



PABLO VERON

Reclaiming the roots

Though he is one of the most talented, versatile and creative dancers that tango has had in the last two decades, his name is not as familiar as others. An early move to France, at the beginning of the 90's, explains it to a great extent. But Pablo Verón, the young tap-dance prodigy, the dancer of eclectic formation, the teaching guru, the movie and theater choreographer is back in his native Buenos Aires.

Interview by *Carlos Bevilacqua*
Exclusive for *El Tangauta*
Photos: Courtesy *Pablo Verón*

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Why did you move to Europe?

Because I fell in love with a Portuguese dancer. Anyways, since I was very young I knew that I was going to live outside of the country. When my parents sent me to study to New York I liked it a lot, but when I was with Tango Argentino in Paris I saw that

that city was still more interesting because of its openness to other cultures. Unknown ties bound me to it.

Things did not go badly for you. Why did you come back?

On the contrary, I did very well, but a year and a half ago I re-settled in Buenos Aires, on the one hand, to recover the connection with some loved ones and with my country and also because I needed a better space. Today in France there is a lot of economic, political, and social tension and that affects daily life. For me there are more space and freedom here than there.

Along your career you changed dance partners a lot. Was it a conscious decision or just the way things happened?

It happened that way. Having or not having a regular partner has pros and cons. One must evaluate where one is physically and mentally in each period. At the beginning, dancing quite a bit with Carolina (Iotti) was fundamental for me to gain confidence in myself and with the language of tango. I have had partners for years. Lately, I changed according to the project.

What was your objective when you put together the video clip Nexus? [\(See box\)](#)

It was like an exercise, done for the mere pleasure of choreographing my own music. It was also a way of showing where my interests lie now. I was satisfied because I put it together in a month. I just wanted to do a dance video clip and explore how tango can have a dialog with other dances at the same level, removing it from its isolated environment yet maintaining its interest as a dance and in a way amplifying it.

Both in music as in dancing, it seems that there are many people mixing. Is fusion fashionable?

Yes, fusion is fashionable and it is necessary to open perspectives, but I mix while having tango very well established. I danced other dances and I chose tango because it called to me and prevailed in me as a priority. I also researched other dances deeply: in the United States tap and hip-hop (a word that in reality names a cultural movement that contains many styles of dance), in Cuba the Cuban dances, and here contemporary dance at the San Martin Theater and modern jazz, in addition to martial arts. To that one must add my education at the National School of Dances.

But tango is my root and I was always concerned about grasping its essence. In my years of learning I went to many clubs, dances and practicas in an almost archaeological search, it was so methodical. I went to places like Sin Rumbo (my favorite), Pinocho, Estudiantes del Norte and others that no longer exist. I learned a lot from Miguel Balmaceda, Antonio Todaro, Pepito Avellaneda, Petróleo, who used to come to my house, and many whose names I can't recall. At the same time, working chiefly with Virulazo, but also with Gloria and Eduardo and with Juan Carlos Copes in Tango Argentino, gave me a lot of valuable information for my main goal, authentic tango on a stage, with roots and at the same time scenic.

I believe that it is better to make mixes when one knows what is mixing. Today they put all sorts of things on poor tango, without learning salsa they add arms to it and without learning tap they do tapping that leave women staring without knowing what to do. Trying to find something new, they fall into something superficial, easy and a little autistic, because they teach to think the dance and not to feel it. Thought is too slow for



the state that one must have to dance. Those absent attitudes of "I am thinking about something important" while they look at their feet or of "I am relaxed" if you don't know what you are doing, are a pose and a deficiency. You can check it by asking good female dancers who get bored when led in that way. It is sad to see young men engrossed contemplating themselves while they miss enjoying the beauties they have in front of them.

Are you speaking of what is called "tango nuevo"?

Speaking of tango nuevo as a dance is difficult because the name proposes a division with the past and that is very debatable, relative and deceitful. It is the definition of the music of Piazzolla and to copy the name, as if that was enough to be equivalent and thus to be different, does not seem correct. It is as if they want you to believe that they invented tango. In that case: What was danced before? Tango is tango and has always been transforming itself since its origins and if each renewal was a new tango, today we would have many new tangos. Tango was made by all of us dancers of all generations who contributed something, and this has been happening for more than 100 years! They thought that tango was no man's land and they planted the "nuevo" flag but what is new is not inevitably better than the old and I do not believe that you can go far if you start by denying or opposing the past. I recognize in what is called tango nuevo the merit of asking for the reasons, of trying to explain the way movements work and to associate the material in a different way, but it is still in diapers and generates quite a bit of confusion. Although it fills a need of the market, because it is thought as a commercial maneuver, it lacks solid bases to be called a "methodology".

The fact is that those who believe that they dance "nuevo" are mostly using the same old elements. The movements already existed, it is a shame that they do not say so: turns, ganchos, boleos, sacadas of the man and of the woman to all sides, changes of direction, arrastres (dragging), paradadas (stops), corridas, leaps, crossed steps, etc. The other day they told me that there are people who believe that turns were invented by one of the "prophets" of today. Petr leo invented turns over 50 years ago!

What is truly new is the increasingly more massive commerce around tango at various levels. The dance has been renewing itself for a very long time thanks to many people and this process accelerated in recent years because it has become a very interesting way of making a living.

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Don't you think that tango nuevo generates new dynamics?

The proposal of challenging the axis is interesting, but it so happens that for every three steps they take, two are out of axis and this becomes a parasite of the whole dance, from the very first classes. These patterns are repeated permanently, given that they are idealized because they are "fashionable" and from this results a predictable,

monotonous and stereotyped dance. They dance as if they were doing it to the beat of a metronome and not of a great orchestra! Thus the dance of the man loses dynamics, presence and what I call dance: moving dynamically, walking, turning, true velocity, varied complexity. What the dancer should work on should be stimulated, and I do it: the axis, why to take care of it and how to use it, identifying a good posture, deep connection with the woman, different ways to embrace, quality of the movement, where is he coming from and how to express that.

I have to say this: this generating of absurd fashions, the "star system", the VIP wave, the disinformation of history for one's own benefit, of those ones who proclaim themselves inventors of figures or movements that are a collective heritage, are deplorable phenomena. The people I learned from were more exacting and less ambitious. They were not "fast food". Some "geniuses" when they do their exhibitions are also "fast food" and they dance like professors, because they learnt like professors, they learnt absolute truths and therefore you see them static. They do not dance to be unique artists, they dance so that the student feels that he can also do it and the underlying message is "I teach you this little trick, you come, pay me and you are in".

For me the last great couple was that of Roberto Herrera with Vanina Bilous. They proposed something exceptional, inimitable and super esthetic. For now, the "nuevo" esthetics are poor and superficial and many professionals of the dance, whose way of seeing things is not conditioned and who are not into the "fad" prefer Gloria and Eduardo, for example, any time. Of course there are people who dance well, but you can see general confusion and mediocrity, a lot of people dancing alike, as if cloned. Today the idea is to dance like someone else and before it was exactly the opposite, it was prohibited. It does not get to your heart, it is as if it does not have a soul, it seems like a fashion show.

Perhaps I am a pessimist, although there are many people who think the same, if we continue in this path soon there will not be tango dancers.

But that standardization, is it a product of tango nuevo or of this system of transmission which is more academic than that of the golden era?

Tango nuevo for now gives me the impression that it is that: a pretense of academic transmission that enables to teach people and give them the sense of security of having the total truth. To produce teachers that in turn will create other teachers and, therefore, increase the public more and more. But it is clearly seen that it does not produce better dancers. Before there were more personal styles because there was less commerce, less manipulation. There was a more intuitive system of transmission, more direct and honest. Today they play with people's ignorance. I hope that the dance of the past will be studied more to rescue dynamics that are sort of hidden, to revisit them and from there to take off with a good base. If it were researched, they would see how those who today call themselves inventors of this or that, copied a lot from teachers that are no longer with us. If I sought personal recognition I would also be able to say that I am the inventor of tango nuevo.

Why?

In fact, it is what people think around the world, which is where I work. The Tango Lesson was the first vision of a modern, different tango, the one that marked and inspired change, and I was the choreographer of that movie, it is my dance! There are

11 or 12 dances, 9 of which are my numbers and for it I received the American Choreography Award, the main prize for choreography in the United States and SADAIC's prize for making the national repertoire known abroad. But I never felt the creator of this fashion or tried to say that, to blow my own horn and to be "someone". I began in the very authentic environment of tango, the milongueros opened their arms to me and from them I learnt. Later I followed my need to transform what I had learnt, I grew and here I am. I am a perpetuator of a current that comes from long ago, tango. And I am a creator.

What weight had that movie in the resurgence of the tango during the 90's?

Even today I continue to receive mails from all over the world from people who thank me for the inspiration they received from seeing my dance in that movie. In Europe, United States and Asia thousands of people began to dance tango after they saw it. They continue to show it regularly on TV in various countries in spite of the fact that it is not for massive consumption, because it is a signature movie, black and white and with a particular sensibility. It is the only movie that shows an authentic face of tango, far from the habitual commercial stereotype.

Why do you teach?

Because giving classes you teach and you learn. You learn because each person is different and is a constant elaboration that enriches you a lot, a very direct contact. I give guidelines of movement allowing for the students to explore and then discover things by themselves. What I propose is more neuter, it does not adhere to a tendency. At times I work on speed, energy and true risk; other times on connection, balance, subtleties. I also give some anatomical data, how to make good use of arms and legs, where the impulse is born. Always at some point I give enough information on possible sequences.

That does not sound so different from what is learnt in Villa Malcolm, a paradigmatic place of what is called tango nuevo.

I do not know what happens in Villa Malcolm, I was there only a couple of times. The issue is also who, what and how they show you. They can speak to you of very convincing concepts and universal truths but if the sequences are useless because they are inapplicable or not very practical and taught only because they go well with the explanation, if the one that shows you does not know how to dance or does not have true interest, or uses the situation to do his own show or treats students as if they were in kindergarten, people get confused. Students arrive to me saying that they are told that in 4 classes and with 4 steps they can dance tango, which is the most complex, deep and paradigmatic partner dance that exists. They relate that they teach them to think on geometric terms and they learn everything fragmented, that the teachers reduce the dance to what they can explain but the explanation does not reflect the essence, that they know but do not understand, that they are left empty and they feel that they do not dance, at a dead end. To dance thinking is the least advisable way, it restricts to the maximum every creative impulse. Dance is emotion, senses, instinct.

But is it not also a technique? Is it not useful to understand it?

When technique intends to explain the whole starting from a weak point, it goes badly. There are a lot more complete ways to explain tango that through basic geometry.

What is good about this moment of tango?

Its worldwide reevaluation. The work of so many people that get involve and that makes the level rise and spread in the whole world. The amount of young people. The idea to dance it more organically. The more informal milongas, with less inflexibility in the customs. When I began to dance tango I went to the "Verdulería" (a place to dance in Buenos Aires), a fashionable place, with a hippy hair-band and thongs. To dance in Tango Argentino I put on the hair gel helmet because I had to comply with the artistic recreation of an era. Tango is a modern, popular dance, not some archaic folkloric thing.

Although you do not like festivals very much, in the last two years you participated in several ones.

It is not that I don't like them, but large festivals sound to me like marketing and I prefer to go to places where there is a community and where I can have a peaceful and more direct contact with the people, this is how I am. My recent times are divided between classes and artistic projects that awake my interest. I participated in a couple of events organized by Johana Copes because we coincided with the dates, but I tend to stay away from large events a bit.

In addition to what can arise from Nexus, what are your artistic projects?

I have several, but I prefer not to reveal them just for luck. I can tell you that they are related to the movies and the theater. I am always working, doing what I like and learning.