

Astrid Weiske

Interview at the Tango Connects Conference Berlin 2025



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What is Tango Connects Berlin Conference?

Tango Connects Berlin Conference brings together voices from diverse disciplines to explore the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of tango communities. With a transdisciplinary lens, the conference invites reflection on how we build inclusive, resilient, and thriving communities, and how Argentine tango can serve as a catalyst for connection, belonging, and collective transformation. We invite you to join us in this vital conversation! <https://tango.connects.berlin/>

Recorded in Berlin in October 2025

Veronica Tumanova: Yes, okay welcome to the session. So far, we have talked a lot about building thriving communities, but this session will be more about the second part of the title that we wanted to include as a topic of our conference and that is social change. Social change as it is understood as political and social economical activism. When we talk about social change, the real meaning of it is dismantling systems of oppression in a society - everyone is properly shocked - but you can also describe it as building a more equal, fair, inclusive, compassionate world for everyone.

Tango communities always reflect this surrounding society and the surrounding culture. In that sense, tango communities are not necessarily a driving agent for change, but the changes that happen in the surrounding societies will be reflected in tango communities. And so today, we wanted to have a panel consisting of three speakers that have been involved in social change activism specifically related to patriarchal gender norms and heteronormativity of tango communities.

So how does the panel work? I'm going to ask each of you to spend 7 to Max 10 minutes presenting yourself, your

work and experience in the field of social change activism tango. And I want you to finish with the most valuable lesson learned from your experience.

Would you like to start Astrid?

Astrid Weiske:

My name is Astrid Weiske. I was born at the end of the 60s in Nordrhein Westfalia in the western part of Germany close to Cologne. I had my personal coming out at a very early age as a lesbian woman, at the age of 16, in the middle of the 80s. I'm mention that, because at that time I was growing up in a small town – 60,000 habitants and it was a very repressive time for people who were gay, lesbian or trans people. We all had to fear about personal rejection or violence if we had been openly out. That was the social environment I grew up in before I moved to Berlin in 1988, before the wall came down.

I left the area at the age of 20 after I had finished my A-levels because I needed to be somewhere else in order to become myself and I couldn't live in in that town anymore.

So, I came to Berlin before the Wall came down and that was the beginning of my personal liberation as a lesbian woman and I found people I felt accepted by. I did not have to explain myself anymore, I didn't have to fear so much the social rejection, or bad things. So Berlin was a great place to be in with a huge Gay/Lesbian community and with all the safe spaces it offered. Berlin always was the best place to be as a queer person.

I started my studies as a photographer here and got in touch with tango in 1992 while I was photographing a documentary about a person who has a specific passion. I choose a guy who was crazy for tango. I witnessed his journey for several weeks and it brought me for the first time

in touch with tango. I visited my first milonga, I heard the music and that was it. That made the click. The music!

At that night I observed this environment. The milonga was at the well known Chameleon Theatre, a beautiful location. I was fascinated by the people who slowly danced counterclockwise through the room while the old scratchy music was playing. I was so fascinated how this dance works and all the social interaction. I finished my work for the documentary and I just thought I want to learn that, but at that time I had no capacity to do that, because I was so busy with my profession.

Two or three years later I got an opportunity here in Berlin. Some friends of mine – female friends – they told me about it a woman only tango class starting soon and that sounded appealing to me because all the other offers to learn tango dancing I was really not interested in. Going to a heteronormative class was not an option for me because I came from the rejection of heteronormative people and it didn't feel safe for me. But this “women only” offer and with my friends, that was a great start to leaning tango.

At that time we had no role change concept, so we had to choose which role we really like to learn. And I personally wanted to learn to lead. I couldn't identify with the follower role. Within whole female tango image I could not see myself following. So I started to learn the leading role - So for the first 10 years of my dancing journey, I was a leader only. I took a lot of effort in learning that and I felt safe in that group and we went out as a group into the Berlin tango world - a 100% straight community. There was no queer tango existing in the middle of the 1990's. Not even those words were invented or defined.

And that was the very first moment where we all had been scared because we were going as a minority group, a very vulnerable minority group into such a rigid heteronormative environment. The old school “role concepts” and “traditional behaviour” - most of us weren't used to that anymore - neither was I . We looked out for other opportunities to share our time. It was also an interesting experience, figuring out how we will received in the dance community as women dancing with each other. The Berlin community wasn't that bad as we all had feared – it was quite okay – and we could integrate without bad experiences in the wider Berlin tango community. But there was not any queer or same- sex dancing, just a little group and that's it.

As the words “queer tango” that was not invented yet, I heard from other same-sex tango communities in Buenos Aires. That there was a little queer community over there where the Argentine tango originated. I was wondering what they experienced, because same-sex tango dancing was a “no go area” for many years in Argentina -unthinkable! I know people got kicked off the dance floor. All that painful rejection from the straight community.

At the same time at the end of the 90s last century a similar movement started in Hamburg. Marga Nagel and Ute Walter created the first international Queer Tango Festival in Hamburg. It was very unique and the first bigger queer tango event in Europe starting in the year 2000.

That was for me and some of my friends THE thing to go and it was so inspiring! It was a totally different environment and we felt everywhere welcome, accepted, no fear or anything like that. For the first time not dancing as a minority.

I was so inspired by the Hamburg festival, I thought I should start some offers for the queer dancing community in Berlin - there was nothing existing anything anymore.

The group I was going out with often dissolved after several years. Wherever I went to a milonga I mostly was the only leading woman. And that felt always strange to me.

I lived for 4 years in Cologne where I first saw Veronica [Toumanova] we both had been tango babies at that time beginning of 2000 - again I was the only female leader in town. Wherever I went, no matter if it was here in Germany or I went for dancing in Europe or I went over the pond to the United States or another places there always was this fear of rejection, or questioning how will people receive me as a female leader, especially as a female leader who is not expressing physically the heteronormative stereotype as a woman. That felt – I felt – really vulnerable with that.

In 2005 after more than 10 years of dancing experience and extensive studies I started teaching the first queer tango lessons in Berlin because I thought the same thing as Sharna Fabiano yesterday mentioned: “I want to have a pool of a hundred dancers around me, because I don’t wanna be the only one and the dance is so beautiful”.

In Berlin there was a big queer ballroom community, but a queer tango desert and I just thought I should step up and create some offers to learn it and it was a long, long, long, long way to start: five people in the class (the same experience like you had), after a few years, more and more people got attracted, starting the first regular queer milonga in Berlin around that time, and I started to teach also abroad like in the US.

I saw the development of the tango and the queer tango within the last 30 years, from the little groups in Buenos Aires, Berlin and Hamburg, and some spread out people somewhere - all of them I met, and after a a few years I had

local classes here in Berlin. The festival in Hamburg inspired me with this mix of wonderful dancers who started building bonds and connection. People came mainly from Germany and a few countries around. A yearly meeting of new teachers and artists with interesting new concepts of teaching tango. Also establishing the role changing concept was a huge resource for me.

I established that in my teaching 2005 from the very first beginning everybody should lead and follow same time. That was well accepted by my students. For some people it was more difficult and I did not force them if they did not get along. Of course they could focus on one role for the beginning too. That was the beginning of global change and it took more than 20 years before queer, same-sex tango and open/double role became such a accepted form of tango. Meanwhile it is a big trend globally and became a big, big international movement. Before all of that I started 2011 the Berlin International Queer tango Festival, inspired by the Festivals in Hamburg, Buenos Aires and Stockholm. My emphasis and vision was bringing people together from all over the world, queer dancers and artists I met on my travels for teaching.

I tried to attract them to come to Europe to Berlin. Also a big focus was on inviting LGBTIQ teachers and DJs so that they have a platform to present themselves and be visible and be seen. It is still not very common in the heteronormative tango world that they open for lesbian, gay or even trans teachers, or that these teacher have possibilities to work and showing their artistic work and making some income. The payment for the artists was very, very low, especially in the queer communities. Also finding queer DJ's in the heteronormative tango world was so rare for decades. All that I wanted to change it at least with my festival the best possible way and there had been really amazing performers, teachers and DJ's out there globally. I

loved to give them visibility to a great queer tango audience who appreciated their values.

I was very impressed seeing so many people from all over the world came to the Berlin Festival all the years and how they connect and they get inspired. They took their inspiration to their countries and started their own Queertango activities. Like I was inspired while I was visiting the Hamburg Queertango Festival 2000 to 2010.

So I am more than happy to see all of that progression, in the queer tango world but also in the heteronormative tango world. I am not the only female leader anymore ;-)
and I am proud being one of the pioneers of that thriving communities and the social change and movement.

VT: And your most valuable lesson?

The most valuable lesson is that tango offers a big opportunity to grow as a person and I see it in myself.

I did the tango. I did not only tango - it inspired me to do some modern dancing too. I keep on going with contact improvisation, somatic dance work, yoga, Feldenkais or nonviolent communication.

Beyond all of this: there's nothing else than getting mirrored by another person in front of you and learning new lessons.

And I would say that tango is the longest relationship in my life - now 30 years - with all the ups and downs with all the frustration and the joy and happiness it can bring - it's a cycle.

I'm stepping into a new chapter of my tango journey. After 13 years directing the Berlin festival, I started another path.

I'm not retiring! I am still teaching and I am sure that my more than 20 years of international teaching experience still is a big value for dancers today and in the future. I look forward finding other ideas to do and continuing giving workshops around the globe and teaching private lessons.

I'm happy that there is a young generation now growing up like Maria [Milbert] here in Berlin or in other parts of Germany and worldwide offering constant opportunities to get people into tango and continuing create safe spaces for queer and open role dancers.

Full „Tango connects“ interview on YouTube see here:

<https://youtu.be/sQH0JUFkrY0?si=xzEMgk0NCcl47NrB>

Also interesting Podcast interview for „Humans of Tango“ by Liz Sabatiuk

<https://www.humansoftango.com/e/creating-spaces-to-grow-with-astrid-weiske/>

Transcription:

<https://www.humansoftango.com/p/transcript-episode-30/>