the building blocks of a salon. A tanda is a series of musical pieces that form some sort of a unity. This unity can relate to several aspects:

- Dance form: valeses, milongas, tangos, candombes, specials, etc.
- 'Colour' of an orchestra
- A certain musician or singer
- The use of a specific characteristic; for example a characteristic rhythm or instrument

Royce Chan mentions on her website also some other aspects which could / should be observed in the making of a tanda:¹⁸

- Records by the same orchestra
- Recordings from the same period
- Roughly the same speed (beats per minute)
- Roughly the same sound quality and level

A generally used tanda structure is: tango - valse - tango – milonga, which we call a tandacycle. Sometimes a tanda will be replaced by

¹⁸ R. Chan, The making of a tanda, www.loksze.com (2006).

something special. The art of DJ-ing lies in the combination of tandas. Where tandas function as building stones for a salon and a tandacycle as a greater unit of tandas, musical arc's main function is to structure a salon. A musical arc can consist out of one or more tandacycles, which function as a musical unity and present a musical trend in a salon.

4.3 Musical arc

The main task of a DJ is work up to a climax. After the climax you can start all over again. A long salon will contain more than 2 musical arcs, where as a short salon or practice night usually has only 1 or 2 musical arcs.

After reaching a climax you just can't just go on building up pressure. It is an overkill that leads to nothing. It might even be contra productive. After a climax it is wise to pause a little longer before starting a new tanda or musical arc. In this short break the excitement can fade away. For example, I use breaks between songs in a tanda which last about 3 seconds, between tandas 6 seconds and starting a new tandacycle 9 seconds or more.

A DJ always has a choice after a tanda: will I go on building up energy, will I keep the level of energy constant or will I create a dissonant?

In letting a salon slowly fade away till the end, there lies a danger of dancers getting bored. The end of a salon could also be some sort of a climax. Dancers love it to go home with a fine energy or some catchy tune still ringing in their ears. If you hear some people whistling or humming the theme you ended with, this means you did a good job.

And finally, most dancers appreciate it when a DJ announces the end of the salon: 'and now the last five: three tangos from D'Arienzo, La Cumparsita and something special'. The reason for this is that some people make an appointment to dance the last tanda or the last tango.

4.4 Cortina

A cortina (literally a curtain) is a piece of music, which is not meant for dancing. It is used to separate tandas. Its function is for dancers

to leave the dance floor so that new combinations can be formed. At least that is the way it is in some milongas in Argentina. The use of cortinas was (re)introduced from Argentina to Europe in mid nineties.

Among dancers and DJ's it is a controversial subject. Either you are in favour or you are against cortinas. We think it is important for a DJ to know why s/he (doesn't) uses cortinas. To do it because they also do it in Argentina is absurd. Cortinas have a function in a salon: to promote the circulation of dancers and people who at the moment are not dancing. It also functions as an opportunity for people to mix. Cortinas also can have a commercial function: it gives waiters time to serve the dancers.

The situation of the dance floor is a crucial factor for (not) using cortinas. If the dance floor is surrounded by tables and chairs, then the dancers can't easily get into contact with others at the opposite site of the dancehall, cortinas do have a function. If the dance floor isn't surrounded by tables and chairs, there is no need for cortinas. So in El Corte we do not use cortinas (although some of our guest DJ's do), but what we do sometimes is a slightly longer period of silence between two tandas. This is what we call a silent cortina, which you can interpret as a compromise between a cortina and a constant flow of music.

Personally, I don't like milonga with cortinas for they tend to create chaos on the dance floor and what is more; they disturb the flow I try to create.

4.5 Specials

Specials are also subject of some controversy, but not as distinct as cortinas. A special is a piece of music to which you can dance tango, valse, etc, has certain elements of surprise (certainly not mainstream music!) and is meant to tempt dancers to break their dancing habits.

Specials usually are pieces of 'world music' (klezmer, salsa, mambo, rumba, etc.), classical music (opera, etc) or popular forms of music (jazz, blues, pop, etc.). Tango music can also function as special music. Think about Astor Piazzolla's tango nuevos or spin offs from well know orchestras like Francisco Canaro's and Enrique

Rodriguez's. Specials function as a way of breaking of the habits of dancers, after which you can begin a new musical arc. Sometimes they also function as a sort of cortina while promoting the circulation. Specials can be cortinas you dance to.

Finally a warning to DJ's on the use of specials: don't use a special too often and keep them special. A special tango (also known as an alternative tango) usually has a limited life cycle, which is logical: since a special has more distinctive characteristics, people do grow fed up with them more easily. Therefore it is wise to use your favourite specials sparingly; that is to keep them special.

4.6 Bridge songs

Certain songs can be used to initiate a new musical direction in a milonga, while at the same time they make an emotionally logic connection between two musical atmospheres. These songs are called bridge songs. For example, if you have been building up energy and momentum for some time, there will be a certain point when you will have to stop doing so. If you don't, it will backfire for sure.

A lot of bridge songs will be specials, but also traditional tangos, waltzes and milongas can function as a bridge. In the following list I will give some examples. This list is not intended to be complete; it is a personal list. Other tango DJ's surely will use other bridge songs!

Song title	Artist	CD title (year)	Bridging ...
Usual happiness	Kroke	10 pieces to save the world (1999)	Energetic-lyrical.
Felicia	D o m i n g o Federico	Saludos (1995)	Tango-milonga.
La yumba	Otros Aires	Dos (2007)	Pugliese-neo.
Milonga Sentimental	Otros Aires	Otros Aires (2005)	Milonga-neo.
Etc.	-	-	-

4.7 An annotated playlist

The intro ...

So now we talked in great detail about how to structure a milonga. Let's forget about the theoretical aspects of DJ-ing theory and focus on DJ-ing in reality. Let's dig through a playlist of DJ Arnoud. In this paragraph I will describe in great length how and why I build up a milonga the way I do.

Tipo Tango in Eindhoven invited me to come and DJ on Sunday April 26. The milonga in Scala (Eindhoven) started at 17:00 and ended well after 22:00.

The dancers and the organisers were pleased with the music. Everybody danced and had a lot of fun. There was a good energy flow going round the place. I got a big applause and some lovely compliments. And what is more; I was very pleased with it myself, which doesn't happen to often.

1. Miguel Calo: 5 tangos (17:00-17:14)

De 6 A 7, QueTe Importa Que Te Llore, Sans Souci, Trenzas, La Guitarrita

I started with a Calo tanda. Other good orchestras to start a milonga with are: D'Agostino (with Vargas), Di Sarli, De Angelis and D'Arienzo. These are all orchestras with the right energy and most dancers know them very well. I never start with orchestras who are either too demonstrative or dramatic (like the later Pugliese), the not so well known, but very danceable orchestras (Garcia, Buzon, Malerba, etc) or with special music (non or neo tango danceable music). In the beginning I want people to dance in a familiar musical surrounding, giving them time to build up their dancing routine and self confidence.

Since it was still sunny outside, only a few people danced. I decided to play another Calo tango tanda later on in the milonga.

2. Juan D'Arienzo: 3 vals (17:14-17:22)

Alma Dolorida, Miedo, Inolvidable

In the beginning of a milonga I focus on music which is energetic and not too slow (at least 65 bpm). I want to give the dancers energy and not empty their batteries prematurely. D'Arienzo, also known as "El Rey del Compas", is perfect for this.

Most of the orchestras will only feature once during a milonga, but D'Arienzo, Laurenz, Canaro, di Sarli, Calo and de Angelis might (and often are) played more than once during a milonga. If I play them more than once, it is never two tango, valse or milonga tandas, but always a tango and a valse or milonga/candombe tanda.

3. Ricardo Tanturi: 5 tangos (17:22-17:38)

Oigo Tu Voz, Asi Se Canta, Palomita Mia, Una Emocion, Recien

Normally I don't play Tanturi this early in a milonga, because Tanturi's style of music is rather complicated and not so easy to dance to. I don't know why I played Tanturi this early. Inspiration, intuition, too lazy to search for other music, distracted by something or someone? I don't know, but it worked perfect. By the way, I always play Tanturi accompanied by Enrique Campos. Good singer who integrates in the orchestra. Tanturi with Alberto Castillo I hardly ever play, because Castillo is too dominant in his singing.

In the beginning of a milonga I often play tandas of 5 tangos (instead of 4). The reason for this is that, when there aren't so many dancers yet, the tanda structure doesn't function so well. Later on in a milonga tandas always contain a maximum of 4 tangos, 3 milongas or vals. Sometimes I even drop one song out of a tango tanda, to accelerate the dynamics of a milonga.

4. Pedro Laurenz: 3 milongas (17:38-17:46)

Yo Soy De San Telmo, La vida es una milonga, Milonga De Mi Flor

What a pity that only so few recordings of Pedro Laurenz were made. His music is great and always pleases the dancers. With Laurenz's

milonga tanda, I concluded the first wave in this milonga. I worked up to a climax, after which I always open a safety valve and let some steam (energy) escape. You just can't go on building up energy for an infinite period of time. The dancers either wear themselves out or quit dancing because they are bored to death.

In a later phase of a milonga I would probably play some easygoing special piece of music (Time by Kroke or Fever by Elvis Presley for example), but in this phase I resorted to tangos from la epoca de oro: D'Agostino with Angel Vargas.

5. D'Agostino: 4 tangos (17:48:18:02)

A Quien Le Puede Importar, Esta Noche En Buenos Aires, Mano Blanca, Ninguna

D'Agostino with Vargas is perfect for cooling down a dancing crowd which is over excited. It is a perfect combination of rhythm, energy and relaxation. I specifically only played D'Agostino with Vargas, and not D'Agostino with another singer or Vargas with another orchestra, because separately they are less interesting than as a couple.

I choose for D'Agostino and not something special because in this phase of the milonga I am very careful in not making the dancers restless. In the first 2 hours of a milonga I will hardly ever play something special. Most of the music I play in this phase is good old tango music from la epoca de oro.

If I play something special in this phase I make sure that it is something that everybody likes and knows well. The first two hours of a milonga are not for experimenting. By doing it this way I build up a lot of goodwill, which allows me later on to be more creative, innovative or experimental in my DJ-ing.

6. Lucio Demare: 3 waltzes (18:02-18:10)

Se Fue, Al Pasar, Dos Corazones

These are some nice perky? waltzes, who will work always. This tanda is a good example of something I do often in a tanda; that is

building a mini wave. This tanda increases in energy and rhythm. Most dancers I know like this.

I always have some tandas in reserve who will work for periods of lesser inspiration, a black out or if I want to play it safe. This one of them. Always have some super tandas in reserve. One day it will save the milonga for you.

7. Ricardo Malerba: 3 tangos (18:10-18:20)

Remembranza, Magdalena, Gitana Russa

I had constructed a 4 tango Malerba tanda, but it didn't really work, so I shorten it to three tangos. There is no law that says that you must play four tangos in a tanda. If it doesn't work, fix it. Somehow I think that there aren't many people who will notice if you shorten a tango tanda.

Looking back on it, this tanda feels a bit out of place after the Demare tanda. Maybe I switched too abruptly to the more lyrical Malerba orchestra. Normally Malerba always works, but usually I play it later in a milonga.

8. Quinteto Pirincho: 3 milongas (18:20-18:28)

El Torito, Milongon, La trampera

After Malerba I had to regain the attention of the dancers. With Malerba I had unconsciously created a dip in energy and Pirincho got the dancers back in the right energy. At least this how I interpreted it. Pirincho always works.

In every milonga a DJ will experience some down period. This used to irritate me, until I realized that it is unavoidable. Sometimes I even create a down period in my DJ-ing in order to contrast the next climax.

9. Donato/D'Arienzo: 5 tangos (18:28-18:42)

El Huracan (Donato), Es Inutil Que La Llores, El Romantico, Sabado Ingles, Gran Hotel Victoria

Why did I start with El Huracan? Beat me, I don't know. Probably I started to construct a Donato series, got distracted and decided

afterwards to do a D'Arienzo tanda. Maybe I forgot to delete the Donato or decided when I previewed this tanda, that it was a nice combination. Normally my traditional tandas are one orchestra tandas. The reason for this is that if you are mixing more orchestras in one tanda, you have to be very sure that it works. If it doesn't work, you will make people restless. So if I play multi orchestra tandas, it usually is during the last two hours of a milonga. In choosing songs for a one orchestra tanda, I always take care that they are (more or less) from the same period. I don't want the musical colour of an orchestra to vary too much in a tanda. Some orchestra had quite a musical evolution during their existence. The most well known example is of course Carlos di Sarli, but also Fresedo and Pugliese evolved enormously in time.

To elaborate on the evolution of music from Di Sarli; in the thirties and beginning of forties his music was rhythmical, but in 1942 the musical style changed quite suddenly to lyrical. Maybe this was caused by Alberto Podesta joining the orchestra.

10. Rodolfo Biagi: 3 vals (18:42-18:50)

El ultimo adios, Pajaro Herido, Lagrimas y sonrisas

I often combine D'Arienzo with Biagi. This logical for two reasons. Biagi played piano with the D'Arienzo orchestra for years and was instrumental in creating the typical D'Arienzo style of the early forties. Biagi has an even more outspoken rhythmical style and use of cortes than D'Arienzo has.

11. Miguel Calo: 4 tangos (18:50-19:02)

Que falta me haces, Que Cosas Tiene La Vida, Dulce Amargura, Saludos

The previous three tandas were rather energetic. With this tanda I changed direction, working my way to the two specials of Chantre and Ebeling.

By the way, this is one of my fail safe tandas.

12. Teofilo Chantre/Arthur Ebeling: 2 special milongables (19:02-19:11)

Roda Vida (Chantre), A Rainy Night In Paris (Ebeling)

These are the first two specials I played. Notice that the first two hours is 100% classical tango from la epoca de oro. Instead of a milonga tanda from la epoca de oro, I decided to play some special milongas (or to be more precise: two milongables).

I use special music to give more flavor to a dancing crowd. The effect is that they have to abandon their dancing routine which works with traditional tango music, but is of no use with other non tango, but tango danceable music. This can energize a crowd, if you do it right :-). This time it worked like a charm.

13. Francisco Canaro: 4 tangos (19:11-19:23)

Al Subir, Al Bajar, Lo Pasao, La Tormenta, Que Es Lo Que Tiene La Fulana?

And after some special music, the classical tango tastes even better. A special piece of music every once in a while in a milonga is like a pinch of salt in the soup. And as a DJ you are a cook!

14. Edgardo Donato: 3 milongas (19:23-19:31)

Ella Es Asi, De Punta A Punta, Sacale Punta

The energy of Canaro felt good to dancers, I noticed just by looking at them.

Donato felt as logical sequence; since they have the same flavor. But I realise that there is allways this dilemma: will I go on in the same routine or will I create a break?

15. Jose Garcia y Los Zorro Grises: 4 tangos (19:31-19:43)

Adios Adios Corazon, Junto A Tu Corazon, Esta Noche De Luna, El Once

In the beginning hours of a long milonga, I don't want to create too much excitement. Later on the waves up to a climax and/or a special will be shorter. But at this point I wanted not to create too much energy.

I decide to continue in the realm of classical tango.

Jose Garcia is one of my favourite "introvert" orchestras. Other favourite orchestras, with the same quality, are Pedro Laurenz, Manuel Buzon and Ricardo Malerba. I am often surprised that (apart from Laurenz) so many tango DJ's don't know these orchestras.

16. Enrique Rodriguez: 3 waltzes (19:43-19:51)

Tengo Mil Novias, Isabelita, Los Piconeros

Waltzes from Rodriguez are always a safe choice. I worked towards a contrast, because I wanted to play some Puglieses and every milongas needs at least one tanda of Puglieses. If you don't play Pugliese, the dancers will notice it and either ask for it or get the feeling something was missing.

The contrast between the happy and light waltzes from Rodriguez and the darkness and dramaticism of Pugliese was what I was after. By creating this contrast, I placed Pugliese as a climax in this milonga. I use Rodriguez as a bridge to a climax.

17. Osvaldo Pugliese: 3 tangos (19:51-20:00)

Farol, Patetico, Derecho Viejo

My feelings for Pugliese as dance orchestra are a bit ambivalent. Pugliese's music is dramatic and dominant. If I play the later Puglieses, I often notice that the floor is suddenly filled with some aspirant Pablo Veron's, meaning show dancers, who use too much space in a milonga and thereby creating chaos on the floor. Dancing like Pablo Veron is okay when you are performing on stage, but in a crowded milonga it is a definite no-no.

When I play Pugliese it is always in the second half, but never close to the end or the end itself. I don't end with Pugliese, because I want to send the dancers home with a happy energy. I have a tendency to

play only 3 Puglieses in a row, but with the older Puglieses (as in this tanda) 4 songs are okay too.

In this case I played only 3 Puglieses, because I wanted to make an abrupt break towards the Otros Aires version of Puglieses La Yumba.

18. Otros Aires / Stavroslantsias: 2 specials (20:00-20:00)

La Yumba (Otros Aires), The death of the bull (Stavroslantsias)

Most of the neo tango music doesn't feel like dancing to me. Interesting to listen to, but not for dancing. Just one man's opinion and feel free to disagree.

La Yumba is another climax in this milonga. Stavroslantsias's Death of the bull is something new I wanted to try out. After the energetic and rhythmical climax of La Yumba, I did another cooling down.

19. Alfredo de Angelis: 4 tangos (20:00-20:13)

Altar Sin Luz, Bajo Belgrano, Jiron Porteno, Pavadita

With Rodriguez's happy energy, Pugliese dramatics and Otros Aires raw energy, I needed something calm, but not too calm. I chose for the most neutral orchestra I know. The De Angelis orchestra is neither energetic nor melancholy, rhythmical nor lyrical and simple nor complex. From De Angelis you can easily switch to almost all other great orchestras of la epoca de oro.

In this tanda I created a mini wave towards Pavadita, with is a good introduction to a milonga tanda. Actually I wanted to play Tangoloco and from Altar Sin Luz up until Canro's Candombe (in tanda 20) I was working up to this.

20. Francisco Canaro: 2 milongas and 1 candombe (20:13-20:21)

Reliquias Portenas, La milonga optimista, Candombe

So this tanda was the tanda where I wanted to have a climax in energy, after which I could make a huge contrast with this Tangoloco song (in tanda 21).

21. Tangoloco: 1 special (20:21:20:26)

Claire de lune / Adios Nonino

As the Canaros completed another wave, I needed some music to cool down the dancers. The dancers were ready for something special. Tangoloco's combination of Mozarts Clair de Lune and Piazzolla's Adios Nonino is perfect for this. It starts very modest but goes a bit over the top in the middle and fades out quietly again. Definitely not a standard piece of music to dance to. The reason why I play special pieces of music is that I want to challenge the dancers to leave the routine in their dance style where it is, and integrate the music in their dancing in an atypical way. I want them to break with their habits, because I am convinced that after this their dancing gets a new dimension.

22. Carlos di Sarli: 4 tangos (20:26-20:39)

Verdemar, 9 Puntos, Comme Il Faut, El Amanecer

After the peaceful ending of Tangoloco, I wanted to create a more easygoing and romantic period in this milonga. The lyrical and well known Di Sarli's are very well suited for this. It is the perfect combination between serenity and drive. And of course the piano playing of Carlos di Sarli fitted with the piano of Tangoloco.

22. ? / Lydie Auvray: 2 special vales (20:39-20:49)

Und in Wien gibt es 10 schone Frauen (?), Tivoli (Auvray)

This tanda is a romantic special valse tanda. The first one by an unknown singer (Und in Wien gibt es 10 schone Frauen) is a slow and sexy version of Leonard Cohen's Take that waltz. Tivoli is a powerful waltz with a very romantic character.

23. Anibal Troilo: 4 tangos (20:49-21:02)

En Esta Tarde Gris, Una Carta, Toda Mi Vida, Tinta Roja

All these pieces you can find on the CD El Imortal Pichuco (El Bandoneon).

Whatever combination of songs you choose from this CD, doesn't really matter. I will always work.

24. Juan D'Arienzo / Edgardo Donato: 3 milongas (21:02-21:10)

De Pura Cepa, Milonga Vieja Milonga, La Milonga Que Faltaba (Donato)

25. Boban Markovic: 1 special (21:10-21:14)

Sat

With the relatively calm De Pura Cepa and Vieja Milonga I worked towards a energetic climax, after which I played a cooling down song. The D'Arienzo / Donato milongas is another climax in energy. I use Boban Markovic's Balkanized version of Kroke's Time to cool down the dancers. Most dancers will realize that they dance to something they know, but what will remain a mystery.

26. Pedro Laurenz: 3 tangos (21:14-21:21)

Llueve Otra Vez, Garua, Que Nunca Me Falte

Usually I start around 40 minutes before the end of a milonga, working towards the grand finale. That is why I dropped one song in this tanda. In 40 minutes you can play two tango tandas, a milonga tanda and a valse tanda. But if you check the times of the tandas 28, 29 and 30, you can see that my calculating was a bit off this evening.

27. Edgardo Donato: 3 valsas (21:21-21:29)

El Vals De Los Recuerdos, La Tapera, Quien Sera

Lovely subtle waltzes with a very happy energy.

28. Francisco Lomuto: 4 tangos (21:29-21:41)

Mar De Fondo, Si Soy Asi, Tormenta, El barco Maria

Musically this is a rather challenging tanda. Mar de Fondo has a long and rhythmless intro and Tormenta has an extra note in the refrains.

29. Enrique Rodriguez: 3 milongables (21:49-21:57)

Noches De Hungria, Amor En Budapest, La Calesita Se Destrozo

These are foxtrots by Enrique Rodriguez. Funny, milongable pieces of music, with a very happy atmosphere. And I definitely want the people to go home with a lot of happy energy in their body. After this tanda, I announced the last five tangos. The reason for announcing the last tanda is simple. You warn people that the end is near. Also some dancers reserve the last songs for somebody.

30. Francisco Canaroi 5 tangos (21:57-22:10)

Alma Del Bandoneon, Atorrante, Derecho Viejo, El rey del bosque, Poema

You might think: Again Canaro? Yes, but I chose for some unusual Canaro's, such as El Rey del Bosque and Poema.

I wanted to end with Poema, as I heard that apart from La Cumparsita also Poema was used as a finishing song in milongas in the old days of tango.

31. Cooling down (22:10-22:24)

Decara A La Pared (Lhasa De Sela), Disamistade (Fabrizio De Andre), Via Con Me and Boogie (both Paolo Conte)

After Poema I noticed that the dancers didn't really want to leave the dancefloor. I announced a few cooling down songs. I choose some happy Italian songs.

... and he outro

What I tried to explain was my process of choosing orchestras and music for tandas and creating a structure in a milonga. A structure in a milonga is very important, because without a structure, nobody knows what to expect. On the other side too much structure can be very boring.

I hope that you get inspired by what I wrote, but I also hope that you will be true to yourself and will go on working towards your own DJ-identity.

4.8 Conclusion

Regardless of what type of tango DJ you are or aim to be; now it is up to you to build a wonderful salon.¹⁹ You have all the tools. It should be easy, but it is not. Sometime it is very hard and frustrating work. Even experienced DJ's will have nights it just doesn't work out. Some times feel catastrophic. Help, the DJ is drowning! What to do in a situation like this?

- Play it safe. Play only traditional rhythmical tangos everybody knows and loves. Have some super tandas in reserve. This gives you time to readjust your strategy.
- Don't experiment with new pieces of music you want to try out. If you don't feel happy as a DJ it is wise to keep a low profile. Don't try to attract attention at all. Some opportunities just are not meant for a DJ to give a personal touch to. So be it, accept it and wait for better times.
- Don't panic. Most dancers will give you more credit than you will expect. They will realize that you are trying to please them and still have to learn the trade. And as long as you are learning, they will keep on giving you credit. It is however another matter if you are obnoxious and don't learn anything. And most important, remember, also experienced DJ's have their off days.

¹⁹ In general you can distinguish three types of tango DJ's: the **traditional** DJ (only plays tangos from la epoca de oro and before this period), the **eclectic** DJ (plays not only traditional tangos, but also specials/alternative tangos) and the **thematic** DJ (plays for example only neotango and specials/alternative tangos).

- Get into contact with the dancers and ask if they like it, if they have requests, etc.

5 Do & don't

5.1 Introduction

*“Everybody wants to be a DJ,
Everybody thinks it is oh so easy.”
(Soulwax, Too many DJ's)*

*“Those who can't dance say the music is no good.”
(Jamaican proverb, anonymous)*

We conclude the part on the art of DJ-ing with some guidelines, we learned by experience.

5.2 Don't loose your concentration

Sometimes you will have to work for hours and naturally you will experience lesser periods of DJ-ing. Focus yourself on playing music people want to dance to.

Should a DJ dance while DJ-in? We don't advise it. Dancing while playing music is risky. Dancers might interpret is that you don't take DJ-ing seriously and even find it not very respectful. On practice nights and informal salons it is okay for a DJ to dance, but only as long as the DJ manages to remain in control of the musical flow. On the other side, some dancing to feel the atmosphere, might have a function for a DJ.

Also (if you DJ with a laptop and have access to internet) don't read and answer your mail, don't play games (sound might interfere with the music you play) and don't google, etc. It is not very polite towards the dancers, because they will notice that you are not fully concentrated on DJ-ing.

5.3 Try to 'read' your audience

A good DJ respects his audience. S/he is there to see to it that the dancers have a good time dancing. A DJ who is able to read the signals from his audience and is able to translate them in to the musical scenario, shows his respect to the audience. But how do you

read your audience? The following points might help you reading your audience:

- How many people are dancing and how many are not? Dancers have a tendency to spread out proportionally in a space. If proportionally few people are dancing, a DJ should change his strategy.
- Who is leaving the dance floor and who is entering? If beginners leave the floor en masse, you might be playing too complex music. Vice versa if experienced dancers leave the floor, it could be that the music is too simple, maybe even boring. Aim at a compromise.
- What are the expressions of the dancers and the people who watch? Do they look happy, concentrated, confused, etc? Are they enjoying themselves or not? By getting into contact with the dancers in a nonverbal way (a wink, a nod, a smile, etc.) you will often evoke a signal of what they feel. These signals give you a lot of information. I spend more time watching dancers than selecting music to play.
- Is the dancing chaotically or in a disciplined way? Are there (too much) collisions? If so; switch to more simple, rhythmical and certainly not too big music most dancers know by heart. Avoid powerful Pugliese music for some time.
- Is there a lot of talking when a piece of music or a tanda is finished and the other has not begun yet? Maybe you will have to calm your audience a bit or maybe there is not enough energy and excitement.
- Are dancers faithful to their (dance) partners or is there a lot of switching? If so, what do you do with it?
- Are there 'chronic wallflowers', people who don't dance at all? Maybe you can ask them if they have a request or match them to somebody. Their enthusiasm when they get to dance, is very inspiring for a salon.
- What is circulation speed of dancers and loungers? A low circulation speed means that a salon is static. You can try to bring more variation in your music.

When Fatboy Slim was asked what defines a good DJ he said: “For me, it is whether they look up or not while they are playing. A good DJ is always looking at the crowd, seeing what they like, seeing whether it’s working, communicating with them, smiling at them. A bad DJ is always looking down at the decks and just doing whatever they practised in their bedroom, regardless of whether the crowd is enjoying it or not.”^{20 21}

Another nice quote on reading your audience comes from blues virtuoso B.B. King, who is always prepared to change his play list during a concert, just to win over the audience: “I am concerned about them. Those are the people that caused me to be on the stage, and they can take you off the stage. It is kind of like in any business. Are you listening to them, pro or con? Each audience is kind of like, excuse the word, a lady. They have a right to change their mind, and they do. You have to be alert enough to tell that if you are not going very well in this direction, change it, abruptly.”²²

5.4 Know your music

“Boy, you have to honour the music more than your mother.”
(Omar Vega’s old teacher)

A good DJ knows his music and is obsessive about his music collection. Knowing your music will consume a lot of time, if not a

²⁰ Brwester & Broughton, *Last night a DJ saved my life*, 2006: 20. For DJ’s who read Dutch, Arne van Terpenhoven & Toon Beemsterboer, *Door! Dance in Nederland* might also be interesting. Especially the chapters on Michel de Hey and Ferry Corsten are revealing, even for a tango DJ.

²¹ Fatboy Slim (born Quentin Leo Cook) is an English musician (drums), producer and DJ in the modern dance music genre. His music style is known as big beat, which is a combination of hip hop, break beat, rock, trance, house and rhythm and blues. Before pursuing a solo career, he was a member of The Housemartins and Freakpower. For more info, see Wikipedia UK.

²² Kostelanetz, R., B.B. King, *The B.B. King Companion*. Five decades of commentary, 1997: xv.

lifetime. If you don't know the music you are playing, how can you estimate what effects it will have on the audience? And a good DJ should always be hungry for new music.

To illustrate this, I quote Brewster and Broughton (again):

"The DJ knows music better than you, better than your friends, better than everyone else on the dance floor or in the record shop. (...) A great DJ will hit a room with musical moments so new and so fresh that it is irrelevant that the music is recorded, and so powerful that they easily surpass your all time favourites. (...) The real work of a DJ isn't standing behind some record decks for a couple of hours, looking shifty and waiting for some drink tickets; the time and effort comes in a life spent sifting through music and deciding if it is good, bad or *'Oh-my-God-listen-to-this!'* A DJ's job is to channel the vast oceans of recorded sound into a single unforgettable evening. (...) To become a good DJ you have to develop the *hunger*. You have to search for new records with the same zeal of a gold rush prospector digging in a blizzard. You have to develop an excitement for vinyl that verges on a fetish. You should not be able to walk past a charity shop without worrying what classic rarity you might have missed nestling among those Osmond LP's."²³

5.5 Know your audience

If you know what the audience likes and what they don't like you can avoid a lot of trouble. Don't hesitate to ask the dancers. Also the organization can usually provide good info. For example if they recently provided a milonga workshop, you can play some more milonga tandas.

John Woodhouse once remarked that he played for an audience which really existed, whereas many musicians play for an audience that only exists in their imagination.²⁴

²³ Brewster & Broughton, *Last night a DJ saved my life*, 2006: 16-17.

²⁴ John Woodhouse (1923-2001) was a famous accordion player in the fifties.

5.6 Know yourself

Knowing yourself, your weak points and your strong points is important. Be critical to yourself but not too critical, or otherwise it will spoil your fun in DJ-ing. Being aware of mistakes you made, will teach you important lessons. It is not a problem to make a mistake, but it is irritating for your audience if you do not learn from it. You might want to keep a DJ-diary in which you write down the things you learned. Also helpful will be evaluating your own play list a few days later.

5.7 Perform in a dynamic way

Always try to aim at a dynamic performance. A DJ who plays the same type music all night long doesn't do the dancers any good. Even if the music is brilliant and very good to dance to, it will become irritating after some time. Variety is the spice of life.

A word of warning might be necessary. Some music can be extremely strong in evoking emotions with some dancers.. This can work out positive but also negative. Music can be a very effective carrier of emotions. By listening to music we also learn to deal with our feelings. It can offer solace and helps us understanding who we are.²⁵ Music is the language of emotion. Be carefull with playing (too much) superemotional music.

5.8 Look for the 'common denominator'

Most DJ's I know, happen to be experienced dancers and have also an extensive musical knowledge and experience in tango music and other types of music. This implies a risk in DJ-ing. A DJ might have an unconscious tendency to play difficult and musically interesting or special music. For beginners this is usually too difficult to dance to and they drop out. Believe me, you don't want that to happen, because without beginners a tango community has no future at all. Play simple music, music used in teaching tango, etc. and only incidentally something more complicated.

²⁵ Henkjan Honing in Prins (2008).

5.9 Do not play too loud

As I mentioned before: if you have to shout, the music is too loud. However when you have been DJ-ing for some hours, you might get used to a certain sound volume and wonder it is still loud enough. An occasional walk through the dance hall will help you place it into the right perspective. Also leaving the dance hall for a few minutes (smoking, toilet, some fresh air) will do the trick.

During a milonga you will have to adjust the sound volume constantly. In the beginning of a milonga (when there are not many visitors yet) the sound volume needed is less than what the milonga needs when it is fully crowded. Towards the end, when people start to leave, you should not forget to turn the sound volume lower otherwise it will become too loud.

So you will be constantly adjusting the volume, also because there are serious differences in sound levels between different recordings.

Not only the sound volume is an important factor, but also too much bass and treble can irritate the dancers. It is unpleasant for your ears. Note that in neo tango music there usually is a lot of bass. So it might be wise to adjust the sound and/or bass, or neighbours will start complaining! Use your equalizer!²⁶

Another phenomenon is that at the end of a song and the beginning of a new one, the dancers can be rather noisy. For all kind of reasons they talk and quite a lot of nice intro's of songs are overwhelmed by talking. What can you do about this? There are several solutions. You can make the breaks between songs a little longer. Or you can lower the sound volume. This usually works well.²⁷

²⁶ Michiel Lombaers discusses in great length what you can do with a mixing console; see chapter 6.

²⁷ Totton (2003:164) illustrates this with an example in the world of flamenco, where they sometimes completely switch off all sound to get people to quieten down and listen to the singer, when he starts his performance. His explanation: "Because they are no longer being blasted with noise, they listen."

5.10 Don't try to attract (too much) attention

A DJ is there at the service of the dancers and not for some ego boosting. Of course you will show your character in playing music, but be critical to yourself.

This is not an easy thing for beginning DJ's. Sometimes you find fascinating music you fall in love with. Such a blind spot can give you a bum steer. What you think is fascinating music, is a very personal thing. It is absolutely no guarantee that others will share your enthusiasm. What to do with this special piece of music that is 'haunting' you? Don't play it for some weeks and check if it still is a darling to you. Try to dance to it and register how it feels. Try it out in an informal setting (after a class perhaps) and ask what people think of it. And (sigh) sometimes you will have to kill your 'darling', but you can always listen to it at home. Or you can very carefully try to plug it by playing it over and over again and making it a hit. This is risky.

5.11 Requests

From time to time somebody will request a song. It is up to you if you will humour such a request or requests in general. If you do, you don't have to respond to it immediately. It might very well take about half an hour or more to fit the request into your scheme. A request that doesn't fit into the atmosphere at all can be ignored. Always do explain why you can't honour a request and if you can honour it, about what time they can expect their request.

*"And I get tired of dj's
Why is it always what he plays
I'm gonna push right through
I'm gonna tell him to
Tell him to play us
Play us a slow song"
(Joe Jackson A slow song)*

5.12 Exchange experiences with other DJ's

Apart from exchanging musical experiences with other DJ's it can be helpful to talk shop with other DJ's about DJ-ing. Giving and receiving feedback in a respectful way has never harmed anybody yet. And two do know more than one. The advantage of asking another DJ to give feedback is that s/he speaks the lingo.

5.13 Be your self

"I am a DJ, I am what I play"
(David Bowie, D.J.)

You are unique in your taste and the way you build up a milonga. Be true to yourself. If an organiser asks you to DJ in a style you can't tolerate: say no to the offer.

And if, after a few good gigs in a row, you grow too big for your breeches (that is get conceited), remember John Peels' words: "It is obvious that disc-jockeys, as a class, are essentially parasitic. We are, with lamentably few exceptions, neither creative nor productive. We have, however, manipulated the creations of others (records) to provide ourselves with reputations as arbiters of public taste."²⁸ ²⁹

5.14 DJ's life cycle

In a DJ's life cycle you can roughly distinguish three phases:

- learning the trade

²⁸ Peel, John, *Margrave of the marshes*. His autobiography, London: Corgi Books, 2005:22.

²⁹ John Peel (born John Robert Parker Ravenscroft) was a legendary English DJ, radio presenter and journalist, who was known for his eclectic taste. Peel promoted many new artists and bands of various music styles. Among the bands which credit Peel as a major boost to their careers are: T-Rex, David Bowie, The Sex Pistols, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Fairport Convention, Pink Floyd, The Clash, The Undertones, Buzzcocks, The Cure, Joy Division and PJ Harvey.

For more info on John Peel: see previous note and Wikipedia UK.

- DJ-ing as a 'career'
- resigning as a DJ

The first two phases have been discussed in detail. In this paragraph we focus on the end of a DJ's career, for one thing is sure: you won't go on DJ-ing forever.

There are several reasons for resigning as a DJ:

- DJ-ing becomes a routine. You have been there and done it just too many times. The inspiration is gone. When you start feeling that you have to DJ again in that awful place, with always the same people, the same jokes, our advice is to quit DJ-ing there and maybe quit DJ-ing at all. Or take a sabbatical year and then decide if you want to pursue your career as a DJ. Because if the inspiration is gone and you sit there DJ-ing with all that bad energy around you, the dancers will notice it. Do a service to the dancers and to yourself and quit DJ-ing. By doing that you will change a lose – lose situation into a win – win situation. People will respect you for doing so!
- Other things in life become more important: a career, a family, etc. DJ-ing is fun but it is certainly not the most important thing in life. It was fun while it lasted, but there comes a time to make another step in life.
- DJ-ing is hard work, both physically and mentally. DJ-ing all night costs you a lot of energy. You have to stay concentrated and alert for hours. Think about reading the audience, dealing with requests, talking with guests and organizers, handling the sound system and deciding what to play next. If the task of DJ-ing becomes too strenuous, you can decide to DJ less hours or on less occasions or to quit DJ-ing at all.

So be realistic about it. When your time has come, quit DJ-ing. Don't continue DJ-ing because you have done it for many years, for the money, the prestige or because you feel an obligation to the dancers or the people who hire you. It is just not worth it. After your DJ career is over, you can still be involved in tango DJ-ing by giving constructive feedback to beginning tango DJ's or make up for all those hours of dancing you missed.

5.15 DJ intervission

In March 2008 I started to evaluate playlists of two of the El Corte DJ's. This is what I call DJ intervission. DJ intervission (probably a newly coined word, derived from the dutch word *intervisie*) refers to the process of improving tango DJ skills by asking a colleague to give feedback on problems and/or bottlenecks a DJ experiences.

DJ intervission aims especially on beginning DJ's, who are still finding out their DJ style. The aim is to give professional (constructive and respectful) feedback to a DJ.

My method is that after a DJ set I ask them for a playlist to evaluate (or they ask me if I want to evaluate their playlist). It is essential that I have experienced their DJ set 'live', so that I know how the dancers responded to their DJ-ing.

When evaluating their playlists I don't aim at telling them to 'do this' or 'never do that' (although sometimes this does happen), but giving them feedback in such a way that they discover their own rules, which are rules that work for them (but not necessarily for you and me).

This Socratic way of giving feedback is not to answer questions (because there usually more correct answers), but to ask the questions or share an observation, which will allow them to discover their own DJ logic and hopefully will help them to develop their own DJ intuition. DJ intervission also should be a two way communication.³⁰

It goes without saying that it never should be an intervissor's intent to create a clone of himself.

³⁰ Socrates (Greek philosopher, who lived from 470 to 399 before Christ) was firmly convinced that people learned to answer questions that haunted them.

6 Sound engineering for dummies

By Michiel Lombaers, edited by Arnoud de Graaff

6.1 Introduction

DJ-ing means you also have to be able to operate some technical equipment and try to get the music to sound as good as possible. This chapter will give you some fundamental insights in the musical set up you may come across while DJ-ing. As the title of this chapter already suggest, this is a simple introduction for (tango) DJ's. For those readers who are interested in the technical aspects of the audio chain in general and its components specifically, we refer to the notes on the bottom of the pages.

6.2 The audio chain

There are a couple of essential tricks that a DJ should know when working on a PA system without the aid of a seasoned sound engineer.³¹ This is a worst case scenario, because usually a PA system and a sound engineer are inseperable.

The set up you work with is called the audio chain (see figure below). The audio chain consists of a source (where the music comes from), a mixing console (where you pre amplify and adjust the sound), the power amplifier and the loudspeakers.

A **source** can be a laptop, CD player(s), mini-disk player (s), tape-deck(s) or a laptop . The source provides the music the dancers want to dance to.

A **mixing console** is also known as a pre amplifier (which is in fact a whole load of pre amplifiers bundled together). With the mxing

³¹ A **public address** or "**PA**" system is an electronic amplification system with a mixer, amplifier and loudspeakers, used to reinforce a given sound (e.g., a person making a speech, prerecorded music, or message) and distributing the 'sound' to the general public around a building (source: Wikipedia UK).

console you will amplify the music provided by the source. The mixing console also enables you to equalize the music you play in terms of musical colour and gain. With musical colour I mean the composition of low, middle and high tones in the music; in short tone control. Gain refers to the intensity of the signals which are sent to the speakers.

A **power amplifier** is the amplification unit that boosts the signal up to the level that is required to drive the speakers.³²

Speakers transform the sound from an electrical signal to an acoustic (audible) one.³³

Cabling: every audio system has an amount of cables to connect the various pieces with each other. Most of the cables and connectors of a professional sound-system are designed for their specific function.

³² Generally, an **amplifier** is any device that will convert one signal (often with a very small amount of energy, a few milliwatt) into a another signal (often with a larger amount of energy e.g. several hundred watts).

In popular use, the term today usually refers to an electronic amplifier, often as in audio applications. The relationship of the input to the output of an amplifier — usually expressed as a function of the input frequency — is called the transfer function of the amplifier, and the magnitude of the transfer function is termed the gain. A related device that emphasizes conversion of signals of one type to another (for example, a light signal in photons to a DC signal in amperes) is a transducer, or a sensor. However, a transducer does not amplify power (source: Wikipedia UK).

³³ A **loudspeaker, speaker, or speaker system** is an electromechanical transducer that converts an electrical signal to sound. The term *loudspeaker* can refer to individual devices (otherwise known as *drivers*), or to complete systems consisting of a enclosure incorporating one or more drivers and additional electronic components. Loudspeakers are the most variable elements in any audio system, and are responsible for marked audible differences between sound systems. Loudspeaker performance (i.e., their accuracy in reproducing a signal without adding distortion) is significantly worse than that of other audio equipment (source: Wikipedia UK).

Also very handy is that specific cables for specific purposes usually have specific plugs. In theory it is easy and seems as if you hardly can do something wrong; the practice is more resistant however.

The audio chain

Source ----->Pre-amp----->Power-amp----->Speakers³⁴

For the average tango DJ the mixing console is the most important tool of the audio chain. The strength of every chain lies in its weakest link. However, the other elements of the audio chain are much less (if at all) influenceable.

³⁴ A **loudspeaker, speaker, or speaker system** is an electromechanical transducer that converts an electrical signal to sound. The term *loudspeaker* can refer to individual devices (otherwise known as *drivers*), or to complete systems consisting of a enclosure incorporating one or more drivers and additional electronic components. Loudspeakers are the most variable elements in any audio system, and are responsible for marked audible differences between sound systems. Loudspeaker performance (i.e., their accuracy in reproducing a signal without adding distortion) is significantly worse than that of other audio equipment (source: Wikipedia UK).

6.3 The mixing console³⁵

The big sound system with mixing console (also known as PA or Public Address system) is not so very different from your home stereo. You can select a (sound) signal, adjust and amplify it until it has enough power to drive the speakers to the desired volume. The extra you get in a PA system is the possibility to control and adjust almost every stage of the sound amplification.

The difference between your home stereo set and a PA system is the mixing console.



³⁵ In professional audio, a **mixing console**, digital mixing console, **mixing desk** (Brit.), or **audio mixer**, also called a **sound board** or **soundboard**, is an electronic device for combining (also called "mixing"), routing, and changing the level, timbre and/or dynamics of audio signals. A mixer can mix analog or digital signals, depending on the type of mixer. The modified signals (voltages or digital samples) are summed to produce the combined output signals.

Mixing consoles are used in many applications, including recording studios, public address systems, sound reinforcement systems, broadcasting, television, and film post-production. An example of a simple application would be to enable the signals that originated from two separate microphones (each being used by vocalists singing a duet, perhaps) to be heard through one set of speakers simultaneously. When used for live performances, the signal produced by the mixer will usually be sent directly to an amplifier, unless that particular mixer is "powered" or it is being connected to powered speakers (source: Wikipedia UK).

A simple mixing console (as shown above) is divided in channels where the individual sounds are adapted and then fine-tuned, and a master section where they are mixed together. With a mixing console you have a possibility to adjust both quantity and quality of sound.

Quantity of course refers to sound volume and quality refers to the handling of the musical colour you want to achieve (tone control). Older recordings of the late twenties and early thirties often have poor quality in higher sound frequencies. Very modern recordings often have too much low frequencies, especially neo tango recordings.

The average mixing console offers you three possibilities to to adjust the sound volume.

At first comes '**gain**', situated as the first thing after the input, on top of the channel. Here you can optimize the level, as it comes out of your player, to your channel.³⁶ Secondly there is the **channel fader**, situated on the bottom of the channel. When you need to adjust the levels between songs, it's the best to use this fader. And finally there is the '**master fader**'. The point where all the active channels are combined and sent to the mixer output connections. The fader(s) at this point regulate the overall output volume and is normally left at a preset value, which you decided on during your soundchecking. So much for soundvolume.

But there is more than quantity. There is also quality of sound. Quantity without quality (and also vice versa) is making an ineffective use of a mixing console. It is the best possible fit between the two that makes the sound optimally.

Most tango DJ's I know use recordings of the forties and fifties (and sometimes even older recordings). The quality of these recordings varies from quite good to rather poor. To achieve a good sound

³⁶ In electronics, **gain** is a measure of the ability of a circuit (often an amplifier) to increase the power or amplitude of a signal. It is usually defined as the mean ratio of the signal output of a system to the signal input of the same system. It may also be defined as the decimal logarithm of the same ratio (source: Wikipedia UK).

quality means that you will have to fiddle around with tone control instruments; the finetuning of the sound. As a rule of thumb you can say that the older a recording is the more you have to adjust your equalizer. The opposite is also true: modern recordings usually don't require much EQ adjustments.

EQ (which is the most important part for us) is a section that can be build up in various ways, but which will at least have a low and a high filter (on your home stereo these are called bass and treble).

Beside that it can have:

- A low cut switch. This is a filter that is designed to filter out 'rumble' low frequency noise like the handling noise of a microphone or the resonations of a 78 rpm record played back with a Hi-Fi pick-up.
- One or more mid-band controls, very useful on old records. Sometimes with frequency and (more rare) band-width control, very useful to confuse the novice operator.

- A bypass switch. With this switch you can compare if the settings you choose are actually an improvement.^{37 38}

With **pan or balance** you controls the virtual position of the signal in the stereo 'picture' between the left and right speaker set.

Pan (short for panorama) is used on **mono** channels and balances the output from the channel to hard left to hard right or somewhere in between.

³⁷ In audio processing, **equalization** (or **equalisation**, **EQ**) is the process of changing the frequency envelope of a sound. In passing through any channel, temporal/frequency spreading of a signal occurs. Etymologically, it means to correct, or make equal, the frequency response of a signal. The term "equalizer" is often incorrectly applied as a general term for audio filters. DJ mixing equipment and hi-fi audio components often include so called graphic equalizers or simply equalizer. These are in fact general all-purpose filters, which can be arranged to produce the effect of low pass, high pass, band pass and band stop filters. Only when these filters are arranged so as to reverse the effects of the internal circuitry on sound output, are they operating as equalizers (source: Wikipedia UK).

³⁸ A **low-pass filter** is a filter that passes low-frequency signals but attenuates (reduces the amplitude of) signals with frequencies higher than the cutoff frequency. The actual amount of attenuation for each frequency varies from filter to filter. It is sometimes called a **high-cut filter**, or **treble cut filter** when used in audio applications. The concept of a low-pass filter exists in many different forms, including electronic circuits (like a *hiss filter* used in audio), digital algorithms for smoothing sets of data, acoustic barriers, blurring of images, and so on. Low-pass filters play the same role in signal processing that moving averages do in some other fields, such as finance; both tools provide a smoother form of a signal which removes the short-term oscillations, leaving only the long-term trend (source: Wikipedia UK).

Balance is used on **stereo** channels and controls the emphasis on the left or right side of the stereo channels but keeps them on their left ~ right position.³⁹

Precautions in handling a mixing console⁴⁰

A few word of warning for switching on and off your mixing console I read in a manual for the Tapco Mix 60: “When you shut down your equipment, turn off any external amplifiers first. When powering up, turn on the amplifiers last.”

In more simple words: when shutting down, work your way towards the source (laptop, CD player), but when starting up work your way from the source to the speakers.

It is also wise to turn the amplifiers level (gain) controls down, before making a connection to an external amplifier. Si in reconfiguring your amp’s routing, first shut the power of, make your changes and then turn the power back on, and then and only then turn the level controls (gain) back up.

6.4 What to bring

The first step is to connect your source (laptop, CD player, etc.) to the mixing console. For this you’ll need cables. And as soon as you bring one (or some) of these sources yourself, consider yourself also

³⁹ **Panning** is the spread of a monaural signal in a stereo or multi-channel sound field. A typical pan control is *constant power*. At one extreme, the sound appears in only one channel. In the middle, the sound is decreased in that channel by 3 dB, and the other channel is brought up to the same level, so that the overall sound power level is always constant.

The pan control in audio gets its name from panorama or panning action in moving image technology. The audio pan control can be used in a mix to create the impression that a source is moving from one side of the soundstage to the other, although ideally there would be timing and reverberation differences present for a more complete picture of movement within a defined space. Simple analog pan controls only change relative level; they don't add reverb to replace direct signal or change delay timing (source: Wikipedia UK).

⁴⁰ Owner’s manual Tapco Mix Series, for more info: www.tapcoworld.com.

responsible for the right type of connecting cables. Of course you can take a gamble and assume that the PA engineer will have all the cables needed at hand, but you can play it safe and bring your own. Please keep in mind that some of those professional mixing consoles can be quite big, so a length of three meters for such a cable is useful. Now if you run your music on domestic equipment most of the time you'll be familiar with the 'RCA' or 'phono' connector.⁴¹ The most mixing consoles however have their line level inputs on

⁴¹ An **RCA jack**, also referred to as a phono connector or CINCH/AV connector, is a type of electrical connector that is commonly used in the audio/video market. The name "RCA" derives from the Radio Corporation of America, which introduced the design by the early 1940s to allow mono phonograph players to be connected to amplifiers. For many other applications it began to replace the older jack plugs used in the audio world when component high fidelity started becoming popular in the 1950s. The corresponding plug is called an RCA plug or a phono plug. The latter is often confused with a phone plug which refers to a TRS connector (Wikipedia UK)

1/4”(6.35mm) TS (tip-sleeve) or TRS (tip-ring-sleeve) connectors.⁴² The same type as those used on older headphones (modern ones generally use 3.5mm mini-jacks. There are simple and cheap RCA to 1/4” TS converter plugs for 3 to 5 euros on the market, and it’s worth the money to have a couple of them with you.



Another important tool is a headphone. For this work the best type are the fully closed ones that enable you to isolate sounds from your

⁴² A **TRS connector**, also called a **jack plug** (UK) or **phone plug** (U.S.), is a common audio connector. It is cylindrical in shape, typically with three contacts, although sometimes with two (a **TS connector**) or four (a **TRRS connector**). It was invented for use in telephone switchboards in the 19th century and is still widely used, both in its original quarter-inch (6.3 mm) size and in miniaturized versions. The connector's name is an acronym derived from the names of three conducting parts of the plug: **T**ip, **R**ing, and **S**leeve[1] – hence, **TRS**.

In the U. K., the terms *jack plug* and *jack socket* are commonly used for the respectively male and female TRS connectors.[2]

In the U. S., a female connector is called a jack. The terms *phone plug* and *phone jack* are commonly used to refer to TRS connectors,[3] but are also sometimes used colloquially to refer to telephone plugs and the corresponding jacks that connect wired telephones to wall outlets. The similar terms *phono plug* and *phono jack* normally refer to RCA connectors. To unambiguously refer to the connectors described here, the diameter or other qualifier is often added, e.g. *1/4-inch phone plug*, *3.5 mm phone jack*, or *stereo phone plug*, for the three-contact version.

The initial application for the TRS connector was in telephone equipment, which explains why, to this day, it is often termed a "phone plug," even though its use in telephony applications ended many decades ago. The connector's association with stereo headphones possibly helped maintain this term (source: Wikipedia UK).

environment. Leave the little earplug-phones at home or throw them away. Those types of earphones are actually bad for your ears.

6.5 Where to connect

The most convenient way is if the console has stereo channels free. Most of the time you can find them near the ‘master section’ in the center or on the right of the console. How to recognize the master section? First find the input channels. They will all be next to each other and they will be more or less identical. (The master section is the more complicated-looking area...) A stereo input channel may be labeled as ‘stereo’ and the numbering might be odd and even on the same strip. Sometimes when the labeling is missing you can look at the knob (also known as pan-pot) that adjust the stereo position of the sound image. It will then be called ‘balance’ or ‘bal’. You can find it normally above the fader.

If there is no stereo channel available you can take two mono channels. When you’re **not** confining yourself to the music of the ‘golden era’ (in other words, when your running music in stereo) , you will have to use one channel for the left-hand signal and one for the right. Turn the pan pots all the way to all the way to left for the former and all the way to the right for the latter. Then all you need to do is connect up your sound source. Look for L and R on the connectors if you’re using a stereo channel, or just remember which is left and right if you’re using two mono channels.

6.6 Getting sound

The next step is to adjust the channel to the source that you’re using. The first step is to adjust the input gain, but to be able to do that you have to isolate the channel that you’re adjusting. For this you’ll find a switch named ‘solo’ or ‘PFL’ (pre fader listening).⁴³ It’s the same function as the ‘cue’ switch found on disco mix consoles. When this

⁴³ Pre-Fader Listen is a function on audio mixers to control the audio signal before the main fader control (source: Wikipedia UK).

switch is active, the signal will be on the headphones and visible on the meter in the master section.

There will be some other switches near the gain pot but most of them you can ignore and/or should be in their default (off) position.

There are however two important functions the channel strip.

'Line' will deselect the microphone input and activate the line-input for your player. With a lot of smaller modern mixers this happens automatically as soon as a 1/4" jack is plugged into that channel.

'B' will select a second set of line-inputs on the stereo channels of some consoles.

Play some music and adjust the gain until the loudest parts of the recording are showing $\pm 0 \sim +6$ dB on the level-meter. The best is to use a recording that is loud and adjust your gain to this recording. Use a recording you know well and which has both low, middle and high frequencies.

Once set this setting shouldn't be changed anymore. If you can't get any reading at all on the meter, check your connections and then check that the sound source really is generating a signal (by looking at it, plugging some headphones into it directly etc.). It may be on 'pause', not have a disc in, etc. You can also plug another sound source into the channel you are trying to use and see if that gets a result. Another approach is to temporarily try another channel.

In other words, work methodically to discover whether a signal is being generated and if so, where it is getting blocked on its path to your mixer's master section.

Once you have set the level you can slowly slide the fader up and listen for the signal coming out of the speakers. If not, there will be a couple of things to check.

6.7 ¡Caution!

With the following actions you should keep the channel fader down and after every change you can slide it up for a moment to check if the sound can be heard.

- First deselect the solo / PFL switch so that the meters will show the actual output of the console.

- Then check if the master fader is open.
- If the meter still shows no output and / or you hear no sound, check if the channel is active ('on'), no switch called 'mute' is engaged and, if there are sub-mix channels, that on the channel that you use for play-back the switch 'mix' or 'L/R' is engaged. At that moment you should see level reactions on your main meters.

If at this point there is still no sound coming out of the main speakers the amplifiers are probably muted. This is tricky. It's best if the PA engineer switches these on. There might be a specific sequence required regarding which block of the power amplifiers is switched on first and which one last.

6.8 Fine adjustments

Once you have the music running, you'll want to fine tune the sound. The tools that are on the console are more extended than those on a standard stereo set. There are various options available. Most of the EQ controls on a mixing console are either three or four band. This means that there are one or two bands in the mid-frequencies.

This is very useful with old recordings. There is even the possibility to have 'sweep' EQs, where the frequency of boosting or cutting can be chosen. With some old harsh sounding recordings you can search for the most annoying frequency band and cut only that one down.

Those sweep EQs need a little time to get used to. If you ever have the chance to try the sound in an (almost) empty hall, take your discs and practice!

This is a point where headphones are handy. When preparing a new 'tanda' you can listen to the sound quality and make some pre-adjustments with the EQ.

6.9 Placing the speakers⁴⁴

The placement of the speakers is important. If I would be fool enough to point the speakers to the wall after some big and heavy curtains, the sound would be muffled. This is logical, but even if you point the speakers to the dancers a lot of things can go wrong. For example if you place the speakers on the floor, the sound will also be muffled by the bodies of the dancers (and the more dancers there are, the more muffled the sound will get).

In general there are three simple principles for placing the speakers. The first principle is to place the speakers at a height that is (at least) about 50 centimeters above the longest dancer present. Usually speakers placed at two and a half meters or more will do the trick. The second principle is to tilt the speakers slightly downwards, because if you direct the speakers horizontally the sound that directly reaches the dancers will be muddled by the sound that indirectly (via ceiling and walls) reaches the dancers. And since you will usually be working with recordings of at least half a century ago, you don't want the sound to be muddy. This effect is called reverberation or reverb. It is defined as a sound which remains in a certain space after the original sound has died down. When sound is produced in a large space echoes will build up and slowly die down when the sound is absorbed by walls and air, thus causing reverb. The tilting of the speakers should be slightly, no more than approximately 10 to 15 degrees. The bigger the hall, the more horizontal the speakers may be placed.

The last principle is to aim the speakers at the dancers. Usually the speakers should be aimed at the middle of the dancefloor, which is often but not always the centre of the dancehall.

⁴⁴ For DJ's who are interested in the technical aspect of placing speakers, see (for example) Vincent Verdult's *De opstelling van luidsprekers in de huiskamer* on www.skidder.student.utwente.nl, Rudolf A. Bruil's *Speaker placement & positioning* on www.soundfountain.com or google freely using the keywords loudspeaker and placement.

A last remark on speakers is about sub woofers. Some audio chains have besides normal loudspeakers (for all frequencies) also a subwoofer (for very low frequencies).

A **subwoofer** is a loudspeaker, that is dedicated to the reproduction of very low bass audio frequencies (150 Hz down as far as 20 Hz or lower). They are used to augment the low frequency performance of main loudspeakers. Unless you are well acquainted with all sorts of audio equipment, my advice is to leave the adjustment of subwoofers to others and assume it is correctly adjusted for its surroundings. If not; check with the people who are responsible for it.

Finally a word of caution and an advice. Realize that playing neo tango recordings usually have quite some bass in them and that subwoofers can boost it up way too much.

Don't forget to see to it that your DJ workspace is not too close by the subwoofer or one of the speakers, for that makes it much harder for you to master the quantity and quality of the music you are playing.

7 Laptop DJ-ing for tango DJ's ⁴⁵

7.1 Introduction

More and more tango DJ's use a laptop, and others thinking about switching from CD's to a laptop. DJ's who work with CD's or even MD's seem to be a disappearing breed.

This is not very surprising, for the advantages of laptop DJ-ing are numerous. The average hard disk of a laptop can easily contain 10.000 songs. Imagine bringing 500 CD's to a milonga, you would need a wheelbarrow. Furthermore, a laptop offers great opportunities for categorising your music collection. You can add all sorts of labels to your music: instrumental or vocal, genre, year of recording, composer, etc. A laptop makes your music collection more easily accessible, which allows you to be more flexible in your DJ-ing. And finally, laptops are not so expensive anymore as they used to be some years ago.

Of course there are also disadvantages to DJ-ing with a laptop. The importing and labelling takes up a lot of time.⁴⁶ Also the normalization of sound volume is quite a job.⁴⁷ There are disadvantages to laptops in general. If you consider standardization and compatibility, you will find a lot of differences between several types of laptops. By the way, these are the same problems the PC experienced some years ago. What can be expected is that in coming years also the world of laptops will become more standardized and compatible.

⁴⁵ In this chapter I will use the term laptop and not notebook. In fact it is the same: a mobile computer, which works on a battery and / or an adaptor and which can do the same tasks as a PC.

⁴⁶ On internet you can find free ware file tagging programs.

⁴⁷ You can also choose to forget the normalization of sound levels and use the mixing console while DJ-ing a milonga.

If you consider using a laptop for DJ-ing, you should ask yourself some questions:

- Will I earn enough as a DJ to make it economically feasible?
- Am I a technical enough to DJ with a laptop?

And if you are already using a laptop for DJ-ing, the next questions might interest you:

- What type of audio files are best to use?
- How do I get the best sound possible?

7.2 Financial aspects

It is not economically feasible for every DJ to buy a laptop. If you don't DJ very often and don't need a computer for other purposes, it would be nonsensical to start laptop DJ-ing. On the other hand, if you already have a laptop, why shouldn't you use it for DJ-ing?

If you DJ regularly (at least once a month), it is likely that you will earn back your investment within a few years. By making a cost-benefit analysis you can make an estimate if it will be profitable for you. Laptop DJ-ing can be profitable if the benefits are greater than the costs. The benefits are what you get paid as you DJ and the costs are what you had/have to invest to be able to DJ with a laptop: buying a laptop and a DJ/music programme, travelling costs, music, etc.

Let me illustrate this with a simple example.

Example

Suppose you DJ every month for 4 hours and you get EUR 12,50 per hour. You buy a laptop for EUR 600,- and have EUR 10,- travel expenses every month. The other instruments you need (headphone, adaptor, cables, etc.) cost EUR 160,-. Every month you buy a CD (the rest you already bought or borrowed from friends) for EUR 10,-.

In the following tables I will show the factious financial process of this DJ enterprise.

Year 1: Starting a business			
Benefits		Costs	
DJ income	600,-	Laptop	600,-
		Travel	120,-
		Instruments	160,-
		CD's	120,-
Total	600,-	Total	1000,-

In the first year there is a loss of EUR 400,-. This loss is mainly caused by long term investments like the purchase of a laptop and instruments.

Year 2: Break even point			
Benefits		Costs	
DJ income	600,-	Travel	120,-
		CD's	120,-
Total	600,-	Total	240,-

The second year is more positive, you already earn EUR 360,-. In total you nearly reach your break even point.

At the beginning of your third year a milonga in another town invites you to come every month and DJ there. They pay you EUR 50,- per milonga and what is more they also pay travelling expenses.

Year 3: Making a profit			
Benefits		Costs	
DJ income	1200,-	Travel	120,-
		CD's	120,-
Total	1200,-	Total	240,-

In the third year you earn EUR 960,-. So totalling the first three years you earned EUR 2400,- and had 1480,- costs. Your profit is EUR 920,-, which is more than EUR 300,- per year.

Of course this example is a simple one. However, you can adapt this model to your own situation. For example, if you DJ more often than once a month and/or get paid better, you will start making a profit sooner. What I wanted was is to show you a way of thinking, which might help you when deciding on laptop DJ-ing or not.

7.3 Software

We (the authors Arnoud and Michiel) work with Megaseg, a DJ programme specially designed for Mac.⁴⁸ So it doesn't work on Windows operated machines. There is however a iTunes version for Windows and a variety of other music/DJ programmes for Windows, like Tractor.

It doesn't really matter what operating system you use (Mac or Windows). What does matter is whether a music/DJ programme does possess the facilities that you (as a DJ) need for doing your job. What facilities are needed for a DJ programme for tango DJ's? Just as a suggestion:

- Reliability: if a program crashes regularly, it will not make you happy and after some time nobody invites you anymore as a DJ.
- Structured: a program should be structured in a logical, user friendly manner.
- Computability: if your program has troubles interacting with other systems and or programs, you isolate yourself as a DJ.

DJ programmes usually have a lot of facilities which are hardly interesting for a tango DJ. Beat juggling and beat mixing are not necessary for tango DJ-ing, although you will never know what the

⁴⁸ For more info on Megaseg: www.megaseg.com. Megaseg works with iTunes.

neotango will bring us.⁴⁹ It is not impossible that the techniques which are now used in neotango will someday be used in underground neotango milongas. Maybe a Tango Tiësto will enter the charts in a few years!

In most programs you have an option to use a built in equalizer and to fix the chosen levels per song. Personally I like to work with an external mixer. Otherwise I would be absorbed by doing everything by laptop, which means that my contact with the dancers would be less intensive. This is a personal choice. The fixing of the levels per song is also an enormous job.

7.4 Audio files

Are you technical enough to become a laptop DJ? Well, I would be surprised if you weren't. Laptop DJ-ing allows you to make it as easy or complicated as you want. Before starting to DJ with a laptop, see that you are advised well. We will not discuss the technological aspects of tango DJ-ing in depth, because this is a subject which is changing fast.

7.4.1 Types of files

In digital audio there are numerous types of audio files, which has to do with different encoding systems.⁵⁰ Some of the most widely used types of audio files are: AAC, AIFF, Apple Lossless, MP3, MP4 and WAV.

- **AAC (Advanced Audio Coding)** sounds better than MP3 and is the default option of Apple iPod and iTunes. These music files

⁴⁹ Beatmixing is a form of mixing two subsequent songs, so that the beat of the first song fades into the beat of the second song. Beatjuggling is the manipulation of two or more music samples to create a new sample of music. Herefore the DJ can use two turntables and one or more mixers. Techniques which are often used in this process are the use of breaks, scratching, backspins and delays.

⁵⁰ Encoding refers to the process of transforming data from one format to another format. The opposite process is called decoding.

have a .m4a extension.⁵¹ The advantages of AAC to MP3 are numerous: more sampling frequencies, supports up to 48 channels, larger encoding efficiency and provides better sound above 16 kHz.

- **AIFF** (**A**udio **I**nterchange **F**ile **F**ormat) is a type of audio file often used for containing sound in PC's. It is based on IFF (which is often used in Amiga systems). AIFF is also used often in Apple Macintosh configurations.
- **Apple Lossless** (a.k.a. Apple Lossless encoder, ALE or Apple Lossless Audio Codec, ALAC) is an audio codec, which is develop by Apple and aims at the compression of music without any loss of quality.⁵² The compression can be up to 50% of the original file. The extension of an apple Lossless file is also .m4a.
- **MP3** (**M**PEG Audio Layer **3**) is probably the most widely known audio file, but not the best. In a few years it might become obsolete, since there are so many more codec's which give better sound quality. The extension is .mp3.
- **MP4** (**M**PEG-4 Part 14) is based on Apple's QuickTime container format. MP4 uses .mp4 as an extension, but this creates a lot of confusion, because the MPEG-4 container format can also contain audio and video streams. For this reason there are other extensions in use, like: audio only files: .mp4, audio books and pod casts: .m4b (or sometimes .m4a) and MP4 files with audio and video: .mp4 and .m4v, occasionally .mp4v
- **WAV or WAVE** (**W**aveform Audio Format) is the standard audio file format used by IBM and Microsoft. A WAV file has a maximum capacity of 4 GiB. The file extension is .wav.

⁵¹ If you want to know more about file extensions, try www.filext.com.

⁵² An (audio) codec is a software program, which encodes and decodes digital (audio) data according to a standardized procedure (algorithm). Codec is an abbreviation for **C**ompressor/**D**ecompressor, **C**oder/**D**ecoder, or **C**ompression **D**ecompression algorithm.

7.4.2 SPARS codes

Some CD's still carry the AAD, ADD or DDD code. These codes are called SPARS codes. SPARS is an abbreviation of Society of Professional Audio Recording Studios. This code will tell you what type of studio recorder (analog or digital), mixing recorder (analog or digital) and mastering (always digital) have been used.

The first letter of the SPARS code refers to the studio recorder, the second letter to the mixing recorder and the last letter to the mastering.

So:

- **AAD** stands for analog studio recorder, analog mixing / editing recorder and digital mastering
- **ADD** stands for analog studio recorder, digital mixing / editing recorder and digital mastering
- **DDD** stands for digital studio recorder, digital mixing / editing recorder and digital mastering

Nowadays you don't see the SPARS codes so often anymore, because this system has some great disadvantages. The SPARS code only refers to recorders and not to some other instruments used (like microphones) for recording music. Using the SPARS code as an indication for sound quality is therefore a bit risky, for there are just too many AAD recordings which have a better sound quality than DDD recordings.

7.5 Hardware

For DJ-ing with a laptop you will need some hardware, like a soundcard, cables, adaptor, headphone, etc.

7.5.1 Soundcards

A soundcard is an extension card, which enables a computer to produce (output) or store (input) a audio data. A soundcard (see photo below) contains two transformation facilities: a DA converter (which transforms a digital signal to an analogous signal (sound) and

a AD converter (which does the opposite). The AD process is also called sampling.

Furthermore does a soundcard contain a mixer which enables the sound volume regulation of the different sources (mike, MIDI, line, WAV).



The built in soundcard (audio interface) of some computers and laptops produces a mediocre sound quality. But fortunately you have a possibility of installing (or having installed) a better quality soundcard in your computer. It goes without saying that a good soundcard is essential for DJ's. Buy the best sound card there is, but keep in mind the price quality ratio. A very expensive sound card can produce a better sound, but is the surplus price you pay for it reasonable, if you compare it to the surplus sound quality it gives?

Always realise that the audio chain (see figure below) is only as strong as its weakest link. A super sound card in a audio chain with lousy speakers is a waste of money.

What may come in handy is a second (mobile) soundcard, which enables you (if your music/DJ program allows you) to preview the

music from your library before putting it into your play list. If you DJ according to a prepared play list, you don't need this function of course. But in our opinion somebody who calls himself a DJ does interact with his audience and does not work with scenarios prepared at home.

7.5.2 Cables, plugs and adaptors

In the next photo you see a audio cable. The audio cable is your connection between your laptop and the mixing console (or amplifier).



In combination with an audio cable it is advisable to have a pair of 1/4 inch jacks (see photo in chapter 6). I remember a DJ in Munich, who was very happy that I brought some!

Look out when you roll the cable that you don't cause a break in the cable.

On the field of electricity there is unfortunately not a worldwide standard. In different parts of the world there are several types of power points (plug sockets), plugs and electric currency. So if you are a travelling DJ, be sure to check what electricity system is used in the

country you go to. A good site to do so is Conrad H. McGregor's, where he discusses the lack of standardization on electrics: <http://users.pandora.be/worldstandards/electricity.htm>. Consulting this site may help you to avoid some nasty surprises.

7.5.3 Headphones

For a travelling DJ a compact headset will be very convenient. Headphones can be connected to an audio player (CD, amplifier, laptop, etc.) with a jack plug, which comes in two varieties: 1/4 inch plug and a 3.5 mm plug. On the photo below you see (from left to right): 2.5 mm mono, 3.5 mm (1/8") mono/stereo and a 6.3 mm (1/4") stereo jack plugs.

Photo: plugs



Headphones are regular health hazards. Listening too long for a too period to loud music through a headphone can and will lead to temporary or permanent loss of hearing. This is caused by the masking effect; that is that a user of a headphone will put the volume level up to mask the background noises, like public transportation, discos, large crowds, etc.. By getting used to higher sound volume, the pain sensations disappear.

7.6 Tips and tricks

Some tips and tricks we learned in practice:

- Make a regular back up on a rebootable hard disk (Firewire?).
- Bring some CD's (just to be sure), in case your laptop crashes.
- Customize your laptop. You can arrange it the way it works best for you. Do it! What works for you, doesn't have to be functional for another DJ.
- Most tango recordings are mono recordings. Stereo became available to the public in 1958. Recordings before 1958 (which include all tango recordings from la epoca de oro) are mono. These old tango recordings do not contain very much information; very high and very low frequencies are often absent or off low quality. For mono recordings a bit speed of 128 kbps is enough, for stereo recordings a bit rate of 192 kbps or (preferably) 256 kbps is advisable.
- Laptops can be transported very well. (As a matter of fact they were designed to be transported.) If you fly, take your laptop as hand luggage, because you will never know how that handle your suitcase. Another reason is that in the baggage compartments it can be very cold and you just don't know how these extreme changes in temperature will influence your laptops performance. Check the technical data of your laptop!

Also you should realise that a lot of small vibrations (rolling suitcases) can harm your hard disk.

- If you roll your cables in the same way over and over again, they will show some preformed loops, which can cause a break in your cable.
- Most music/DJ programs offer a lot of possibilities to add information to a song. In iTunes I use name of artist, song title, CD title, year, genre, composer and remarks. In iTunes you can choose which categories you want to use (Apple J for "weergeave" options). For example I use the remarks category to state whether a song is vocal or instrumental. But I could also decide to label a song as rhythmical, lyrical, energetic, melancholy. In the following section I will discuss the extra

categorization possibilities a music/DJ program offers you and which make DJ-ing easier.

- It is a hell of a job, but attaching tempos to songs (beats per minute or BPM's) is very helpful. There are programs you can use to count the BPM. If you work regularly with tandas with increasing temps, this is very helpful.

7.7 Categorization

A music/DJ program has an advantage: you can attach labels to it. When I started DJ-ing with a laptop, I found this the most difficult and time consuming part. I changed my categorising system a few times, before I discovered a system that works efficient *for me*.

I stored (part of) my music collection in iTunes. I divided my tango DJ-ing relevant music into 9 categories:

- 0 - Cortinas & soundbites
- 1 – Candombe
- 2 – Milonga
- 3 – Speciaal
- 4 – Tango
- 5 – Tango milonga
- 6 – 'Neofusion'
- 7 – Valse
- 8 – Tango nuevo

In iTunes you can choose from 36 categorising options (Apple J), which should be enough ☺.

I use the following options:

- Name (of song): *La Tormenta (@X)*
- Artist: *Canaro, Francisco*
- Time: *2:36*
- Album: *La Cumparsita*
- Genre: *4 – Tango*
- Year: *1938*
- Composer: *E. S. Discépolo*
- Remarks: *Vocal: ?*

This example needs some explanation:

- In the name category I use (@X); which means that this song contains special instruments or sound effects. I also use (@V) and (@M). This refers to special valse and milonga versions, which I don't categorise under 6 – Valse or 2 – Milonga.
- I categorise on surname, followed by Christian name. There are just too many Roberto, Juan and Francisco's to do it the opposite way. It would become too chaotic for me. For the same reason I deleted suffixes like *y su Orquesta Tipica* and the like. Information like this is usually incorporated into the album title.
- I think year is an important piece of information. Year can tell you something about the sound quality, but more important: a lot of orchestra evolve over the years. Canaro and Di Sarli are good examples of orchestras which did change their music enormously over the decades.
- In the remarks field I noted whether a song is instrumental or vocal (and if so: name of singer). Unfortunately a lot of tango CD's offer rather poor or incorrect liner notes.

This example and its explanation are meant as a inspiration for you to invent your own system, which works well for you. With some creativity you can build your own system. But do keep in mind that too many categories will confuse you, which will damage the functionality of your categorising system.

7.8 Troubleshooting

The technical part of laptop DJ-ing can cause you a lot of problems. On the internet there are some discussions going on about laptop DJ-ing and especially the problems in getting good sound. Some DJ's don't succeed in getting a good sound. And since you work with recordings at least half a century old, an even less sound quality is not something you want.

In the friends of el corte discussion (end of 2006) some problems came up. Michiel answered questions about internal sound problems.

7.8.1 Internal sound problems

Firstly, for intermitted playback on random spots: there is not enough RAM available for playback.⁵³ When you've got 256MB or less RAM in your rig; add more. 512MB RAM is in a lot of cases a kind of minimum for smooth use. When you've got that already; build a start-up version with nothing else than iTunes. With Windows XP a lot of installed programs are automatically loaded on start-up. This can clog your available RAM. To make it "rock-solid" run it lean & mean.

Secondly, for intermitted playback and weird noises that always connected to the same moment in the music: this can be caused by bad coded MP3. The solution is to re-import the songs preferable from original CD's. If you're going to re-import; consider this: MP3 is the most universal (easy exchange with others) but not the best quality. If you want to use MP3 try or the iTunes converter (not the best but already there easy & trustworthy) or LAME (better quality but more things to set up and slower).⁵⁴ OGG/FLAC/AAC are better quality but not everybody has standard playback for it (OGG/FLAC not on an iPod for example).⁵⁵

Finally, for hum & noises related to hard disk and/or mouse activity: this can be caused by a bad sound card or main board design. You could try the Griffin iMic USB soundcard or try to run on battery.

7.8.2 Ground loop

Another problem is when an audio system produces a low monitor buzz. This can indicate a ground loop. This can be fixed by a ground loop isolator.

⁵³ RAM means random access memory. This is a method of storing data, which enables integrated circuits to access data randomly. So every place in the external memory is as easily accessible as another.

⁵⁴ LAME is a MPEG-1 audio layer 3 (MP3) encoder. *LAME* is an acronym for *LAME Ain't an MP3 Encoder*.

⁵⁵ OGG is connected with Ogg Vorbis, which implies an open source-method of data compression (audio files), which is free of copyrights. FLAC means free lossless audio codec.

In electricity a **ground loop** refers to a electric current (which is generally not desired), in a conductor connecting two points that are supposed to be at the same potential (ground), but are actually at different potentials. Ground loops can harm a electrical system; in this case your audio equipment.⁵⁶

7.9 Conclusion and acknowledgements

Laptop DJ-ing has a lot of advantages but also some disadvantages. If you DJ regularly you will earn back your investment within a few years. On the other side it will cost you quite some time to import and label your music.

There are a lot of music/DJ programs with all kind of fancy options, which you don't need for tango DJ-ing. DJ-ing with a laptop does presume that you are not 100% a-technical.

As far as I know there is only one coherent story about tango DJ-ing with a laptop: Tipps für den Tango-Notebook-DJ, Teil I & II, which is written by Jonas Luell in 2005 (www.tangoinfo.ch).

Luell describes hardware (laptop, sound card, cabbles) and software (program and audio files). Also some DJ forums do touch on this subject. For the rest this story is based on conversations with other laptop tango DJ's and our common sense. For technical details I also consulted Wikipedia UK and www.epanorama.net.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ For more info on ground loops: www.epanorama.net.

⁵⁷ Wikipedia UK: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/> and Wikipedia NL: <http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/> For technical info only: de Free On-Line Dictionary Of Computing: <http://foldoc.org/>

8 Important tango orchestras

In this appendix we will list some tango orchestras that are 'involivable' and should be in every tango DJ's toolkit. These orchestra's are:

- **Alfredo de Angelis** made energetic and rhythmical music, which will always be appreciated by dancers. His music is multilayered, which makes it interesting for all levels of dancers. Recommended CD's: From Argentina to the world and Adios Marinero (EBCD).
- **Carlos Di Sarli** started his career with fast, rhythmical music but switched in 1944 to a slower, majestic type of music. Recommended CD's: Instrumentales volume 1 & 2 (Tango Argentino) and RCA Victor's 100 anos (BMG).
- **Juan D'Arienzo** lured dancers back to the dance floor at the end of the thirties, after tango in twenties and thirties had become more and more artistic than danceable (the decarean school of tango). Recommended CD's: Tango para el mundo & Sus primeros exitos volume 1 & 2 (Tango Argentino) and La Cumparsita (EBCD).
- **Anibal Troilo** made powerful and hard-to-resist-to-dance-to tango music with virtuoso melodies and harmonies. Most of his music is very good to dance to, but in the sixties he also made big bombastic music, which is hard to dance to. Recommended CD's: El inmortal "Pichuco" (EBCD), Anibal Troilo y sus cantores (RCA Victor 100 anos, BMG) and Instrumental 1941-1944 (Tango Argentino).
- **Oswaldo Pugliese** was a great musical innovator. With *Recuerdo* (1921) and *La Yumba* (1943) he surprised his audience and set an example for generations of musicians. His

music is big and powerful and invites dancers to dance "big". Sometimes Pugliese's music is too chaotic to dance to. Recommended CD's: From Argentina to the world, Ausencia (EMI), 15 grandes exitos (Blue Moon) and Recuerdo (EBCD).

- **Francisco Canaro's** career is probably one of the longest from tango's history (from ca 1916 to 1964), although there are more musicians who had very long careers (Pugliese, Piazzolla and Troilo). Canaro and Roberto Firpo were the icons of the guardia vieja. Canaro's music is very diverse because he was not averse from "eclectic borrowing" of other musicians inside and outside tango's territory. Recommended CD's: From Argentina to the world, Tangos inolvidables and Bailande tangos, vales y milongas (Reliquias).
- **Roberto Firpo**, the autodidactic piano player, arranger and bandleader often played in smaller ensembles. His style can be described as very rhythmical and energetic. Firpo introduced La Cumparsita to the world. The older Firpo's are in tango-milonga style, music from the thirties. His milongas are excellent for salons. Recommended CD's: Alma de Bohemio, Milonga Orilero (both EBCD), De la guardia vieja and Tangos y valsecitos volume 2 (both Reliquias).
- **Miguel Calo** (violin and bandoneon) played with the orchestra of Osvaldo Fresedo, before forming his own orquesta de las estrellas in 1940. His style is romantic. Calo had an ear for good musicians (Emilio Balcarce, Osvaldo Ruggiero, Osvaldo Manzi, etc.) and singers (Raul Iriarte, Raul Beron, Alberto Podesta, etc.). His orquesta de las estrellas (orchestra of the stars) hosted a lot of great musicians, who later formed their own equally famous orchestras. Recommended CD's: Miguel Caló Y Sus Cantores and Yo soy el tango (EBCD 34).

- **Ricardo Tanturi** (piano and violin) formed Los Indios in 1933, with whom he played in cinemas. From end thirties he led his own orchestra. Tanturi achieved great fame with the singers Alberto Castillo and Enrique Campos. Recommended CD: Una emocion (EBCD 81).
- **Rodolfo Biagi** (piano) is known for his rhythmic music and the notes he doesn't play. His style is easily recognized. Before forming his own orchestra, he played with D'Arienzo, where he was instrumental in the the orchestra's change to super rhythmic and energetic music in 1935. Recommended CD's: all his Reliquias CD's.
- **Angel D'Agostino** (piano and singer) became famous because of his cooperation with Angel Vargas. D'Agostino's music is calm and powerfully elegant. Recommended CD: RCA Victor 100 Años.
- And there are many more: Quinteto Piricho (Canaro), Enrique Rodriquez, Lucio Demare, Domingo Federico, Miguel Villasboas, Horacio Salgan, Juan Maglio, Pedro Maffia, Francini & Pontier, Alberto Castillo, Francisco Lomuto, Florindo Sassone, Osmar Maderna, Adolfo Carabelli, Orquesta Tipica Victor, Los Tubatango and countless other musicians, singers and orchestras

9 Copyright & DJ-ing

9.1 Introduction

What about copyright on music?⁵⁸ Do you have to pay if you DJ somewhere? Do you have to pay if you have a dance school? And what happens if you don't pay dues when you should have done so? These are important questions, cause they can have a great financial impact.

In most cases a DJ is asked to DJ by other parties. These other parties can include dance schools, milonga organizers, festival bureaus, restaurants, pubs, etc. In the Netherlands the other parties are the ones who should pay copyrights to BUMA STENRA. As long as you don't have an exclusive relation with one of the other parties mentioned, a DJ doesn't have to pay copyrights.

On BUMA STENRA's website (Dutch copyright organization) you will find the prices for using music. These prices can vary, dependant on who is the organising party. For pubs and restaurants there are different prices compared to parties who organise an event. The price can be downloaded via the BUMA STENRA site (brochures: *Muziek gebruiken in de horeca en Opgaveformulier evenementen*).

When I contacted the BUMA STENRA in 2004 (Jury Brantenaar) I was told that a DJ only is responsible for the paying of the copyright dues when he is an organiser of an event. Not paying a due can imply a substantial fine.

Some situations are free of copyright:

- private use for party
- if the composer has been dead for 70 years or more

⁵⁸ In this appendix I will discuss the consequences of copyrights for tango DJ's in the Netherlands only. However if you have information on copyrights on music in relation to DJ-ing in other countries, please send it to me: a.degraaff@hetnet.nl

9.2 More info

Every country has its own copyright regulations. For a list of copyright regulation per country, check out Wikipedia UK, using the search word “copyright”.

If you want to know more about copyrights, we refer to the following websites:

- www.biem.org
Bureau International des Sociétés gérant les Droits d'Enregistrement et de Reproduction Mécanique
- www.bumastemra.nl
Dutch copyrights organisation
- www.cisac.org
Confédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Auteurs et Compositeurs
- www.emo.org
European Music Office
- www.gema.de
German Copyrights organisation
- www.gesac.org
Groupement Européen des Sociétés d'Auteurs et Compositeurs

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