



More Than Two Can Tango

Museum curator brings new dances and entertainment to community

By Jeanie Senior

It's after 6 p.m. on the last Saturday of the month, and the strains of tango music rise from the education center at the south end of the Mary and Bruce Stevenson wing at Maryhill Museum.

Welcome to Tango Night, a popular monthly event that started in March and continues through October. It has been drawing tango aficionados from as far away as Seattle, Yakima, the Tri-Cities and Idaho—as well as local folks from Klickitat, Sherman, Wasco and Hood River counties.

Museum members pay \$5 a session. Nonmembers pay \$10. The fee pays for an instructor for the hour-long lesson, followed by a break for wine, cheese, crackers and a sweet. Ending the evening is the

milonga—a two-hour tango dance party.

The tango venue at Maryhill boasts wide windows that overlook the Columbia River.

“The view is just spectacular,” says Lou Palermo, the force behind tango at Maryhill. “Close your eyes, you’re in the music, and the rest of the world disappears.”

Lou, the museum’s curator of education, has worked there since May 2016. Raised in upstate New York, she has been on staff at museums in Los Angeles, Houston, Cleveland and Little Rock, Arkansas.

Lou, a former flight attendant, enjoys travel. She says she also loves to dance, especially tango. She calls tango a journey, not a destination.

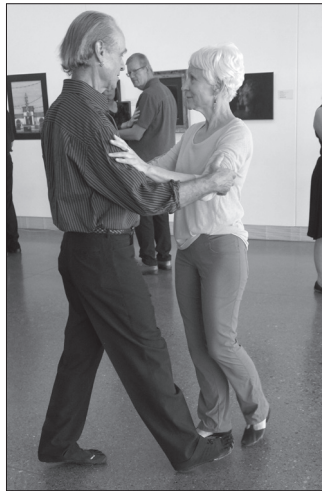
She spent a month in Venice a few years ago.

“I would just jump on the train and go to Padua,” Lou says. “There was tango there and in Venice. There was tango everywhere. It’s around the world. Such an amazing dance.”

Although tango originated in the 1880s along the River Plata, which forms the border between Argentina and Uruguay, its popularity rapidly spread outside South America.

There is a difference, Lou says, between the version with exaggerated movements, which she calls show tango, and what people will see at Maryhill, which involves small, graceful moves.

“When you’re a beginning tango person, don’t come in with the expectation you’re going to be dancing with the stars,” Lou says. “That’s a show. Come to have a wonderful social experience to music.”



Clockwise from above, Lou Palermo, Maryhill Museum curator of education, looks on as dancers enjoy Tango Night. Instructors Jay Rabe and Megan Pingree demonstrate movements. Lou readies wine and soft drinks for the milonga—a two-hour dance party. Dancers stay after the hour-long lesson to practice and socialize.

Lou says participants build on each lesson.

“One of the beauties of tango is that you are in sync,” says Jay Rabe of The Dalles, who joined Megan Pingree in teaching and demonstrating moves at the July session.

Part of Jay’s lesson was to help dancers get comfortable with the tango practice that assigns one partner to be leader, the other follower.

Lou calls Megan an amazing, brilliant dancer and an excellent teacher.

Megan has been dancing tango for more than two decades. She describes the difference between open and close—or heart-to-heart—embrace.

She nods when a man asks, “If I try it close and it isn’t working, is it OK to back off?”

Megan says dancers can have a

nonverbal negotiation between open or close embrace. Cultural aspects, she cautions, can influence people’s comfort with the close embrace and may take some getting used to.

“There’s a profound connection with a dancing partner when it’s heart-to-heart, and the man leads the tango with his chest,” Lou says.

The number of dancers at the tango sessions has ranged from 30 to 45. There is a vibrant dance community in the Gorge, as the website gorge-dance.com points out, with its crowded monthly calendar of events. The community includes a sizable group of tango enthusiasts.

Sheila Dooley says it is nice not having to go all the way to Portland for tango sessions. She has been coming to Maryhill with her husband, Phil Swaim.

The couple lives in Mosier, and Sheila says it has been fun to dance at the museum.

Maryhill’s last Tango Night for 2017 begins at 6 p.m. Saturday, October 28.

“That’s our big fancy dress-up night,” says Lou.

Some people wear tango dress at the monthly events, and several men and women wear dancing shoes. Thin leather soles are preferred, and women’s shoes often feature high heels on silver or gold leather. Vintage shoes are highly favored.

“When you listen to big band music, your feet start tapping,” Lou says, trying to explain the magic of tango. “With salsa music, your body starts to shake. Listen to tango, take a deep breath and close your eyes and melt into the music. It’s like nothing you’ve ever experienced.” ■