

# a road less traveled

By Vladimir Shlimovich

As I entered the Church of Our Savior in Brookline, MA, there was a simple postcard-sized note that read "TANGO" pinned to the door. This was my destination, to conduct an interview with one of the most prominent Tango teachers in the Greater Boston Area. The teacher, delicately built, maintains her presence with a soft-spoken, yet eloquent and mesmerizing manner. Her name is Hsueh-tze Lee, and she was one of the pioneers of Argentine Tango in the USA, becoming an accomplished dancer and internationally acclaimed Tango teacher.

Hsueh-tze was born in Canton, NY, just 20 miles from the Canadian border. Her parents were Chinese immigrants. At age 5, she moved to Hong Kong to live with her grandparents, and returned to the US after four years, to Philadelphia, PA. Later, Hsueh-tze moved to Boston to study at Tufts, MIT, and Harvard University. She became a biology professor at Wellesley College, and then...

**AsianBoston:** When did you start to dance Tango?

**Hsueh-tze Lee:** I started dancing when I was 3 years old; it's been a big part of my life since then. I learned everything from Scandinavian, English, Scottish, modern, to swing, but when I discovered Tango, it went straight to my heart. I've been dancing Tango for 16 years now.

**AsianBoston:** Everyone says that you have a unique style of teaching. How would you describe your teaching style?

**Hsueh-tze Lee:** Tango is often taught as a sequence of figures. The approach I've taken is more conceptual. I try to find a theme and work around it. At the beginning, our classes are oriented around technique. I feel this is important. Whether you dance a simple walk or the fanciest of figures, it will not be pleasant if it does not feel good. At first, students might not appreciate working hard on basics, but then...boom, overnight it clicks. Students typically begin dancing well in a much shorter time. At times, some have even been mistaken for Argentines because of how well they dance on many levels: musically, dynamically and emotionally. For me, one of the most gratifying things is hearing people say how much they enjoy dancing with my students.

At the end of our conversation, Hsueh-tze contemplates her transition from an academic career to teaching Tango full time:

"Many Asians tend to pursue a professional route, such as science or medicine. Teaching Tango is an unusual profession for someone in the United States,

and culturally, even more unusual for someone who is Asian. I came from a professionally driven background, went to competitive schools, and worked hard on a career." Hsueh-tze continues, "So to make a switch to dancing is an unusual step. In the process I turned down two tenure-track positions. My mother and sister have been very supportive. I'm making a living, and I am happy pursuing what I love."



Photography: Oxana Dmitrieva

Hsueh-tze teaching Tango to one of her students, Emerson Liu.