

DanceFeature

A testimony to the African roots of Tango, Candombe's warm and upbeat rhythm gives an earthy feel to this beautiful dance. It has a drum-based musical style based on Bantu African drumming and first appeared in Uruguay, Montevideo in the 18th century. It was brought to the shores of the Río de la Plata (which translates as River Plate) by Africans who arrived in this Hispanic "New World" as slaves and it's believed that the Candombe rhythm is the basis for all black dances of the time.

It could be argued



black population all but disappeared, decimated in the 1800s by yellow fever, intermarriage and the massive military recruitment of black people who sadly died in wars. In Uruguay there remain just 189,000 people of African descent in a nation of 3.2 million.

What's left today is an exciting, contagious music and fabulous dance. Tango Candombe's steps are shorter, faster and on the beat. Its characteristic movement of the hips and shoulders from side to side accompany the strutting of the dancers and match the rhythm of the music. The embrace is close

CANDOMBE

Tango's African Flavour

Geny Caloisi discusses the origins of a different type of tango

that Tango would not have been born had it not been for Candombe. The Africans called their drums *tangó* and used the same word to refer to the place where they gathered to perform their Candombe dances. Some believe that this is how tango derived its name since, by extension, the dances themselves were also called *tangós*.

Candombe dances were a mixture of traditional African dances. The result was elaborated choreographies with freely-

improvised steps, and energetic, semi-athletic movements.

In the middle of the 19th century, while black youth parted from these rhythms in favour of European styles, the Caucasians of Montevideo and Buenos Aires began to imitate the steps and movements and mix them with some of the other European rhythms, giving birth to Tango Candombe.

These days it is difficult to find traces of the originators of Candombe. Argentina's

and the heads of the dancers face in opposite directions.

Tango Candombe doesn't have the seriousness of the traditional tango dance, but instead exhibits a more tongue-in-cheek and playful style. The dancers look at each other and smile and sometimes dare one another to perform intricate fast steps. Despite this, Candombe creates no sense of competition between dance partners. Instead it inspires a sense of complicity and shared fun. ●

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