

It takes two to tango

From the moment she set foot on the dance floor, Dr Kylie Clifford of the Adelaide Animal Hospital, SA, has had a love affair with Argentine tango



“Buenos Aires is the mecca of Argentine tango and I’ve been there five times. It’s amazing, like a cross between a crumbling Paris but with a Latin flavour.

“The first time I visited I’d only had 10 tango lessons but was determined to dance. As one of my friends pointed out, I had delusions of adequacy. The social dance is called a Milonga and the one we chose was so crowded, there wasn’t much room to move. This worked out well for me as the basics I had learnt was enough to let me muddle through.

“About 14 years ago, I was living in country Victoria and attended my first Argentine tango lesson. I was hooked from that very first class.

“When dancing the tango, there’s a leader and follower. The leader proposes a move and direction, and the follower moves into that space. It’s a completely improvised dance—when I’m dancing, I don’t know from second to second what I am going to do next.

“When attending a tango social event, you will dance with complete strangers. No-one comes up and asks you—it’s all done with eye contact. This was developed in 19th-century Buenos Aires when image and ego were everything. Someone might catch my eye and nod their head towards the dance floor. If I look away and refuse to dance, no-one except for that person and myself know what has passed between us.

“At present I teach tango one night a week, go to a class one night a week, and dance at socials up to four times a month. I’ve been dancing for 14 years and my passion isn’t going to go away.

“I also travel a lot and there’s tango all over the world. It’s great to walk into a room where I don’t speak the language but I know the rules and I know how it’s going to work. So far I have tangoed on five continents, and there will be many more tango journeys in the future.” ➤

• Kylie teaches at Southern Cross Tango, www.southerncrosstango.com.au