

Choose Your Own Adventure: Tango Music Edition

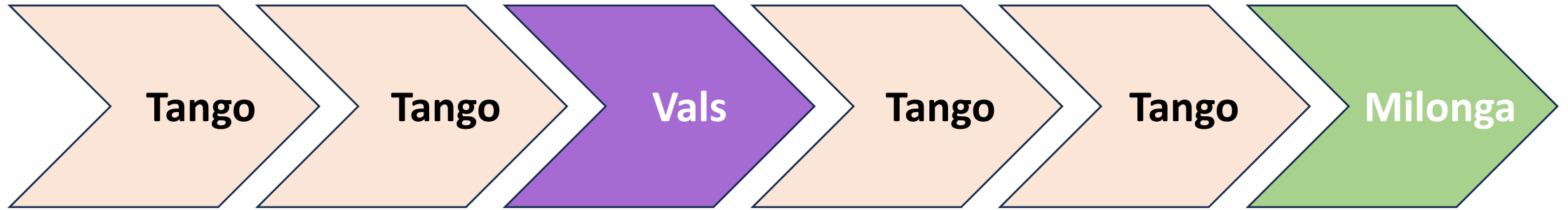
Jackie Pham

DJ Workshop

March 30th, 2024

Yale Tango Festival

A milonga consists of cycles of music



- There are multiple cycles in a milonga – each with a different feel
- Each milonga feels different (e.g., afternoon vs. evening, Fri/Sat/Sun)

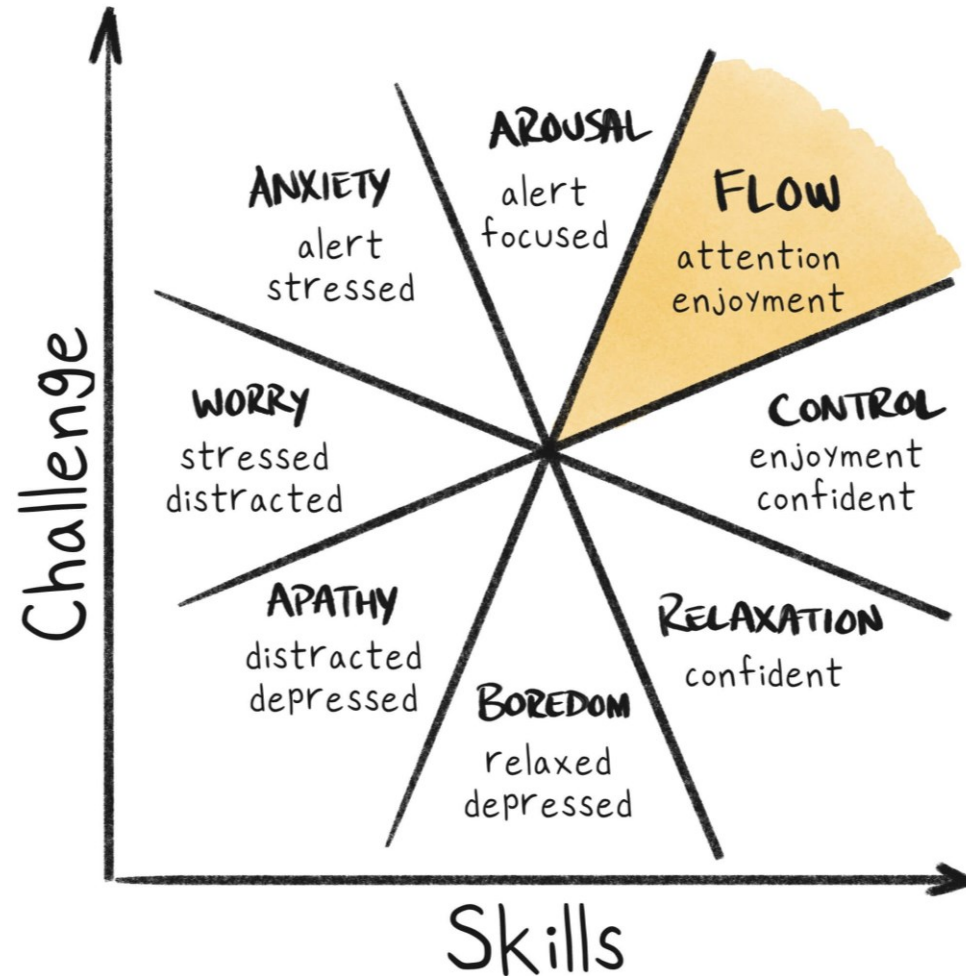
➤ ***Why care about the order of music?***

Understanding music flow empowers us to maximize our enjoyment of tango

- Gain more agency over your enjoyment
 - Get to know tango more deeply through different angles
 - Shape how you engage with the music, other dancers, and your environment
 - Shape the music as a DJ
 - Help others enjoy tango more!
- Helpful for all — anyone can become a DJ!



Understanding the music helps us find flow



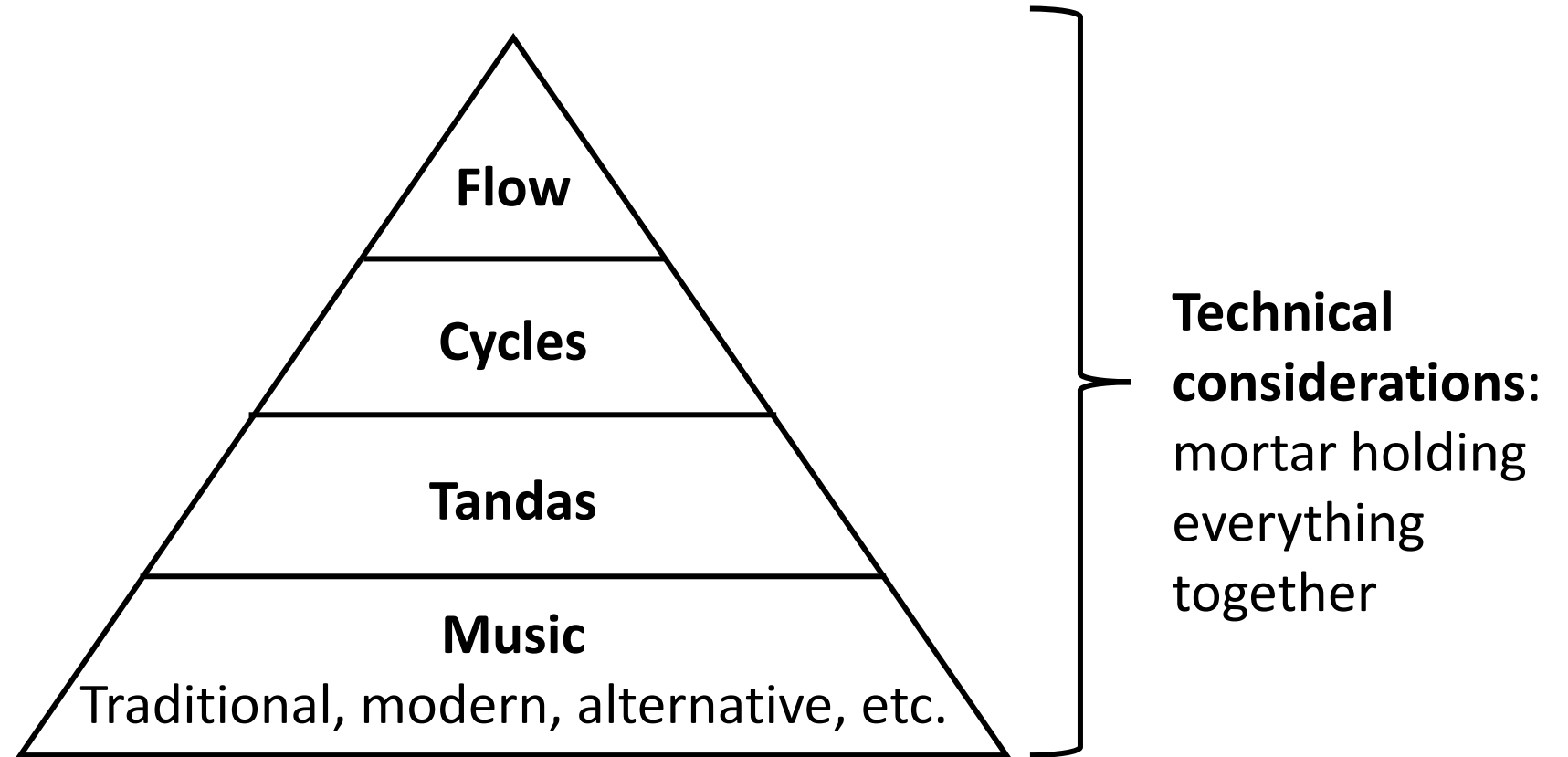
- **In tango, we are all trying to find flow**
- Flow is a state of peak performance, where our skills match the challenge of the activity at hand
 - Heightened positive emotions
 - Reduced self-awareness and self-doubt
 - Altered time perception and total immersion in the activity
 - See Mihály Csíkszentmihályi below

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). "Toward a psychology of optimal experience," in *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology*, ed M. Csikszentmihalyi (Dordrecht: Springer), 209–226.

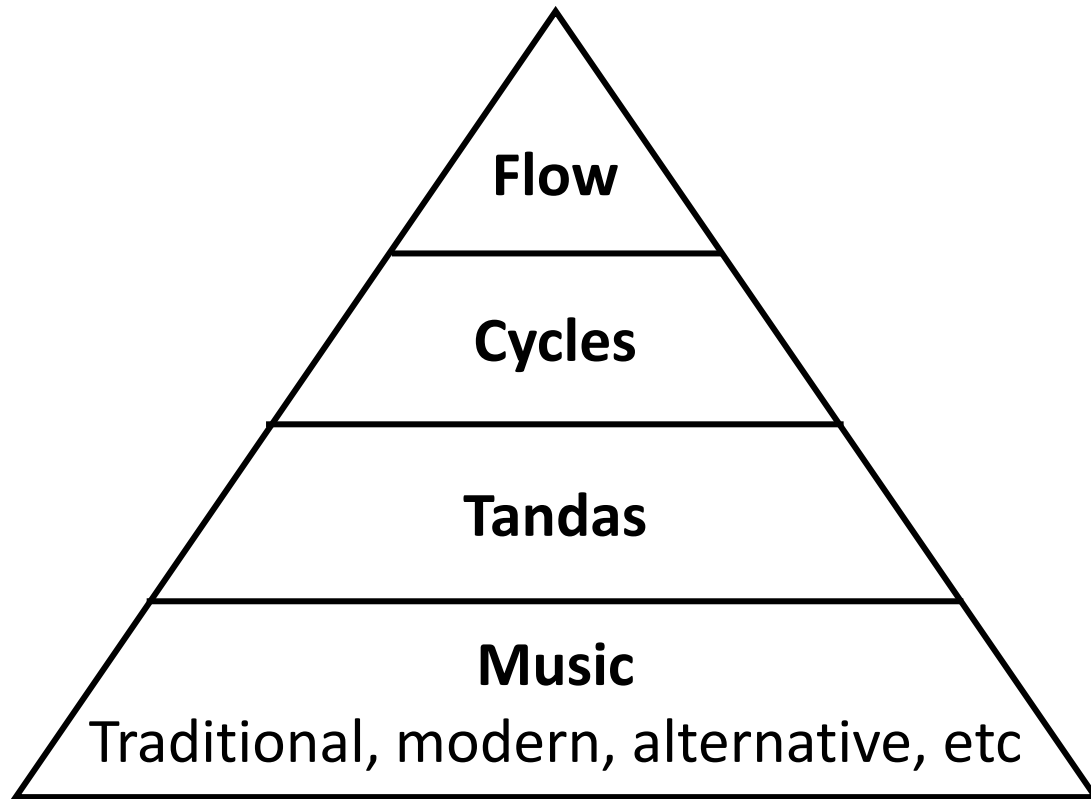
Csikszentmihalyi, M., and Nakamura, J. (2010). "Effortless attention in everyday life: a systematic phenomenology," in *Effortless Attention: A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action*, ed B. Buya (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 179–190.

(A) Framework of Tango Music and DJing



The broader your foundation, the bigger pyramid you can build

Milestones to guide your journey



- **Discovering Music**
 - Guiding your exploration
 - Music resources
- **Organizing Music**
 - Curating libraries (mental and digital)
 - Tandas and arcs
- **Playing Music**
 - General tips
 - Active DJing: cycles and flow
 - Mixing traditional, modern, alternative, and beyond

Discovering Music

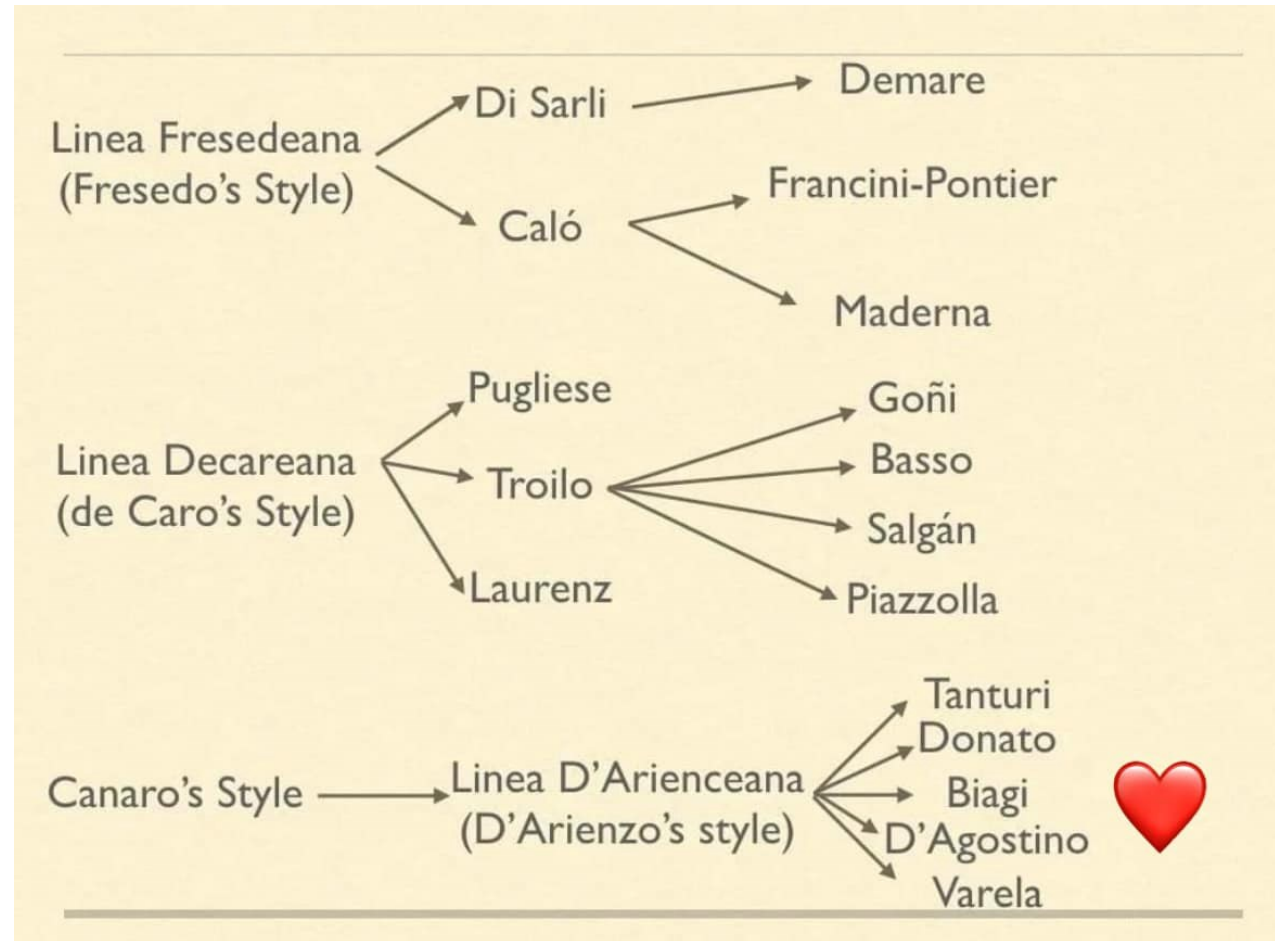
Build your memory palace – start with what you love

➤ **Reflection: What type of music do you like to listen to? Dance to?**

- Ask a DJ / find a mentor to help you explore
- Your library is both mental and digital
 - Big 4 orchestras: Di Sarli, D'Arienzo, Pugliese, Troilo
 - Eras: late '20s – mid '50s
 - Genres: traditional, modern, nuevo, alternative, etc



Find what you love and follow it



Source: posted to TDJF – Tango DJ Forum on Facebook, original source unknown

Find what OTHER people love, and follow it

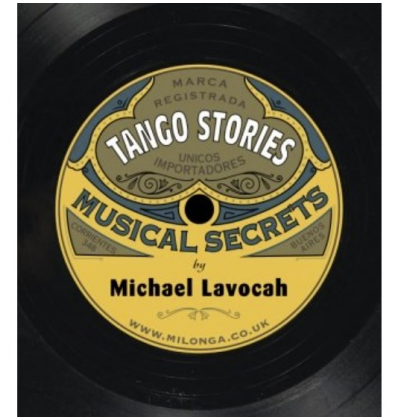
	Orquesta	Votes for Favorite
The Big 4	Juan D'Arienzo	63
	Anibal Troilo	63
	Oswaldo Pugliese	63
	Carlos Di Sarli	62
Top 10 Most Picked	Ricardo Tanturi	53
	Miguel Caló	52
	Pedro Laurenz	31
	Angel D'Agostino	27
	Rodolfo Biagi	23
	Francisco Canaro	22

Orquesta	Votes for Favorite
Oswaldo Fresedo	17
Alfredo Di Angelis	13
Edgardo Donato	11
Lucio Demare	10
Típica Victor	7
Enrique Rodríguez	5
Alfredo Gobbi	4
Romántica Milonguera	3
Roberto Firpo	2
Francisco Lomuto	2
Ricardo Malerba	2
Tango Bardo	2
Orquesta Típica Misteriosa Buenos Aires	2
Héctor Varela	1
Fulvio Salamanca	1

Source: Informal poll of tango DJ Facebook groups (Club de Musicalizadores de Tango FELIX PICHERNA, some Musicalizadoras) and an online TDJ course by Instituto Argentino del Tango

Orchestras and Music History Resources

- Local and visiting DJs
 - Shout-outs to DJs who teach and publish educational materials: Robin Thomas, Tine Herreman, Dan Boccia, Jay Abling, and Ayano Yoneda and Felipe Martinez (tangopoetryproject.com)
- Deeper dive books:
 - Michael Lavocah books (Tango Stories, Musical Secrets + deep dives on Troilo, Di Sarli, Pugliese, D'Arienzo, and Fresedo)
 - David Thomas: Get to Know Twenty Tango Orchestras
- Any tango musician, especially those who dance
- Dancers/musicians who teach music theory for dancing:
 - Horacio Godoy, Murat Erdemsel, Korey Ireland, Alex Krebs



GET TO KNOW

**TWENTY TANGO
ORCHESTRAS**



DAVID THOMAS

Music Discovery and Acquisition Resources

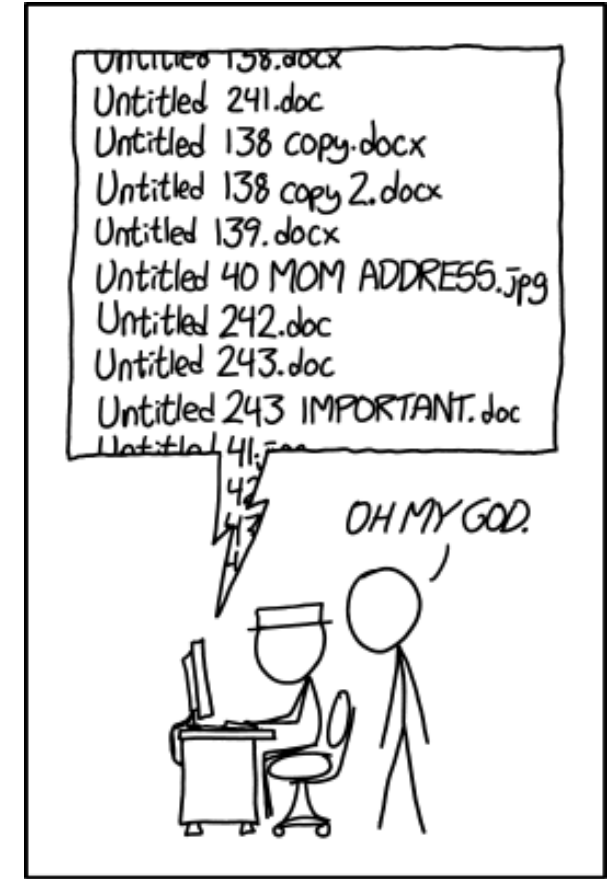
- Discovery:
 - Spotify (good source of free discovery)
 - YouTube (for rare recordings)
 - SoundCloud, other music publishing platforms
- Acquisition:
 - Digital: TangoTunes, ToTango.net, no.7digital.com, Quobuz.com, Amazon (variable quality), Apple Music (purchase DRM-free tracks), others
 - CDs (some rare tracks only available on Japanese CDs)
 - Vinyl, shellac
 - Older DJs clearing out their CD collections
 - Generous DJs who share their digital collections

Organizing Music

Organize your memory palace (mental and digital) according to what makes sense to YOU

➤ Reflection: How do you think about your music?

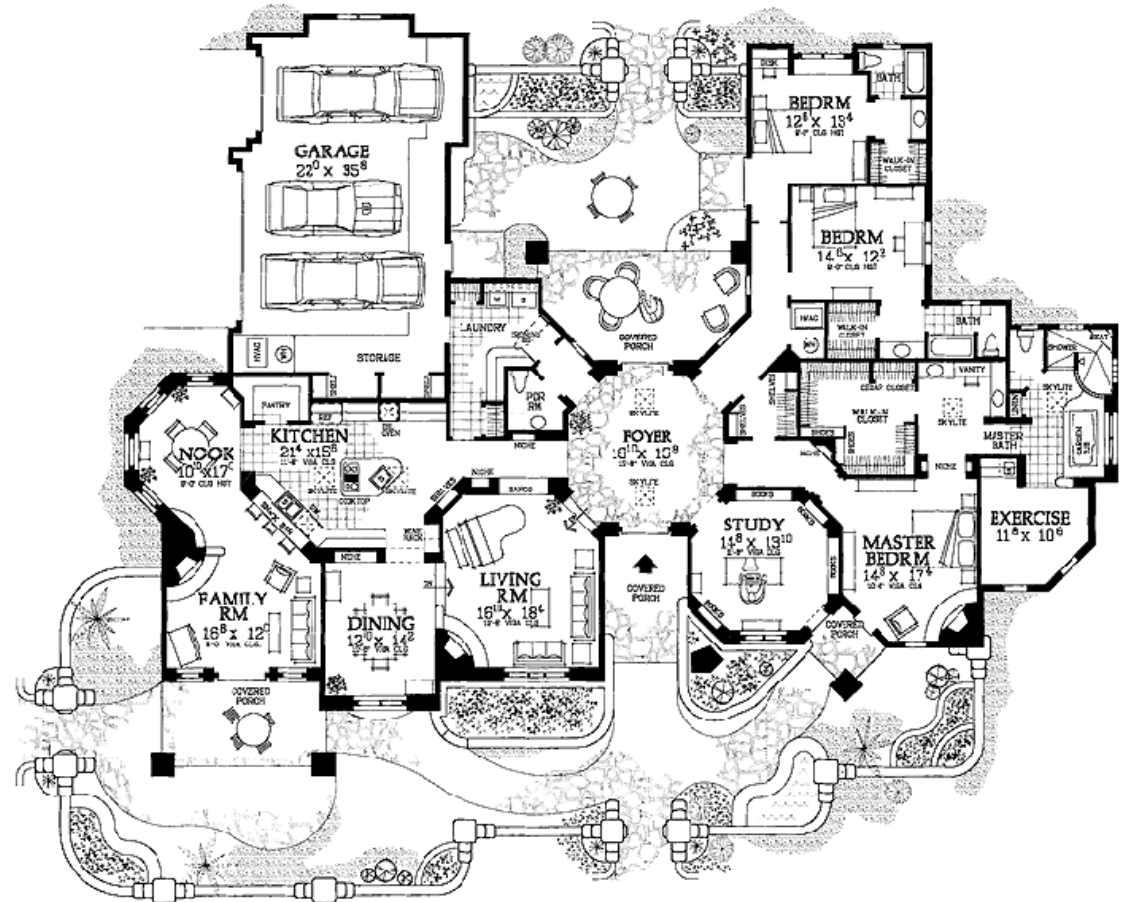
- The specific framework of your library does not matter, as long as you have a framework
- Example: Type (TVM), orchestra, singer, year, personal classifications (e.g., lyrical vs. rhythmic, happy / sad / romantic / nostalgic / dramatic / stormy, Major/minor)
- Demo in Traktor



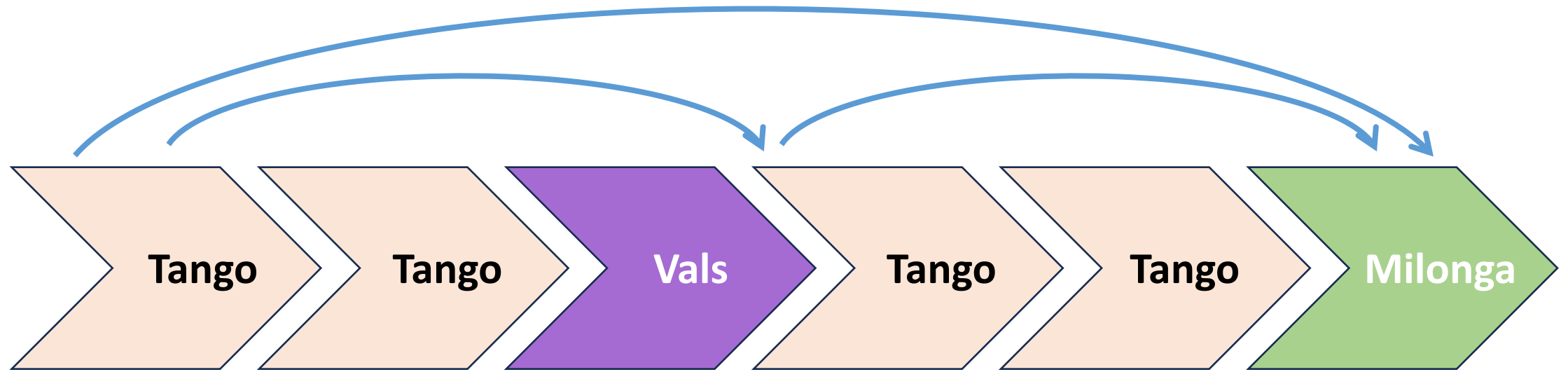
PROTIP: NEVER LOOK IN SOMEONE ELSE'S DOCUMENTS FOLDER.

Tandas are “rooms” in your memory palace and contain different arcs that you can connect for different flows

- Typical tandas consist of 4-song tangos and 3-songs vals and milongas
 - For faster partner rotation: 3-song tangos
 - Unusual but gaining popularity with some DJs: 4-song vals and milonga tandas
- Start with what you love and create (aurally) cohesive tandas
 - Start strong, end strong!
 - Create arcs using your classifiers
- **Be flexible: mix-and-match tandas to create different arcs and flows**



Arcs within and between tandas shape our experiences in a milonga



- Balance **kinetic** and **emotional** energy to keep dancers engaged; too much of anything will exhaust dancers
- Mentoring and camaraderie are the keys to thriving: seek feedback and support from fellow DJs you trust
- Demo in Traktor

Playing Music: Cycles and Flow

Listening and presence are critical to DJing well

- The quality and care of your DJing is **independent** from the number of dancers in the room
 - Play for everyone present for that moment – you are dancing with everyone in the room
 - Energy off the dance floor feeds the ronda, not the other way around
 - You can play anything, so long as you can build up to and recover from it



El Regalo Tango Marathon (2023). PC: Pio Ting

- Actively DJ: be ready to adapt to and guide the room
 - Build arcs between your tandas and within your cycles
 - Play a good mix of something for everyone – balance different styles, moods, and energies
 - Afternoon and evening milongas have different vibes and periods throughout the event

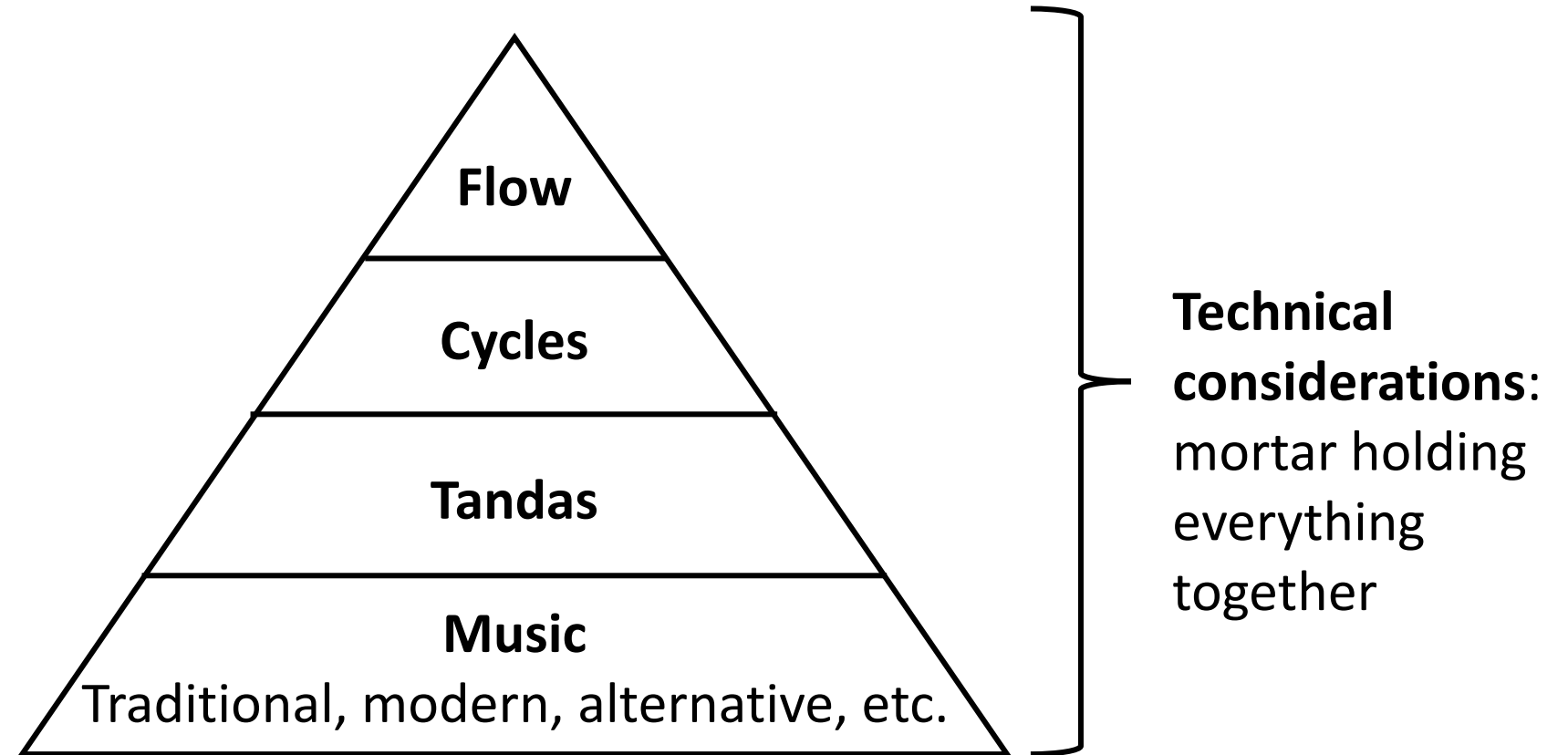
Jackie's personal DJing tips

- Strategies for starting and ending a milonga:
 - Start and end the milonga on time: check in with hosts/organizers ~30 mins prior to end
 - If there is a pre-milonga class or event, arrive early to observe and gauge energy
 - Optional: play transition or intro music
 - 3-tanda stem to observe and gauge the room, then adjust
 - Decide how you want to end the milonga, and play outro music
- Professional tips:
 - Mentoring and camaraderie: find your support network + give support!
 - Collaborate with the hosts/organizers to set a distinct tone or intention
 - Periodically walk the room to check sound quality throughout the space

Considerations when mixing genres

- Traditional:
 - Pros: more familiar to most dancers, good to ground and align the room
 - Cons: too much can become boring and dull to the ears, some head-scratching songs
- Modern:
 - Pros: refreshing and clean sound, familiar songs and orchestrations are danceable
 - Cons: too much can be aurally overwhelming. Watch out for piercing treble, rumbling bass, super-fast tempos, and huuuuuuuge, challenging tempo changes
- Alternative:
 - Pros: clean sound with clear rhythmic backbone, more relatable to newer dancers
 - Cons: can be overly emotional or dramatic, rhythm can become repetitive, too much of one style can be emotionally and physically draining

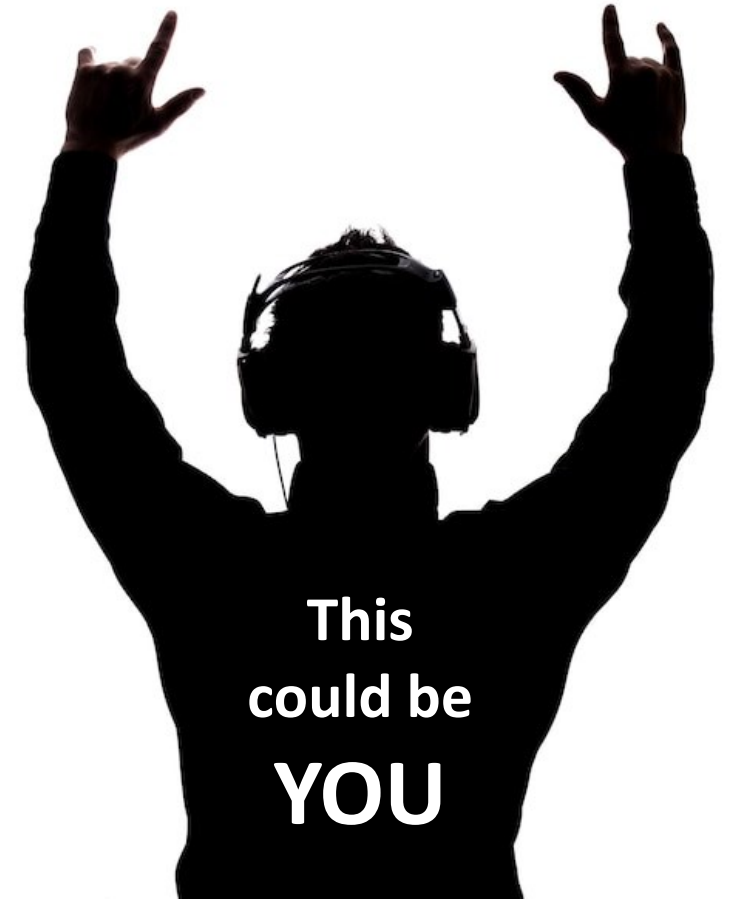
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Thank you! Let's discuss!

Remember: There are no stupid questions, only stupid answers

Technical considerations grow with your aspirations and need for stability and reliability

- Music players:
 - iTunes / Apple Music (some stability issues)
 - Embrace (requires iTunes)
 - Traktor, Serrato, VirtualDJ, other DJ software (\$\$\$, overpowered but helpful for stability/reliability for more professional aspirations)
 - ~~Spotify, YouTube, other digital streaming services~~ (Not recommended except for zero-stakes experimentation)
- Hardware:
 - **Reliable headphones or earbuds** + optional auxiliary music player for pre-listening
 - **Audio cables:** RCA-to-3.5mm (must), 3.5mm-to-3.5mm (must), RCA-to-RCA (rare), ¼ inch and XLR cables (more rare, but useful for higher-impact gigs)
 - **Backup music player** (heaven forbid your main device ever dies mid-set!!!)
 - Optional: DACs and external sound cards
 - Optional: Software-specific equalizers and mixers (e.g., Traktor, Serrato)
- Miscellaneous:
 - Adapters (1/4 inch, 3.5mm, USB-C, Lightning – have the latter 2 adapters esp if you are DJing with performers)
 - Flash drive (USB-A at minimum, USB-C can be helpful)
 - Gaffers tape (tears easily and leaves no residue – unlike duct tape)
 - Power strip
 - Power bank (for outdoor / battery-powered events)