



QUEER TANGO GOES TO RUSSIA

Written & directed
by Aleksandr M. Vinogradov

GENRE CREATIVE DOCUMENTARY; **LENGTH** '100 (CINEMA) '52 (TV); **FORMAT** FULL-HD 16:9 COLOUR;
SOUND STEREO; **STATUS** IN DEVELOPMENT.

Synopsis

According to the latest research, more than half of Russians think that gays should be either exterminated or at least isolated from the society. Is it the right time to travel to Russia if you are gay? The most outstanding queer tango representatives from all over the world indeed think so. They are going to St. Petersburg for queer tango festival this coming summer.

Some of them hope, that the international queer tango movement will help to bring tolerance to the society and this trip will support the local LGBT movement there. Others would like to explore "a deep Russian soul" and its culture, embracing it with love. But the journey may pose some real challenges ahead. The harsh reality of Russia today will put queer tango visitors into the unexpected and dangerous waters.



Production details

Written and directed by
Aleksandr M. Vinogradov

Cinematography:
Tatiana Haurylchyk

Produced by:
VideoVam Production

Co-produced by:

Broadcaster:

Filming locations:
Russia, Germany, France, UK

Editing and mixing of the sound:
Calvo Charo

Editing:

Colorgrading:

Synopsis

This documentary will take the audience into the unique and passionate world of Queer tango. The story will follow festival preparation, focusing on the culmination of the event and its outcome in the wider political and social context. Each queer tango character presented in the film has a personal reason to make this journey and a story to tell.

Daily struggles of the Russian and the visiting queer tango dancers will be uncovered. Dancers will share what made them follow queer tango and how it influences their life. Russian characters will share a glimpse of the hidden and oppressed life of the queer community in St. Petersburg. From Europe to Russia and back, the kaleidoscope of stories will bring all characters at the singular meeting point - Queer tango festival in St. Petersburg. When narrow-minded traditionalism and xenophobia are rife in the world, it is important to continue to dance tango no matter what gender, sexual orientation or country you are from.

As a dance tango itself is not only about music and movement. It is a language established between two bodies and minds. That is why tango is related to feelings, senses and the way we express what we feel. The film will explore this phenomenon. As our society is changing, Tango continues to mirror these changes faithfully. New waves of this dance appear, Queer Tango amongst them, which is a movement open to everyone, not dependent of sexual orientation or choice of role. It is a meeting point to socialize, learn, sense and connect. Above all it's about love of movement, that can change people's minds, attitudes and who knows, maybe even nations.



Director's Note

I used to work a lot with the dance topic in my films, most of the time that was a contemporary dance. But I always wanted to work with a mainstream or popular dance, which is tango. As soon as I discovered queer tango in 2013, it was clear for me that I have to work with it. The tango embrace is an exquisite way of being open and is wonderfully revealing of the people who engage in it. 'Queer' is not just, or rather, not even a sexual orientation. It is, arguably, a social and political sensibility. Do you have to be LGBT to dance Queer Tango? I suggest probably not. It seems perfectly reasonable that anyone alive to this sensibility can dance it if they choose. Of course, it is perfectly possible to engage in the practices without the political baggage, although I would argue that this is simply 'open-role tango' and not 'Queer Tango'. Different people bring different qualities to Queer Tango which celebrates - or ought to celebrate - sexual diversity, rather than proscribing it. I like this queer openness. Logically, being LGBT should not be applied as a test for entry into Queer Tango. In the mainstream, women increasingly carve out opportunities for themselves to lead. It is harder for men to gain experience as followers, yet there is anecdotal evidence of more men asking to be led.

In June 2013, a federal law of Russia criminalized the distribution of "propaganda" among minors in support of what it defined as "non-traditional" sexual relationships, and was enacted as an amendment to an existing child protection law. The law has resulted in the numerous arrests of Russian LGBT citizens publicly opposing the law and there has reportedly been a surge of homophobic propaganda, violence, and even hate crimes, many of whom use the law as justification. I couldn't accept what was happening with my country, also because of being gay myself. Social documentary was never a language of my films, that is why I couldn't find a way to deal with this subject. But last year I returned back to queer tango idea, and this time with some characters who are living in Russia, and no matter what is happening these days, they are developing this movement. I decided to bring more inspiration to LGBT of my country and to support Queer tango movement, so I got an idea to make a documentary film with queer tango dancers from all over the world who are visiting dance events in Russia, even that it's not safe for LGBT travelers these days.

Form

The dance was always an important topic for my films. In this project the goal is to focus even more on "why this phenomenon of queer tango happens nowadays" and "is it possible for the dance to be a catalyzator for conflicts in the society". Through personal stories of the characters I will tell the larger story of the appearance of queer tango and it's development in Europe.

The structure of this film will string together different stories of the tango dancers in a dynamic chain, inspired by the growing of it all over the world and specifically in Russia.

All film characters will be given free rein to their imagination. They will be directed only by a reason to trace out the path with a theme and style restrictions, and to steer the story in the right direction. The viewer will see a world of queer tango where reality and imagination accentuate and outdo each other. In this way, the entire filming process becomes an adventure of controlled improvisation and surprise. The stories will not draw a predictable, monotonous line. Some will be read by people and added in voice-over, others will be imagined spontaneously on the spot. Some will be narrative, some literary, some fluent, some stammering, perhaps even dancing - everything is possible.

The shooting process will be made by a small and technically easy to use DSLR camera. In order to keep things spontaneous and reduce the distance to characters. A spontaneous audiovisual approach of characters is of the utmost importance in this project.





CHARACTERS AND TREATMENT

The narrative structure is based on the research I've made during last two years in Russia, Germany and France. I met many dancers of tango and potential characters, found a multitude of the stories. The decision was made to focus more on 3 gay couples, so they will get a larger role than others in the film. The narrative progress is based on experiences and events during research, without consideration of the future reality. It can therefore not be an exact image of what the film will finally become, as its narrative discourse will stem from the stories of the characters at the moment of filming. I consider this narrative freedom and openness indispensable for the end result.

Please take a look at the trailer which is introducing the style of the shooting and all the characters. This is a first rough experiment and should be seen as such, as a "trailer in process".

Description of the characters

Otar and Misha

A gay couple of tango dancers living in St.Petersburg. Otar is a Georgian by nationality and a stomatologist by the profession, also he is one of the main organizer of the queer tango events in St.Petersburg, including the festival. Misha is a teacher of the English language, but can't work anymore in the school after students were bullying him as a gay. He gives private classes at the moment.



Ray Batchelor

Ray is a teacher at the faculty of design in London, but also one of the main leader of the queer tango movement in UK. He is living with his husband Jerome, who doesn't have the same passion about the queer tango. That is why Ray is travelling alone. As a character, Ray will bring some history of queer tango movement, some major moments of it, and will reveal his own project - "the football tango". His line will be based on humour and irony.

Ray says, 'I knew at once it was 'my dance', but had no idea then, why. Like many others, I don't like tango, I love it. My own dance is a fairly simple one, but I listen to the music as I dance, and listen carefully to my partners. No one stops learning, and my leading is better than my following - but I am working on it! I remain in awe of the joy tango can bring. It is a privilege to enable others to share that joy through teaching at Queer Tango London and elsewhere.



Celine

A tango dancer in Paris. Since 2015 she is a co-organizer of the second edition of the International Tango Meeting in Paris "La Vie en Rose" together with another queer tango dancer San Fede. Tango for Celine is a perfect way to initiate a thorough knowledge of self and its relation to the other. Recently Celine met Chanelle, who used to be her student, but now her life partner. The age difference is making the relationship fragile, but since there is no security in any of emotions, two of them are enjoying and discovering each other every day.



And there will be secondary characters: Salidat, the founder of queer tango movement in Argentina; San Fede, a founder of "La vie en rose" queer tango meetings in Paris; Natalia, a feminist and a DJ at milongas, she will introduce an alternative queer life in St.Petersburg; Anna and Marina they both represent Queer Tango Club in St.Petersburg, but also are sworn friends with a tragic story in the past; Lucas Fernandes a dancer from Brasil who made his tango career by dancing on a high heels; Juampy Ramirez and Daniel Arroyo Miranda a rising queer tango drag performers who already became finalist of the Mundial in Buenos Aires - that is, the World Tango Completion held since 2003, and since 2013, open to same-sex couples. Reaching the finals is an achievement in itself and for the whole queer tango community.



Narrative structure

The film will present the queer tango movement, but also will discover the emotional complexity of a life experience through the performative mode of documentary representation. That is why the film will combine the classic narrative documentary and some elements of a mental journey of characters.

From the beginning of the film we see each character in their own country preparing for the festival in St.Petersburg. The camera follows their daily routine, where an important part is taken by the queer tango.

Ray story will be presented more as a diary, because he writes down each day what is happening and addressing it to his husband. We also speak about his previous journey to St.Petersburg in early 90s, his visits to gay clubs during that time, his fears of how to behave with Russian men. Also, we will discover that he is organizing the football tango events. One of his idea will be to organize something similar with a football club in St.Petersburg.

Celine's line will start from her tango practices in Paris and relationship with Chanelle. Also, together with San Fede they are planning to present "La vie en rose" during the festival in St.Petersburg. But maybe this journey will inspire them to bring some queer tango from Russia to Paris?

Otar and Misha will be preparing for a festival in a snowy St.Petersburg, meanwhile having dinners with friends and meeting parents, also discussing their future plans about living in "homophobic" Russia. During the time of the festival they will have a professional conflict: Otar will be against that Misha should dance on high-heels, specially not on a queer milonga. Finally, Misha will do the dance anyway and Otar will accept it. Also, they will have some administrative difficulties during the festival which might also ruin the whole event. By the end of the film we will discover that they both are planning to move to Israel. "Will they stay in Russia or not?" - this will be a question until the end of the film.

All characters are returning back to their daily routine after the festival in St.Petersburg, but full of great memories about the festival and Russian people. In the end all of them are going to meet in Paris during "La vie en rose" festival. Misha and Otar will be preparing for the new event in Russia. Celine and her new girlfriend will be planning a trip to St.Petersburg together for the festival. All of them will be beautifully dancing before the credits.



About Queer Tango

Tango itself as a dance is not only music and movement. Tango has to do with communication between two persons. It is a language established between two bodies in which sensuality flows. For the few minutes which a song lasts strong emotions are conveyed between the dancers. That is why tango is related to feelings, senses and the way we express what we feel.

Tango is a popular dance and, like any other, it works as a mirror for the society from which it emerges and in which it is developed. But Tango is also a dance that has a strong sensual connotation. Hence this mirror reflects nothing but the way our society sees eroticism between its members. In the first place: man-woman; then, active-passive; two well-defined, distinct sets of roles. Such binary oppositions simplify the complex erotic bonds that exist between individuals. Although it is a model which represents a considerable majority in our society, it establishes an "allowed" way of feeling that conditions and censors many other different ways of feeling.

However, our society is changing, and Tango continues faithfully to mirror our society, changing along with it. Its scene, its dancing, its people. It is this possibility of change that opens the doors to Queer Tango.

Tango Queer is a tango environment open to everyone. It is a meeting point to socialise, exchange, learn and practice, where the aim is to explore different kinds of communication between dancers of Tango as a different way of communication. In Queer Tango nobody takes your sexual orientation for granted, nor your choice of role.

Queer is usually associated with action and cultural and political activism. However, it was able to make its way into the academy through the development of queer theory which proposed a new way of understanding gender, sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Queer theorists argue that identity is always composed of an infinite number of elements, such as: sexual orientation, class, gender, nationality, age, race, etc. All identities are unstable, arbitrary and exclusionary constructions. By means of exclusion, identities are formed as the result of power relations, with a centre and a periphery. The main aim of queer theory is to accomplish a multidisciplinary approach to social submission and control devices.

Queer Tango in Russia

The situation with the development of Queer Tango in Russia is still very complicated. It started 2010 in St Petersburg and has now grown to three medium-sized schools in St Petersburg and a big one in Moscow. There have been lots of changes, difficulties and conflicts during this period, but what we have learnt for sure is that a huge part of the traditional tango community is still not very eager to accept and welcome Queer Tango dancers. We all know the mechanisms of homophobia and hatred: rejection of 'the other', but it is clear that, with a wider cultural and political climate in which ideas of traditional family virtues, religious feelings and overall conventionalism are increasingly favoured, Queer Tango will hardly be welcomed on traditional dance floors.

On the other hand, more and more people from different spheres and with different dancing experiences are getting interested in learning different roles in tango, and teachers ready to instruct queer tangueros in more tolerant schools. There are some men learning the follower's part and women ready to dance with female partners as well as learning to lead themselves.

It's good to see that, now, both in St Petersburg and in Moscow, the heads of Queer Tango schools provide this opportunity for the individual to choose the role that they want, or encourage them to learn both.

As for the mainstream milongas, it is still quite rare to see a woman leading or a man following there. Women are more flexible and appear to be ready to dance with a female partner, while many male dancers still perceive tango in terms of eroticism and sexual attraction and consequently find it unacceptable to dance with a same-sex partner. It is interesting to note that male dancers associate the leading role with masculinity, determination and responsibility (a typical set of macho values); while describing the follower's role, they use such terms as gentleness, grace, sensitivity, trust; so it becomes clearer why they reject the following role - by doing this they symbolically lose their masculinity, become more feminine and gentle. That cannot be consistent with the ideal of the 'true' man. It is also curious that teachers are considered to be immune to some of these norms concerning their behaviour and choice of partners. It is quite common to see a female teacher leading at traditional milongas and it is approved and widely accepted; there are also a few men dancing with each other, but they are either teachers themselves or life-long dancers which puts them almost in the same category. It is known that quite a lot of women learn to lead, but they never do it socially on the dance floor, as it is not approved of. They say, you have to dance perfectly to lead, if you are a woman, though by contrast, male beginners receive support and understanding.

In Queer Tango schools, people are gradually becoming more and more interested in learning both parts. At both Moscow and St Petersburg schools there are now straight followers and leaders who come to learn the opposite role and experience something new.

It is important to integrate Queer Tango into the traditional tango community to show in the wider world alternative ways of dancing, to break the strict traditionalism that keeps both women and men within strict limits that hamper them from fully enjoying the great diversity of this magical dance.

What are the objectives, perspectives and achievements of Queer Tango in Russia?

For almost four years, Queer Tango has been developing in Russia. In St Petersburg there are 3 schools: the Queer Tango school "Salida"; Queer Dance Club and Open Role Tango Studio. Each school organises different types of events: regular practicas and milongas in public areas open for all dancers; costume milongas and open-air events; joint seminars; and milongas organized in other places than Moscow and St Petersburg.

Russian queer tango dancers are hoping to establish contacts and friendly relationship with Queer tangeros in other countries, that is why the festival is very important event for them.

Today, when the reinforcement of totalitarian rule and power, narrow-minded traditionalism and xenophobia are rife, it is extremely important to continue to dance and share this magnificent experience with creative and flexible people no matter what gender or sexual orientation they are.

Schedule

1. Research period:

July 2015 - June, 2016 - following characters, participation on Queer Tango events in Europe and Russia

April 2016 - pitching "GoEast" talents lab in Wiesbaden

September 2016 - pitching at the Baltic Sea Docs Forum

2 .Shooting of the film:

10 days: December 25, 2016 - January 4, 2017 - St. Petersburg

7 days: March 16, 2017 - March 22, 2017 - Paris

7 days: April 15, 2017 - April 22, 2017 - London

11 days: April 25 - May 5, 2017 - Int. Queer Tango Festival in St Petersburg

13 days: May 26 - June 7, 2017 - Queer's Tango Club, St Petersburg

5 days: June 22 - 26, 2017 - La Vie en Rose Tango Meeting Paris

3. Post-production:

Editing: 90 days - period July, 2017 - October, 2017

Sound editing, sound mix: 14 days - period October, 2017

Color-grading: 4 days - October, 2017

Aleksandr M. Vinogradov

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Aleksandr was born 1981 in Petrozavodsk, a city in the north of Russia. In 1998 had finished school of Fine Arts and entered Law Department of Petrozavodsk State University. After graduation he started to work as a graphic designer and later as a creative director in the advertisement agency. In 2009 applied to MA program in TV school, which he graduated with honors in three years later. In 2015 graduated two years master degree program "DocNomads". Nowadays Aleksandr is based in Brussels and working on several documentary and fiction film projects.

Filmography:

- 2015 "CALL ME CHAOS" / documentary / French, English /
Premiered at Visions Du Reel 2016, Medium Length Film Competition
TRAILER: <https://vimeo.com/133560596>
- 2015 "OLENKA WATER" / experimental documentary / 12' / Russian, English
- 2015 "THE DREAMERS' CLUB" / documentary / 17' / Hungarian, English
- DocLisboa 2015 (Portugal)
- 2015 "SOUNDS OF KAZINCBARSIKA" / documentary musical / 14' / Hungarian, English
- Selection of DocFeed Film Festival 2016 (Eindhoven, Netherlands)
- Best Short Documentary Award at the Beginning Film Festival 2015 (Russia)
- 2013 "AWAITING" / documentary / 5' / Portuguese, English
- 2013 "ROBBIE WILLIAMS: FANS JOURNEY TO TALLINN" / documentary / 56' / second unit director
- 2013 "CALL OF A HEART" / documentary portrait / 44' / Russian
- 2012 "FIVE STEPS OF BUTOH" / art documentary / 17' / Russian, English /
- Grand Prix of Telemania 2012
- Best documentary and Best Cinematography of Telemaniya 2012
- Best Art Documentary, Int. Festival „MENSCHEN UND LÄNDER" (Germany)
- Participant of Beginning Film Festival (Saint-Petersburg), 2012
- Participant of "Point in the endless universe" Open air festival (Moscow), 2012
- Nominee for Best Documentary, XXth film festival "Saint Anna" (Moscow), 2013
- 2011 "MY NAME IS HONEVO" / art documentary / 13' / English, Spanish, Russian /
- Original visual decision award. Telemania 2011 (Moscow)
- Original visual decision award. Beginning film festival 2011 (Saint-Petersburg)