

BOOKS



Tango Nuevo

By Carolyn Merritt. University Press of Florida. 2012. 272 pages. \$24.95.

Not only is Carolyn Merritt a dynamic hybrid—American-born anthropologist, writer, and dancer—but so is her fascinating *Tango Nuevo*, part memoir, part academic study of the culture of Argentina's signature social dance.

Merritt draws us into her adventures in Buenos Aires, where she learned the moves and absorbed the conventions of the *milongas* (traditional) and *prácticas* (less formal venues) and interviewed numerous tango professionals. Here each dancer may choose to maintain rigid gender norms or negotiate a fluid yin/yang of expression. There is even a flourishing “queer tango” scene.



In her attempt to pin down the emerging term *tango nuevo*—innovative, physically demanding, sometimes edgy approaches that separate “the kids” from the old guard—Merritt discovered that many *tangueros* reject this marketing label. From its earliest manifestations, they argue, tango has been the very spirit of evolution.

Merritt discusses the rise and fall and triumphant rebound of this seductive dance, from its origins in the slums and bordellos of multi-ethnic Buenos Aires to its decline under the dictator Juan Perón. At times, her analytical discourse can be dense. Readers may flee to YouTube for a more immediate, visual connection to the matter at hand. Even so, we owe thanks to Merritt for sparking curiosity about the world of tango that may yet become a love affair.

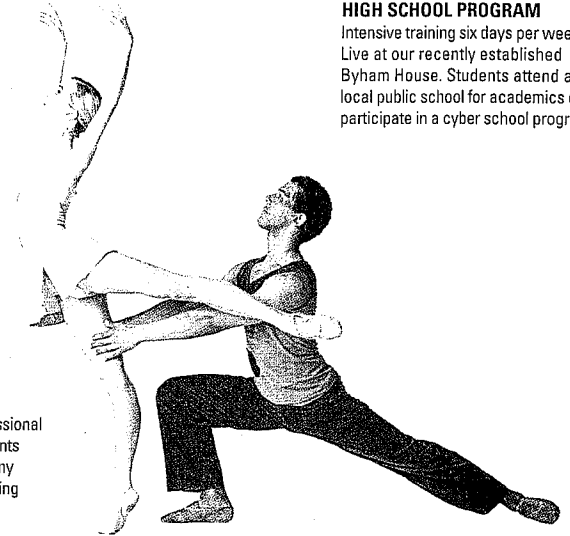
—Eva Yaa Asantewaa

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