USF Professors Stage *"Tango Panopticon 2.0"* Global Event, May 1
Art and Internet Project Synchronizes Dozens of World Cities in Dance, Technology

TAMPA, Fla. (April 27, 2010) – As an artist and an computer scientist respectively, USF professors Robert Lawrence and Anda Iamnitchi are fascinated by the virtual world and its ability to unite people. As tango enthusiasts, the couple is drawn to the subtle messages of the dance and its political history and subtext.

And at 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 1 in Ybor City, their artistic and technical talents will lead hundreds of Tango enthusiasts in dozens of cities around the world in *Tango Panopticon 2.0*, a synchronized global demonstration that will unite the artistic, the technical and the political in a synchronized event.

At the exact same time, dancers in Ybor and at least 18 other cities will tango in front of public surveillance cameras and have their dance streamed live from cell phone video cameras to the website Tango Panopticon.

Participants will be provided with open source software that will allow them to use cell phones to produce the live video feed to the website, where it will be instantly visible to public and participants in other cities and anywhere in the world via the Internet.

The event will mark May Day with a political and artistic statement through the storied dance that has done both for more than 100 years. The focus on the public surveillance camera is to call "attention to video surveillance in a way that is both playful and intimate," Lawrence said.

"The idea is to have a dance intervention that is unexpected in a public place and to reclaim a public space in a sensual way," said Lawrence, a Fulbright Scholar who has staged 31 "Tango interventions" around the world since 2007. "It's intended to wake people up and make them present, to surprise them and delight them. At the Tango Intervention website people learn that the actions are site-specific and engage local historical or social issues."

Lawrence explains: For each tango intervention, there is a related political or social element. The piece has two sides – in the physical world where people unexpectedly encounter the dancers, and on the Internet, where they can encounter the intersection of politics of the dance and the location where the intervention takes place.

While tango may more commonly evoke images of showy *Dancing with the Stars*-type productions, the real tango is a social dance with deep roots in Italian, Spanish, Caribbean, and African cultures that were mixed together in the slums of late 19th century Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The evolution of the dance was informed by economic and class struggles of early 20th century colonialism. Adopted by nouveau riche Argentine Dandies, tango was exported to Europe and, to the surprise of earlier practitioners, tango

returned as a more elevated cultural form. Tango has continued to migrate around the world and evolve and just recently this formerly working class social dance was added to UNESCO's World Heritage list.

Lawrence said as an artist he has become increasingly interested in forms of social interruption in recent years, and has brought Tango Intervention to such novel places as the Brooklyn Bridge, Washington, Vienna and Phnom Penh. While the dance makes a political statement, it is not one that confronts viewers as much as delights, entertains and piques their curiosity, he notes.

"For me, art that opens people's eyes to a different reality is interesting," Lawrence said. "It's beautiful and it's completely unexpected. The intimacy of tango, it looks like something that people should be doing alone, at night. Doing it in broad daylight on the Brooklyn Bridge or intentionally under surveillance cameras is surprising, a bit shocking really."

The first Tango Panopticon was launched May 1, 2009 with Tango Interventions under public video surveillance in 15 cities around the world, from Maui to Krakow to Johannesburg South Africa, and 12 stops in between.

The technical aspects of the project are Iamnitchi's canvas. Her work has focused on large-scale distributed systems, with current emphasis on socially-aware applications and distributed systems, and ways to create systems that can manage huge amounts of data. The technical challenge of Tango Panopticon, she said, is to create a system that expands to handle the potential load of a simultaneous, global event whose magnitude will not be fully known until the minute it happens.

"We're using cloud computing so we can scale up with the potential load," she said. "Let's say we are hugely popular, with cloud computing we are able to replicate the services to take the extra load."

An additional challenge is integrating social media into the event. Participants and viewers will be able to tap into Twitter and post videos and comments on the *Tango Panopticon* website, making the event fully interactive on a global scale. The challenge for Iamnitchi and her student Michael Stillo, who is working on this project as part of his Master thesis, is how to make the system work seamlessly and how to make the hard technological aspects of the event nearly invisible. The open source platform they have built for Tango Panopticon is a democratization of media in that it will enable other worldwide synchronous events by anyone with access to everyday mobile devices and the Internet.

Tampa's part of Tango Panopticon will involve couples dressed in black dancing for an hour down 7th avenue from 15th street to 22nd street. The "intervention" is found in the dance interrupting normal daily life of passersby, merchants, and the authorities monitoring 7th Avenue's extensive video surveillance system.

Word of Tango Panopticon has spread around the world through the vast, interconnected web of tango enthusiasts. In addition to Ybor City, participants have registered in: Beirut; Chicago; Bremen, Germany; Culemborg, Netherlands; Edinborough, U.K.; Johannesburg; London; Miami; New York; Port Townsend, Wash.; Portland, Ore.; Portland, Maine; Richmond, Va.; Seattle; Victoria, Canada; Vienna; and Washington. New cities are being added as word of the event spreads through listservs, traditional media and word-of-mouth.

By Vickie Chachere, University Communications