

Tango tea at the Waldorf

by **Carole Edrich**

People were already dancing to the live band when my god-daughter Jade and I arrived at the Tango Tea Dance at London's Waldorf hotel in June. Our table was slightly higher than the dance floor in this well lit, imposing room with a huge glass roof and subtly reflecting mirrors, well-placed to watch dancers and musicians over a glass of welcoming champagne. About 130 guests were seated around a cleared central dance floor that was small enough to encourage intimacy, and just about sufficiently large to hold everyone who wanted to dance.

Our afternoon tea was superb, and although we knew nobody there, we danced for most of the time thanks to the service provided by Simply Dancing Partners. Founder Jenni Kravitz explained she had set up her company because of the dearth of good dance partners to learn and dance with. It's a great idea, especially if you're shy, unsure of your abilities, or have brought a teenage girl along with you. Thanks to Jenni's partner service, Jade was delighted to find herself learning jive and foxtrot with a good-looking 23 year-old and has asked for more ballroom dancing lessons as a result.

Built in 1908 just in time for the arrival of Argentine tango from Parisian society in 1910, the Waldorf's place in tea dance history was documented by the *Dancing Times*: "The 'Tango' is graceful, decorous and worthy of a place in any ball-room. If you doubt me, go to one of the 'Thés Dansants' organized by the 'Boston Club' on Wednesday afternoons at The Waldorf Hotel, and you will be charmed." (June, 1913)

The popularity of the Waldorf Tea Dances grew even further when Howard Godfrey joined the hotel in 1926. Already an established



Photograph courtesy of Hilton Hotels.

band leader with several popular recordings, people flocked to the Waldorf to see him and to dance. As fashion moved on from tango to charleston, new music was incorporated into the Tea Dances. They were stopped when a bomb shattered the Palm Court's glass roof, but resumed in 1982, and ran weekly until the salon was closed for renovation.

June's tea dance was the first in five years, as part of the build-up to the Waldorf's 100th anniversary next January. The dance demonstrations were well received, and while it would have been nice if the band had been able to play salsa as requested, and fantastic if any of the expert partners had been able to dance Argentine tango, we met some great people and thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon. Pre-tea lessons and Simply Dancing Partners open the tea dance to any level. Jade and I are off to lessons now and are looking forward to the next one on September 16. ●

Visit www.hilton.co.uk/waldorf or call 020 7836 2400 for more information. Tickets are priced at £55 and include afternoon tea.