

From Bench-Warming to Dancing in Thirty Seconds or Less: How to Use the Cabeceo Effectively By Daniel Boardman and Michelle McRuiz

What is the cabeceo?

A private, nonverbal invitation to dance. It is initiated by either party and accepted (or declined) by either party.

Why use the cabeceo?

- It's easier than asking verbally.
- It doesn't obligate the person being asked to accept.
- It is much more polite than approaching and asking to dance.
- If a person declines the invitation, it allows the other person to save face.
- It doesn't make the person feel manipulated, pressured, or even stalked by the other party.
- You can do it from across the room.
- It's speedy: You can cabeceo multiple potential dance partners in rapid succession. Two people can find each other quickly using the cabeceo if they prefer to dance to certain orchestras together.
- It helps dancers if they tend to dance only one or two tandas together in one night (for whatever reason) to find each other for just the right music.
- Dancers can use it to "sort out" their evening, to take control in a non-aggressive way, to find their most desired dance partners.
- It is a dance unto itself; it becomes an extension of tango.

Visualize a world without the cabeceo ...

In a cabeceoless world, the most aggressive people get the most dances, rather than people who really want to dance together finding each other.

What are the steps to a proper cabeceo?

1. Scan the room, looking for your favorite partners first.
2. If one of them makes eye contact with you, hold his/her gaze, and then initiate the cabeceo through a nod, a lift of the eyebrows, a widening of the eyes, or a head tilt. These should be subtle, not exaggerated.
3. The other person may accept by mirroring your cabeceo or doing his/her own cabeceo in return.
4. If someone is cabeceoing you and you do not wish to accept the invitation, simply look away and resist the impulse to look back at the person to see if he/she is still looking at you.
5. If there is any doubt about if you're the person being cabeceoed, you can point discreetly to yourself ("me?").
6. In the case of a misunderstood/accidentally intercepted cabeceo, it is the man's obligation to apologize to the woman who misunderstood and go with the woman he originally cabeceoed.
7. Generally speaking, it's proper for the woman to wait for the man to approach her so she can be sure she's the one. She may continue to make eye contact with him as he approaches.

Top 10 worst pseudo-cabeceos (in no particular order):

1. **Creepeceo:** Getting too close/sneaking up on the side or behind and then cabeceoing within a couple of feet. The invitee feels pressured, stalked, and obligated to say yes.
2. **Chateceo:** Using conversation as a preamble to verbally asking a person to dance.

3. **Crotcheco:** A man standing directly in front of a seated woman and asking her to dance. This is uncomfortable for the woman.
4. **Commandeeco:** A man walks up to woman, extends his arm, and beckons impatiently with his hand.
5. **Snackeeco:** Staking out the snack table so that if anyone wants to eat, he/she has to interact with you, and you then ask him/her to dance.
6. **Whineeco:** Whining to the person that he/she never dances with you. The person being whined to is aware that he/she doesn't dance with you and has his/her reasons for this, "Why doesn't that person dance with me?")
7. **Cortinaceo:** Either verbally or nonverbally asking someone to dance during the cortina. The person being asked should be allowed an opportunity to hear what the next tanda will be before deciding if he/she wants to dance with the cortinaceoer or not.
8. **Booked-in-advance cabeceo:** Saying "save me a tanda!" or "you'd better dance with me!" at the beginning of the night, or on Facebook, etc.
9. **Babysitting:** After using the creepeeco and whineeco and being turned down, the requestor then sits next to the person for the remainder of the tanda as if to prevent that person from dancing with anyone else.
10. **Intercepteeco:** Deliberately intercepting a cabeceo between two people by inserting yourself between the couple, then cabeceoing the person.

Bonus! 10 ways to get more dances at a crowded milonga

- Stand up when the tanda ends. During the cortina, stand in or near the dance floor exit routes.
- Reposition yourself throughout the night. Sit for a while, then move around the room and stand for a while in a high-traffic area. Then sit in another area.
- While you're seating/standing, smile at dancers while they are dancing so they can see that you appreciate their technique and musicality.
- Show up early and/or stay late. Often there are more men than women at the beginning or the end of a milonga, so a woman has greater odds of getting more dances if she shows up early or stays late.
- Remember your past dance partners' names and greet them by name. (This is especially helpful at a festival or marathon.)
- Look like you're ready to dance. Sit up straight, scan the room with your eyes.
- If you're in conversation, continue to look around the room and keep a posture that shows you can break away from the conversation.
- Especially for women: Wear colors other than red or black so you will stand out more.
- Especially for men: Dress the part. If you wear a nice, unwrinkled shirt and pants or even a suit, women are more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt, especially if they don't know you.
- Look happy and friendly.