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Alejandra Hobert

Interview with Clothing Designer Mona Estecho

BY SARAH GRAFF

Clothing that moves and looks stunning is a very important component in a tango dancer's life. Have you ever wondered where the famous dancers get their outfits? Mona Estecho has designed tango garments for many big names in the business including Giselle Anne, Alejandra Hobert, Elina Roldán, Claudia Códega, Corina de la Rosa, Nancy Louzan, Mariana Flores, and many more. I had the fortunate opportunity to meet this gifted artist, see her atelier and interview her about her work.

TN: What brought you to the profession of costume design? Did you study fashion design in school or work for someone who made costumes?

Mona Estecho: Many years ago I was working in a bank, but it was not my way, so I thought, "What I can do with my own hands to earn money and be happy at the same time?" I did my own clothes, so I decided to begin to design clothes to sell to my friends. Since this idea worked well, after some years I began to study at the University. I completed a degree in Fashion Design, and with my previous experience as a designer I could rise up quickly. I never worked for someone who made costumes; I always worked in my atelier.

TN: When did you begin designing costumes for tango dancers?

Mona Estecho: In 1994 I was a winner in the Bienal De Arte Joven of Buenos Aires, in which I did some fashion parades with my collections. I received two awards: one for a ready-to-wear collection and another for a theater costume. In both parades I worked with dancers instead of fashion models, and they were tango dancers! From this moment, I began to design for them. The models I used are very important tango dancers from Argentina: Veronica Alvarenga, Victoria Vieyra (she lives in Paris), Elina Roldán, and Marina Svartzman.

TN: Were you designing for theater

productions before you worked with tango dancers?

Mona Estecho: I began to design for theater productions and tango dancers at the same time, after 1994, but my first professional tango parade was in 1997, in Trastienda, a very nice theater in San Telmo.

TN: Do you design costumes for both men and women?

Mona Estecho: I usually design for women, but when I work for show tango I design for men also. In Argentina I work with Tango Protesta, a theater group that portrays tango from a social point of view. In our last performance, I designed body painting for a video dance.

TN: Who or what inspires your work?

Mona Estecho: It depends upon each work. When I am designing for a dancer, I respect the style, the personality and the fantasy of that dancer. When I am designing for a play, I work with the ideas of the director. It can be a realist play or a fantasy play. Right now I am working with a production from Belgium where there is a scene about Paris in the 1920s. So, I must study and research the fashion at that time in my library. I have beautiful books! But there is a modern scene too so I can design freely, searching my own imagination, but always respecting the choreography.

TN: Can you describe to us the process

Show Parade HAMBURG



MONA ESTECHO PAINTING BODY FOR TANGO PROTESTA



of creating a unique garment for tango?

Mona Estecho: At first, I see the design in my mind, maybe when I am doing something, then I draw it and I speak about it with the dancer. If she likes it, we search for the right material and I begin to do it. I measure her size, create the pattern, cut the fabric, and most of the time I sew it myself, but I also work with some very good seamstresses. It depends if I am very busy or not.

TN: How do you begin to create something original for a dance that has not only been around for over 100 years, but has certain standard elements in the costume? For example, women's costumes in tango traditionally reveal the legs and designers have usually included a slit on one side of a skirt or a dress. How do you work with and/or around these conventions?

Mona Estecho: Nowadays, the conventions are not usually respected, especially because I don't like these conventions and because modern tango takes fashion styles from different worlds like pop music, hip hop, disco, the streets,

orientalism, and other different new inspirations. I always respect the fashion style when the garments must show the past, for example, the end of the 19th century, the beginning of tango. The clothes must show an especially lower class in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. I like to reveal an historic age not only with realism but with recreation too. Certain standard elements, such as the right split, are used because the straight and fitted skirt makes it impossible to dance! When the skirt flies away with big movement, it is not necessary, unless the dancer wants show her legs.

TN: How do you create performance costumes for an entire cast?

Mona Estecho: It depends upon the director; each production is different. The best is work with a good director that has a clear concept. For example, in the last play that I worked, a play called Tango Vivo directed by Claudia Códaga and Esteban Moreno (biennial of the dance 2006-Lyon-France), they had a concept about masculine-feminine. So, in the opening both men and women were dressed in the



same tailored fabric, the men in striped suits and the women in striped short skirts and vests without a back. It was masculine but sexy. Performance costumes have a unity concept, the details of the dress are not as important. The costumes must show what the director wants to say with his play or what the dancers want to say with their choreography.

TN: In your opinion, what are the key elements that create the best costumes for professional dancers?

Mona Estecho: The more important the dancers, the dress or the suit must help them to dance, not disturb the steps. If the costumes are comfortable and exactly fitted to their bodies, without technical problems, I am happy. After that, the costumes must be simple and beautiful, without unnecessary ornament. I prefer the synthesis and purity. Of course, I design exclusive costumes! The professional dancers must have something

unique and from their own imagination.

TN: Would you design a garment differently for a stage performance than you would for a performance in a milonga?

Mona Estecho: Generally a performance garment in a milonga is more casual, and a stage garment needs to be showier because the stage is further away. But always there is the opinion and the preference of the dancer! In my work I prefer freedom, because the conventions or prejudices are not good for the creation of new things.

TN: Do you sell ready-to-wear tango clothes for dancers who are not professional? If so, where can people find your clothes?

Mona Estecho: Yes, I have ready-to-wear clothes. I invite tango dancers to my atelier at my home in San Telmo, Venezuela 823 number 5, or they can visit my website: www.monaxtango.com.ar

TN: Do you dance tango or have you ever danced tango? If not, would you like to learn?

Mona Estecho: I work from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.! Besides, I have two daughters, so I cannot go to the milongas in the evening! I prefer yoga.

Visit Mona's site at:
www.monaxtango.com.ar

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Foundation Class

This class is designed to give students the foundations of tango technique. Absolute beginners are encouraged to start their tango experience here but seasoned dancers may find this class useful and are welcome as well. Registration is required.

Time: Mondays 8:30 – 9:30 pm
Cost: \$80 for a session of six classes.

Intermediate Class

This class is a continuation of the Foundations Class. It focuses on technique, musicality and connection with your partner. Prior tango experience or completion of Foundation Class is required. Registration is recommended.

Time: Mondays 7:15 – 8:15 pm
Cost: \$80 for a session of six classes.

For private lessons, performances or information on class registration call: 773.575.6906 or visit us online at www.tangoproject.com

Advanced Class

This class provides students with the techniques for complex movements in tango applying technical skills from the Foundation and Intermediate classes. Registration is recommended.

Time: Thursdays 7:30 – 8:30 pm
Cost: \$80 for a session of six classes.

Chicago Tango Project Practica

The practica is where you can practice what you have learned in class and ask questions. This practica is open to tango dancers of any level and any style.

Time: Thursdays
8:30 – 10:00 pm
Cost: \$10 includes practica & refreshments. \$5 for students registered for classes.

Our classes are conveniently located at Dance Connection Studio in Chicago 3117 North Clybourn, just south of the intersection of Clybourn, Belmont and Western. Ample Parking.

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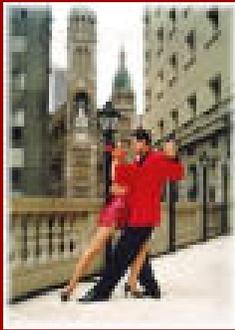
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Chicago Tango

CHICAGO MILONGAS

MONDAY

El Milongon

Mariposa. 1803 W. Byron, Chicago, Illinois
Practica from 9-9:30pm (tango lesson prior)
Milonga starts at 9:30pm, \$10; \$8 for students
with ID. Hosts & DJ: Gerardo Perrez & Phoebe
J. Grant

TUESDAY

Tango Tuesday at Rumba

Rumba 351 W. Hubbard St. Chicago. \$10;
9:15pm. Contact: Jairo Lopez 312-222-1226,
Daniel Noce (773-510-5726) Ramona Nita
(773-220-8918)

Milonga Entre Amigos

Ritz Tango Café, 933 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago,
Illinois. 9:00 PM - 12:00 + AM; \$10; free class
before milonga. Contact: Jorge Nidas 312-
437-2122; Email: Jorge@2ltango.com; Web:
www.2ltango.com or www.RitzTangoCafe.com

Tango Chicago Tuesday Night Milonga

Tango Chicago Dance Centre, 1043 W.
Madison, Chicago, Illinois. 8:30 pm - 12
midnight; \$12. Host & DJ: Al Gates. Further
info: 312.850.1078. www.tangochicago.com

American Tango Institute's Tuesday Night Milonga

Palwaukee Inn (formerly Kabak), 1090 South.
Milwaukee Ave., Wheeling, Illinois. 9:00 pm - 12
midnight; \$10. Lesson prior to milonga included
in cover. Host & DJ: Netza Roldan. Further
information: 312.287.8406 MyTangonet@yahoo.
com www.americantangoinstitute.com

WEDNESDAY

Somer & Agape's Tango Motivo

Barba Yianni Grecian Taverna. 4761 N. Lincoln
Ave., Chicago IL. 9:30 pm - 12:30 am; \$10.
Lesson prior to milonga. Hosts & DJs: Somer
Surgit & Agape Pappas. Further information:
Somer 773-807-5704. somersurgit@yahoo.
com; Agape 773-936-1619 findagapepappas@
yahoo.com

Free Milonga con Ritmos

Images restaurant, 3908 N. Lincoln Ave.
Chicago, Illinois. 8pm - 12:00am; \$10 cover
(with lesson, \$15) Contact: Daniel Noce(773-
510-5710), Ramona Nita(773-220-8918)

THURSDAY

Milonga Entre Amigos

Ritz Tango Café, 933 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago,
Illinois. 9:00 PM - 12:00 + AM; \$10; free class
before milonga. Host & DJ: Jorge Nidas.
Contact: Jorge Nidas 312-437-2122; Email:
Jorge@2ltango.com; Web: www.2ltango.com
or www.RitzTangoCafe.com, Nina Tatarowicz
312-730-8873; ninatanguera@gmail.com

Milonga Loca

Café Duvall, 2257 West 23rd Place
Chicago, IL Illinois. 8:30 PM - 12:00 AM;
\$15 includes lesson prior to milonga.
Contact: William Duvall 773-376-8760;
Email: williamduvall@sbcglobal.net or Nina
Tatarowicz 312-730-8873. ninatanguera@
gmail.com; www.tangoelixir.com

Chicago Tango

FRIDAY

Milonga Vida

1st and 3rd Friday (and 4th, when there are 5 in a month) at Mariposa. 1803 W. Byron, Suite 214, Chicago, Illinois. 9:00 pm - 2:00 am; \$15 (\$12 for students). DJ: George Drivakos
Hosts: Beth Braun & Mari Liz Foley. Further info: 847-846-5611, Bethdance11@aol.com
www.mariposachicago.com

Los Besos Milonguita

2nd Friday of the month at Mariposa
1803 W. Byron, Suite 214, Chicago, Illinois
9:00 pm - 2:00 am; \$15 (\$12 for students)
Hosts: Ellen & Oleg Mashkovich; DJ: Ellen
Further information: 847-409-4513
una_emocion@yahoo.com or Beth Braun
847-846-5611, Bethdance11@aol.com. www.mariposachicago.com

Nuestro Tango

Last Friday of every month. Latvian Community Center. 4146 N. Elston Ave., Chicago, Illinois. 9:00 pm - 1:00 am; \$12
"Free" class prior to milonga (8:00-8:15 pm) with prior reservation to one of the hostesses: Valentina Cisar, Carmen Pinto and Phoebe J. Grant. DJ: Tony Cosentino or Fred Romero. Further information: Valentina 262.942.4587; Carmen 773.279.9414; Phoebe 312.342.4335 773.260.2595. WindyCityTango@yahoo.com

SATURDAY

Recuerdo Tango Club

6137 N. Northwest Highway, Chicago, Illinois
9:00 pm - 3:00+ am; \$15. Hosts: Carlos & Melisa Favre; DJ: Carlos Favre. Further info: 773-617-6311, tango@recuerdoclub.com.
www.recuerdoclub.com

De Corazón a Corazón

American Tango Institute
325 N. Hoyne C-404, Chicago, Illinois
9:00 pm - 2:00 am; \$15. Host & DJ: Netza Roldan. Further information: Netza Roldan 312-287-8406, MyTangoNet@Yahoo.com
www.americantangoinstitute.com

Chicago's All-Nighter

Every 2nd Saturday. American Tango Institute
325 N. Hoyne C-404, Chicago, Illinois. \$10; 12:30am - 6am. Contact: Burak Ozkosem; tel. 312-810-0252. e-mail: burakozkosem@yahoo.com, web: tangoshusheta.com

SUNDAY

Tango Matinee at the Ritz

Ritz Tango Café, 933 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Illinois; 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM; \$10; class before milonga. Contact: Jorge Nidas 312-437-2122; Email: Jorge@21tango.com; Web: www.21tango.com or www.RitzTangoCafe.com

Somer & Agape's Tango Motivo

Barba Yianni Grecian Taverna. 4761 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago, IL. 9:30 pm - 12:30 am; \$10
Lesson prior to milonga. Hosts & DJs: Somer Surgit & Agape Pappas. For information: Somer 773-807-5704. somersurgit@yahoo.com; Agape 773-936-1619 findagapepappas@yahoo.com

CHICAGO PRACTICAS

MONDAY

Burak's "Tango Laboratory"

Casa de Tango, 1104 N. Ashland
Chicago, Illinois, Every Monday; \$10 covers the lesson and practi-longa. 8:30pm - 10pm. Lesson prior to Practi-longa. "Tango Laboratory" supervised by Burak. Contact info: Burak 312-810-0252; burakozkosem@yahoo.com www.tangoshusheta.com

Ritz Tango Cafe Guided Practica

Ritz Tango Café, 933 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Illinois. 9:00 PM - 12:00 + AM; \$10; free class before milonga. Contact: Jorge Nidas 312-437-2122; Email: Jorge@21tango.com; Web: www.21tango.com or www. RitzTangoCafe.com

TUESDAY

Sweet Elixir Practica

American Tango Institute
325 N. Hoyne, C-404, Chicago, Illinois
8:30pm to 10:30pm; \$10 (\$5 for students with ID). Free class prior to milonga
Host & DJ: Nina Tatarowicz. Further info: 312.730.8873, ninatanguera@gmail.com
www.tangoelixir.com

U of C Practica Sept. 27-Dec. 6

U of C, Ida Noyes Building, 1212 E. 59th St., Chicago. Tango lesson prior to guided practica. 9:30pm-10:30pm. Contact: Marco Mambeli: marco@hep.uchicago.edu

Practica Milonguero

Mariposa, 1803 W. Byron, Suite 214
Chicago. Lesson prior to practica \$8 walk-ins; Free to registered students. Contact: Carlos Favre, tel. 773-617-6311, tango@recuerdoclub.com, www.recuerdoclub.com

THURSDAY

Chicago Tango Project Practica

Dance Connection Studio. 3117 N. Clybourn, Chicago. 8:30 - 10:30 pm; \$10, students registered for any tango classes in Chicago \$5. Lesson prior to practica. Refreshments provided. Contact: Sarah & Misha: 773.575.6906, www.tangoproject.com

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U of C, Ida Noyes Building, 1212 E. 59th St., Chicago. Tango lesson prior to guided practica. 9:30pm-10:30pm. Contact: Marco Mambeli: marco@hep.uchicago.edu

FRIDAY

Tango Chicago Dance Centre

1043 W. Madison, Chicago, Illinois. 7:30-11:00 pm, open to all levels; \$12. Contact: Al Gates 312.850.1078. www.tangochicago.com

SUNDAY

Practica with Instructions at Mercury Cafe

Mercury Cafe. 1505 W. Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. 6:30pm-8:30pm; \$10; Contact: Daniel Noce (773-510-5726) Ramona Nita (773-220-8918)

Tango Sentido Productions Practica

Drucker Center; 1535 N. Dayton St. Chicago, Illinois; 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM; \$10. Contact: Dany Novakovich 312-296-1955, 773-550-2646; http://TangoinChicago.com

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Contacts: www.atlantatangofestival.com

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Contacts: www.centragtango.com; Joe Grohens: joe@joegrohens.com; www.tango.joegrohens.com 217.378.4751, Ron Weigel: TangoSociety@aol.com; 217.328.1311
Valerie Williams: www.vjw.biz/docs/amessocdnc.htm; v@vjw.biz; 515.232.7374;

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Contacts: Valerie Williams: www.vjw.biz/docs/amessocdnc.htm; v@vjw.biz; 515.232.7374;

FAIRFIELD / IOWA CITY, IA

Contacts: Greg Kovaciny, Iowa City Tango Club kovaciny@inav.net. New website: <http://soli.inav.net/~dance/tango.html>. It is the official home of Iowa City Tango Club, and includes extensive information on things going on in the Iowa area, including our events in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Fairfield, Des Moines, Ames.

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Contacts: www.tangoindy.org; info@tangoindy.org, David Crosley: dcrosley@challenge-inc.com; 317.407.8181, Barb Bill: 513-321-3546; bbillcinci@yahoo.com

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Contacts: <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~tango>
Michelle Murphy: mcmurphy@psych.purdue.edu

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Contact: Carmen Maret; foliasmusic@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.grtango.org/>

ANN ARBOR, MI

Contacts: www.umich.edu/~umtango; umtango@umich.edu; 734.327.0642 or 734.564.0811

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Contacts: Karen Whitesell: www.thelearningdepot.com/murrays-1/; 417.471.1001

ST. LOUIS, MO

Contacts: St. Louis Argentine Tango Yahoo Group: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/St_Louis_Tango/ and [http://cec.wustl.edu/~hs3/Tango St. Louis](http://cec.wustl.edu/~hs3/Tango_St_Louis): <http://www.tangostlouis.com/> Roxanne McKenny: www.tangoteacher.com, 314.324.0887.
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Contacts: www.tangoacademy.org; Musharraf Farooqi at info@tangoacademy.org or 416.536.8446.

Please send any information regarding contact information for Argentine tango events in the Midwest to central_tango@yahoo.com and we will be sure to update each community's contact listing. Also, let us know if you'd like your community featured in an upcoming issue.