

# tango noticias

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INTERVIEW WITH  
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GUSTAVO AND GISELLE  
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# teachers of teachers :

Interview with Gustavo Naveira & Giselle Anne:

BY LYDIA ESSARY | EDITING AND TRANSLATION BY LYDIA ESSARY

GUSTAVO NAVEIRA AND GISELLE ANNE SPEAK TO TANGO NOTICIAS. THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY LYDIA ESSARY. EDITING AND TRANSLATION BY LYDIA ESSARY. PHOTOS BY LYDIA ESSARY AND CARLOS VIZZOTTO.

**F**or those who visit Buenos Aires looking for great classes attended by experienced dancers, there is a place where they are sure to find the most selected clientele in BA. In Naveira's classes, many of the attendees are the "cream of the cream" instructors in Buenos Aires: the local teachers of advanced classes and/or performers looking for an opportunity to master a particular skill. Gustavo Naveira and Giselle Anne teach workshops and seminars at La Manufactura Papelera, a place with tango character in the heart of San Telmo. The atmosphere here is friendly but disciplined. People meet and relax a little before the intense two and a half hour class at a bar on the ground floor. It is best to attend with a partner, though advanced dancers occasionally attend individually and may be able to spot somebody at their level. Gustavo & Giselle spoke to Lydia Essary (on behalf of TN) after one of their Saturday night classes.

**Lydia Essary: Was your goal as an artist geared to be a performer or an instructor? Do you think you have met your objectives?**

**Gustavo Naveira:** My goal as an artist was not so clearly defined as to separate it to be an artist or an instructor. My goal was to discover the tango. To understand it, dance it well and enjoy it. I consider I have met that particular objective. I am satisfied with what I have accomplished so far. I think there is much more to do in tango and I am happy I feel that way: like if I had just started instead of finishing. If I say, "I met my objective", it sounds like I am done. (Lydia laughs...). That is not my case.

**LE: Did you have formal dance training prior to dancing tango?**

**GN:** Prior to tango no. While dancing tango, yes. In other words, tango was the first dance I tried. Later, while dancing tango, I studied Argentine folklore and classical dance. I also tried some modern dance and Spanish dance. More or less, you could say I have a peripheral view of the world of dance.

**LE: I see, you started with tango. Any family influences or how come you found tango?**

**GN:** When I was young, it did not occur to me I would be dancing tango, much less professionally. But tango had a large presence in my family. Just about everybody, dad, grandpa, my uncles, mom, all my aunts, danced a little tango as amateurs. They were all familiar with the music, composers and the lyrics. There was a close connection with tango and thus I was very familiar with it since I was very young.

**LE: At what age did you start dancing?**

**GN:** Dancing seriously, since age 20. But I know tango from birth.

**LE: Did you also study music?**

**GN:** Yes. It was my initial idea, to become a musician. I studied music at the conservatory, much earlier than dancing. I studied guitar and music at the municipal conservatory. Although I played the guitar from a young age.

**LE: Was the guitar your primary instrument at the conservatory?**

**GN:** Yes.

**LE: How long did you study there?**

**GN:** Not long, about 3 years. But I played the guitar since I was 7 years old without interruptions until I was 20. In the last years, I attended the conservatory to have a more formal/classical training. Prior to that, I had mainly private classes.

**LE: Do you think your musical training has helped your development as a dancer?**

**GN:** Yes, yes. It helped a lot, especially in the last years when we have focused on the musical aspect of the dance. We were interested in studying the link of the dance to the music. So, having a musical background has definitely helped.

**LE: This is for Giselle Anne. I heard you spent some time in Spain.**

**Was part of your training in Spain? Could you give us a brief history of your dance education?**

**Giselle Anne:** All my training as a dancer was in Buenos Aires. I traveled with an Argentine tango group, and stayed a few years in Spain and France. But I was already working professionally. In Seville, I started some tango instruction, as there was nothing there. Later, I started some tango activities in Paris.

**LE: Was your education classical dance, contemporary, or...?**

**GA:** Classical dance. I completed the entire curriculum to become a dance teacher here in Buenos Aires. I earned the title of professor of classical dance. We do contemporary dance within the classical dance core curriculum.

**GN:** She is a certified classical dance professor in Argentina.

**LE: Excellent! How did you find tango?**

**GA:** It was fortuitous, because when I started, there was not much... Maybe I found it through the folklore, because at that time I was dancing with a folklore ballet.



**LE: Do you miss your classical dance?**

**GN:** No, not anymore.

**LE (laughs): This is for Gustavo. At what point in your career did you find Giselle; how did it happen? I don't mean to enter your personal life, just the professional aspect.**

**GN:** Well, they are linked. Our personal relationship happened based on a professional encounter. Originally, we were hired separately to teach at a dance festival. But the organizer of this festival, asked in a special request, if we could dance together.

**GA:** All this was possible because Gustavo was traveling and teaching by himself, and so was I. Thus, as we did not have formal

partners, there was the possibility that we try dancing together at that festival.

**LE: Did the organizer have an idea how it was going to turn out?**

**GN & GA:** no, no

**GN:** It was crazy...

**LE: It was an innocent request...**

**GN:** And a little a crazy request. Professionally it was crazy, because it is very difficult that two people who don't know each other, from day to night could come up with a presentation and choreography at a professional level. But we did it; we assembled a presentation in 3 days.

**LE: Where was this presentation?**

**GN:** In Barcelona. It was a success, we danced great and felt comfortable with each other.

**LE: So, thanks to a casual request, you found each other.**

**GN:** Sure.

**LE: What year was it?**

**GN:** Mmm...1995

**LE: So you are dancing together since then...**

**GN:** No, we danced together at that festival. We met again at the same festival the following year, but did not see each other all that year. We worked together and again had a great professional experience. Our personal relationship did not start until 1998. So, there was a time when we mainly worked professionally, more frequently due to our affinity in the dance.

**LE: It is a general thought that one of your talents is the capacity to analyze the dance and to dissect it to the smallest (almost molecular) structure. Are you in agreement with this thought from your own students? Is this type of analysis deliberate, when you practice?**

**GN:** Yes, yes... It is a very accurate description of our way to face tango when we dance. It was always that way, we both use this approach, even before we met. When we started dancing together, we realized that we needed a more intellectual or academic scheme for this dance. We had not seen such an approach before.

**LE: You both travel a lot through tango. Can you tell us how you find tango in general in the world? What is the status: does it need improvement? Is it different in every place? Is there an integrity?**

**GN:** I think there is an integrity. I think the process is similar everywhere including Buenos Aires. There are many new people dancing tango for diverse reasons. Tango is many times a solution to problems pertinent to modern life and, it

is really appealing to most people. Thus, tango is growing, there are expanding communities in most cities in the world, most with similar traits and styles, which is good and is giving signs for a good future. It seems like there is a good understanding of the tango dance in general.

**LE: During our trips, have you seen influences of other dances in tango, for instance from ballroom?**

**GN:** It is common to see that the groups do not mix. That means that for those who dance ballroom and begin to dance tango, either they stay with ballroom and do not dance tango anymore, or switch to tango and no longer dance ballroom. In other words, the groups do not blend or mix. The same happens with salsa, the groups do not mix. I do not find that the tango dance has any influence from any other dance.

**GN:** The subject of 'tango nuevo' is something....it is a name that some people have started to use to identify something that is thought to be a new style. I don't agree with that concept. I never called what I do 'tango nuevo' and do not intend to call it that because I think it is wrong, but I can't argue or prevent others from calling it by that name. I just have a different opinion. I think what has happened is that tango has evolved and logically there are a number of new aspects that enrich the dance, that were previously not known. There is a more elaborate choreography that makes the dance look a little different, obviously, because of complexity and detailed, broader, dense. This does not mean that there is a nuevo tango; that's an illusion. I think what it is there is a better tango. Tango has evolved and today we



**GA:** So, it is not a nuevo tango, we want to analyze what we already have.

**LE: Do you think this is still an ongoing process?**

**GN:** It is an ongoing process of change and will continue to change..

**LE: Do you think it is important that the students learn to develop some expression skills in addition to technical skills?**

**GN:** Within the genre there are people who are perfect and do everything just right.

**GA:** They could also master their technical skills.

**GN:** Now more than ever, there is a technical knowledge not seen before. In early years, everything was left to intuition and the individual natural capacity without any other guides or control. Today, everything can be done with more precision. It is possible to achieve a higher technical level.

**LE: Do you think that a tango instructor needs certain training? Has anybody thought about a system or process for the certification of tango instructors?**

**GN:** Many have thought of that. But there is nothing set to date. Many have thought of the importance of certifying the instructors, but nobody has been able to do it because there is not an official institution with the authority to sponsor such certification.

“I think there is much more to do in tango and I am happy I feel that way like if I had just started instead of finishing.”

**LE: It is a general observation that in many classes there is a tendency to teach tango using sequences or patterns.**

**GN:** That happens in many dances, not only in tango. There are people who learn two, three, five sequences and immediately start teaching. This is not something bad. It has a positive side because these people function in some way as “diffusers” of tango or any other dance and attract more people. Thus, it is a benefit. Later on, the students learn to recognize quality and will decide what to do and choose their future classes.

**LE: Some people have named you “the father of Nuevo Tango”, what are your thoughts?**

are seeing the results of such evolution. I don't think it is very wise to try to “box” every style and put it in separate “boxes” or categories. I don't think it happens that way.

**LE: Is there a tendency to make it more structured?**

**GA:** A tendency to organize it, because there was no organization before.

**GN:** I think it is not exactly a tendency to structure it. Because if I say that the dance is becoming more structured there could be a thought that we are seeking a standard sequence, and that is not what we are looking to do. We are aiming at understanding the elements that form the dance. We want to understand how the elements coordinate to make it work.



**LE: What is needed to have such an institution?**

**GN:** The thoughts need to evolve until we have a clearer vision of what would be the required elements to deem somebody worthy of certification. I don't think those elements or basic requirements have been outlined. Well, we know who teaches well, but there is not something defined of what would be required to certify somebody. It is a process that may take years to mature and to gain importance and attention. In the meantime, there may be some certificates issued somewhere, but nothing official.

**LE: It seems like from what you are telling us that there is not an immediate need for an instructor certification**

**GN:** I don't think there is an immediate need. Tango is providing for itself and continues to grow.

**LE: What is unique about this class at La Papelera is that some of the students are teachers at other places....**

**GN:** The majority of them...

**LE: Some call you teacher of teachers and your classes are recommended for advanced students. How do you define an advanced student?**

**GN:** Well, there are a number of technical skills that must be there. Also, there must be an understanding of how basic elements are intertwined to make the dance happen. And there must also be experience. When all these items get combined and work, then you have an advanced student, in general.

**LE: Do you keep in touch with the rest of the cast of the Tango Lesson?**

**GN:** Well, not exactly but not detached either. We are all working our careers the best way we can. Salas has an infinity of

commitments worldwide. Now and then we see each other somewhere. We are no longer working together though...

**LE: How come you ended up working together?**

**GN:** At the time Sally (Potter) started preparing the production for the movie, Fabian (Salas) and I worked together. Later, we recommended Sally to look for Pablo (Veron). That is how we formed the group just for the movie. Later, Pablo took off his own way. Fabian and I decided to work separately; I decided to leave the company, and, well, every body found their own way. The project for the movie originated there, from the work that Fabian and I did together and our relationship with Sally.

**LE: Where was Veron ?**

**GN:** Veron was in Europe

**LE: What do you consider is your strength, for both of you? What is the formula responsible for your success as performers and instructors?**

**GN:** It would be good to ask people if we are really that good. From here, I can tell you that there are a number of things that have improved with time and experience. We worked hard on many aspects of our dance. I've been dancing tango for 27 years. Thus, you can see that in that length of time we have reevaluated 100 things 100 times. We obviously got some results and logically we now have a stronger technique, better rhythm and many improvements. I suspect all these are visible to other people and it explains the response we get from them. I am not sure which is that principal element that characterized our dance and determines if what we are doing is good or not. I think it is more a combination of elements.

**LE: It seems like your work and tour schedules are really tight. Are you managing your own schedules?**

**GN:** We have not been able to delegate the assembling of our schedule to someone else. The dealings with people and organizers are something personal to some level, that it is very difficult, at least for now, to have a manager. Maybe later, when our schedule takes more volume and gets out of hand. We are the managers for now.

**LE: Giselle Anne and Gustavo, thank you for your time, dedication and the opportunity for this interview for Tango Noticias. It has been a pleasure. Before we close, any new developments?**

**GN:** Yes, we are writing a book. It is a big project, and time-consuming, it is going to take us....

**LE: Is it a didactic book?**

**GN:** It is a book about the technique of the tango dance. Not about teaching. And it will be combined with an image. The idea of the DVD is a future project.

**LE: Is the book for advanced levels?**

**GN:** It is for everyone, but those who know nothing, will have to work a little more. ■

For additional information or questions about this interview contact the author, Lydia Essary, at [essary@creativetango.com](mailto:essary@creativetango.com) or visit her website

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tango  
is  
my

# Shadow

the magic of tango  
eventually envelops everyone

A spectacular  
show about a Russian  
newspaperman bored with  
his routine and wishing for  
more when he is assigned to  
the captivating city of Buenos  
Aires. It is told through the  
electrifying music of the Alma  
de Tango Ensemble led by Gerardo  
Perez, Bandoneonista from Uruguay,  
and eight dazzling and sensual tango dancers.

Once you meet tango and its mesmerizing  
music, you too will say, "Tango is My Shadow".



GERARDO PEREZ

**TIME:**  
Show takes place July 9th  
and 10th, 2008 at 7:30 PM.

**LOCATION:**  
Harper College, 1200 West  
Algonquin Road Palatine, Illinois.

**TICKETS:**  
Price: \$25.00. To purchase  
call Harper College Box Office  
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