

together – they're very intertwined and tango is an extension of us, it is our baby and we see it as something alive that we nurture on a daily basis," says Maral.

Maral also observes that the territory in which one works conditions one's possibilities. The UK, for instance, has few subsidies for dance artists, unlike France where there is more state support and valuing of artists.

"Here, the only way to 'survive' is to run a good business first and foremost," she says, "Business and art are not always nicely aligned and it is unfortunate that dance and the arts in general are not valued and supported enough in this country beyond their entertainment value – and entertainment always takes us to the lowest common denominator; you get the picture."

### Get the word out

For a business to work, you have to work at it. Between the two of them, Maral and Mariano spend some 30 hours a week on promotional activities. Says Mariano: "We promote ourselves by all means available to us: Facebook, mailing, our website, YouTube, flyers, we post on other dance and leisure centre websites and also network face to face. Of course, the shows where we dance are a nice promotion for us too."

Maral says: "We are dancers and artists and we would prefer to spend more of our time practising and creating. Some of the promotional process is creative, like designing flyers and working on improving the website, but most of the



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Maral Kojayan and Mariano Laplume

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work is not. Nonetheless it's essential to let people know what's available to them."

In the case of Maral and Mariano, morals and principles guide their business tactics. Maral says: "We really don't like heavy promotional tactics; we believe that students find their teachers. We just have to make sure the info is out there and represents us well.

"But, for example, we never say to someone we see in a milonga, 'You should come to my class,' or to someone who stopped coming, 'Where have you been?' or 'You should come!' Basically, we don't put pressure on people or make them feel uncomfortable – we believe in treating people as mature grown-ups and equals to us."

### Know your core values

Mariano explains that their teaching profile has evolved since they started. "We had certain perceptions about ourselves and tango when we started, but we had to modify things in order to address the needs of our students

and make our teaching more approachable and accessible."

"If you want to teach, you have to study, be creative in your learning process, explore and don't listen to people that say 'this cannot be done,'" he adds.

"I would tell everyone to follow their heart and follow their dreams," says Maral. "In this time of difficulties and challenges for all, it is not easy to have the courage to live your dream, it is easier to hide for fear of losing the little that you have – knowing that it's not easy to find work, it's not easy to 'make it'.

"But I believe in the power of the heart and the power of dreams to help us overcome difficulties, to help us deal with having to compromise on ideals and all of that. A true dancer feels he or she is a dancer – it's not about thinking of it as a career, it's about expressing what you are. I was an academic, about to start a PhD, but [focusing on dance] is the best thing I've done. If I can do it, so can you!" ●

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