

Astor  
**PIAZZOLLA**  
**Tango Nuevo**

Tomas Cotik, violin • Tao Lin, piano



## Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992) Tango Nuevo

I was born and grew up in Buenos Aires. My early interest, as well as the main focus of my career, has been on classical music, the Viennese classics, in particular. People around the world associate the Tango with Argentina, but when I was growing up, the traditional Tango was not exactly fashionable or “cool” for people my age, and perhaps classical music wasn’t either. I would mostly hear Tango in the background. It was present on TV and on the radio. I remember listening to it, played by busking bandoneon players on the subway stations of the “D” line, or on an AM radio program coming from a pocket radio from the person who was in charge of pressing the numbers of an old-fashioned elevator in a sports club. I also heard it sometimes on one programme or another that many people skipped while flipping through channels on their black and white TVs.

When I left Argentina as an eighteen-year-old, I remember taking with me one cassette of Carlos Gardel. This music, like the *mate* and the *dulce te leche*, seems more Argentinean once you are living abroad. I started becoming more interested in Piazzolla’s music with the passing of the years, when I was living abroad in Germany. My main focus remained classical music, but a few years later I wrote a thesis about Piazzolla’s music at the University of Music Freiburg. I had already played some of his music, acquired many of his albums, and wanted to read as much as possible about him and his music. Later, when I was living in Toronto, I unsuccessfully tried to learn how to dance Tango from a Pakistani teacher for about six months. Next came Miami, then Texas and Miami again, where I live nowadays. As a member of the New World Symphony, a string quartet, and as a faculty member in the middle of Texas and then at the University of Miami, I kept dabbling in the *Nuevo Tango*, including playing Piazzolla pieces in recitals and quartet concerts, fostering collaboration with dancers, and organizing big Piazzolla concerts.

2012 was the twentieth anniversary of Astor’s death, and I decided to use it as an excuse to go ahead with an old pending dream. For years, I had tried to find Tango sheet music in my sporadic visits to Buenos Aires, knowing that eventually the right time would come to utilize it. I wanted to do a programme for violin and piano, which is pretty much a classical ensemble, and it wasn’t easy to find the pieces and

the sheet music to do such a programme. I discovered some very good arrangements and decided to adapt some other pieces myself, always trying to keep those adaptations simple and not to interfere with the original. Now, after such a long process, when I look back at the titles of the pieces on this album, it is difficult for me to believe that not one of them was originally composed for violin and piano.

I feel that Piazzolla’s music is international. It appeals to me not only as an Argentinean, but also as a classical musician. I hear aggression and madness, the honking, the chaos, the drunkenness, dizziness and the energy of the megalopolis of Buenos Aires. In Piazzolla’s slow melodies, I perceive smoky atmospheres and veiled feelings, vegetative states of mind, wistfulness, nostalgic love ... like an old person’s sorrowful reminiscences of a younger love ... melodies sung inside a person’s head and at other times sung out loud.

A goal of mine was authentically to recreate the language of the *Nuevo Tango* in a very instrumental, almost virtuosic way, and at other times through arrangements of utmost simplicity that revive both the violence and sensuality of Piazzolla’s music with the highest possible instrumental performance, recording and acoustic qualities.

Astor Piazzolla died more than twenty years ago, but his *Nuevo Tango*, rooted in traditional Tango but informed by various musical styles, still sounds fresh and modern today.

The word “tango” is supposedly African in origin and was used as a synonym for the parties of African slaves in South America and Cuba. The characteristic rhythm of the Tango can be found in Africa-rooted songs and dances throughout South America. Tango emerged in the last part of the nineteenth century on the shores of the Río de la Plata. It was the music of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the capitals of Argentina and Uruguay, places shaped by a vast European immigration. Tango was the result of a mixture of cultures and nationalities. The most direct influences were the *Habanera*, *Tango Andaluz*, the *Milonga*, and the *Candombe*. Perhaps not surprisingly, Piazzolla’s own story, the sum of an improbable mix of places, people, experiences, and sounds, mirrors that of Tango.

Astor Piazzolla (11th March, 1921 – 4th July, 1992) was

not born in Buenos Aires but in Mar del Plata, a resort town on the coast of Argentina. His family moved to New York when he was four years old, settling in Greenwich Village, not the fanciest neighborhood of Manhattan at that time. Young Astor grew up surrounded by other immigrants including Jewish, Italian and Irish families, and years later, he would talk of an atmosphere of danger and violence that forever tinged his music. His father gave him his first bandoneon when he was eight years old but, at the time, Piazzolla was uninterested in Tango music, which was a nostalgic presence every evening at home. But to please his father, he started to learn to play the instrument.

The family tried to return to Argentina in 1929, but the economic conditions back home were such that a year later the Piazzollas were back in Manhattan. They settled this time in Little Italy, now surrounded by Polish, Russian, Romanian and Jewish neighbors. Some of their music would become part of his music. In Little Italy Piazzolla took piano lessons with Bela Wilde, a neighbor that happened to be a former student of Rachmaninov. This was Astor’s introduction to classical music. He became particularly fascinated by the music of J.S. Bach, which, as arranged by Wilde, he played on the bandoneon. It was an experience that sparked Piazzolla’s desire to be a musician. It was around this time that he also discovered Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington, bands he heard from outside at a club in Harlem. Jazz would remain an influence in his music throughout his career.

When Astor was sixteen years old, his family returned to Argentina for good. Back in Argentina, Piazzolla became increasingly in touch with the roots of Tango through artists such as Pedro Laurenz, Pedro Maffia, Alfredo Gobbi, Julio de Caro, Osvaldo Pugliese, Francini-Pontier, Argentine Galván, Miguel Caló and Horacio Salgán. From 1938 to 1944 he played in and wrote arrangements for the orchestra of bandoneonist and composer Anibal Troilo, an essential figure in Tango history. At the same time, beginning in 1940, he studied with Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera, analyzing the music of Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Bartók. He also studied piano and conducting. Although he was writing and playing Tango for a living at that time, Astor’s own compositions were classical.

In 1954 Piazzolla won a scholarship to go to Paris and study with the fabled French composer, conductor and pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, teacher of, among others, Aaron

Copland, Elliot Carter, Virgil Thomson and Philip Glass. With Boulanger Piazzolla studied neo-classical works and four-voice counterpoint, a technique that would have a profound impact on his own music. Still, he thought that his destiny lay in classical music, but in a famous anecdote he would recall throughout his life, it was Boulanger who, after persuading him to play one of his Tangos, stopped him after a few bars and told him “Astor, this is beautiful. Here is the true Piazzolla — do not ever leave him.” Years later Piazzolla, who while in Paris would record some of his compositions featuring jazz pianist Martial Solal, would also speak of the profound impact of hearing Gerry Mulligan’s Octet. The sum of all his experiences from New York to Buenos Aires, Paris and back, resulted, upon his return to Buenos Aires, in the Octeto Buenos Aires, an ensemble that marked a new era in Tango.

Piazzolla’s *Nuevo Tango* still contains some of the *Canyengue* character of the traditional Tango, a playful, charismatic and provocative way of walking and dancing associated with the *compadritos*. The *compadritos* were men who resided in the *arrabales*, the rough outskirts of Buenos Aires. Reputed to be macho but likeable scoundrels, they hung out on the streets of Buenos Aires often carrying knives, avoiding work, and living for women and Tango. Piazzolla’s music retains other defining qualities such as *mugre* (filth) and *camorra* (fight/trouble), characteristic elements of Tango. His compositions are often very rhythmic, full of accents, with emphasis on each note, and they have a sense of swing. The melodies can be fragmentary and disjunctive, producing at times aggressive, provocative and powerful characters. At other moments Piazzolla’s lyrical melodies evoke Italian opera—meditative, elegiac, romantic, sensual, passionate and at times melancholic with a rather free approach to tempo. Piazzolla’s distinctive 3+3+2 rhythm, which he ascribed to the Klezmer music he heard growing up, was already present in the Tango orchestras from the 1930s and 1940s, but Piazzolla developed and varied it.

Harmonically, Piazzolla often adds sevenths, ninths and elevenths to traditional chords and occasionally uses extreme dissonances, polytonality, atonal effects, jazz cadences and color notes added to the chords that give an unstable character or impressionistic atmosphere.

As a performing artist, Piazzolla worked in his ensembles with top musicians from different kinds of music and was influenced by so-called popular as well as serious music. His

music, the *Nuevo Tango*, transcends categories. It is, for the most part, instrumental and not for the dance floor. His compositions were precisely written down — but with room for interpretation. In Ellingtonian fashion, he wrote with specific players and ensembles in mind, rearranging his compositions several times, as needed, for different ensembles. The violin was one of the original instruments in Tango, present in the groups playing in bordellos around the 1900s but also, later, in the *Orquestas típicas*. Piazzolla includes and expands in his works the Tango effects from the violinists of the *Orquestas típicas* such as *Chicharra/Lija* (sandpaper), *Tambor*, *Glissandi* and other *Yeites* (tricks).

*La muerte del ángel* was composed as incidental music for the three-act play *El tango del ángel* (1962) by Alberto Rodríguez Muñoz. Heard at the end of the play, this piece starts with a tango fugue in three parts followed by a section depicting the desperate fight between the devil and the angel. *La muerte del ángel* is one of seven pieces in the play, all paying tribute to a dying angel. Later Piazzolla used this composition in at least two 'Angel' Suites.

*Histoire du Tango* tells the history of the Tango in four movements, which trace the evolution of the Tango in thirty-year intervals. This version is an arrangement for violin and piano by Dmitriy Varelas of Piazzolla's only original work for flute and guitar, the instruments associated with the first flowering of the Tango in Buenos Aires at the turn of the century. *Histoire du Tango* was composed in 1985 and dedicated to the Belgian flute player, Marc Grauwels, who gave the première of the piece. These are the four movements and descriptions of their particular styles:

*Bordel 1900*. The Tango originated in Buenos Aires in 1882 and was first played on the guitar and the flute. Arrangements then came to include the piano and, later, the bandoneon. It is music full of charm and vivacity, which reflects the good spirits and volubility of the French, Italian, and Spanish women who lived in these brothels, enticing the policemen, thieves, sailors and hoodlums who visited them. The Tango in this era is cheerful.

*Café 1930*. This is a different era of the Tango. People no longer danced to it, as in the 1900s, preferring instead simply to listen, which allowed for a more musical and romantic evolution. In a radical transformation, the Tango during this period became slower, more melancholic, and

incorporated new harmonies. Tango orchestras were made up of two violins, two bandoneons, a piano and a double bass. Sometimes it was sung as well.

*Night-club 1960*. A new evolution was witnessed during this period, in which international exchange increased considerably. Brazil and Argentina met in Buenos Aires; Bossa Nova and the "new Tango" moved to the same beat. The public flocked to the nightclubs to listen earnestly to the new Tango. This marked a revolution and profound alteration in some of the original Tango forms.

*Concert d'aujourd'hui*. Certain concepts in Tango music become intertwined with modern music. The works of Bartók, Stravinsky and several others have reminiscences of Tango tunes. This is today's Tango and the Tango of the future...

*Melodia en la menor (Canto de Octubre)* was composed in 1965, as Piazzolla's twenty-five year marriage was on the verge of crumbling under the stress of extramarital affairs with a "youngish lass" and later with Norma, a woman married to a Swiss banker. This piece, with its poignant music and pensive title, could well have been intended as an elegy to the dying marriage. When the aforementioned affairs came to an end, Piazzolla changed the title of the piece to *La Mandrágora* (the mandrake), a reference to a poisonous plant and his nickname for Norma.

*Tango en la menor (Tanguano)* is the first section of *Dos Piezas Breves* (the second section is *Noche*) composed originally for viola and piano. In 1951, Piazzolla composed and arranged this piece for Anibal Troilo and titled it *Tanguango*.

*Milonga sin palabras* (Milonga without Words) was composed in 1979 originally for bandoneon and piano and was dedicated to Piazzolla's wife. The *Milonga* is a musical form that originated in the Río de la Plata area of Argentina and Uruguay. It was very popular in the 1870s. The *Milonga* was derived from an earlier style of singing known as the *Payada de Contrapunto*.

*Fuga y misterio* was incidental music for Piazzolla's Tango "operita" (little opera) titled *Maria de Buenos Aires*. The music, one of three instrumental pieces in the work, constitutes the fifth scene, in which the heroine leaves the suburbs and wanders through the heart of Buenos Aires. The libretto for the opera was by Horacio Ferrer and it had its première at the Sala Planeta in Buenos Aires in May 1968.

*Ave Maria*, originally titled *Tanti anni prima*, was com-

posed for the film *Enrico IV* (1984) by Marco Bellocchio featuring Marcello Mastroianni and Claudia Cardinale. The film was based on Luigi Pirandello's play of the same title.

*Ave Maria* is the theme associated with Matilde, Claudia Cardinale's rôle in the movie. The piece was originally written for oboe and piano.

*Yo soy María* is an instrumental arrangement of the third scene of the operita *Maria de Buenos Aires*. The surreal plot centres on a prostitute in Buenos Aires; the second half takes place after her death. The ill-omened María, born "one day when God was drunk" in a poor suburb of Buenos Aires, heads to the centre of the city, where she is seduced by the music of the Tango and becomes a streetwalker. Thieves and brothel-keepers gathered at a black Mass undertake her death. After her death, she is condemned to a hell which is the city itself; her Shadow, now walks the city. Returned to virginity, she is impregnated by the word of the Goblin Poet, and — witnessed by three Construction Workers (Magi) and The Women Who Knead Pasta — gives birth to a Child María, who may be herself.

*Oblivion* is written in the style of a *Milonga*, a song form that predates the Tango. It has become one of Piazzolla's most popular works. Like *Ave Maria*, it was composed for the film *Enrico IV* (1984). The play *Enrico IV* tells the story of an actor who falls from his horse in a historical pageant while enacting the rôle of Henry IV. When he recovers consciousness, he apparently believes that he really is King Henry. For the next twenty years his nephew, Count de Noli, arranges

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### Glenn Basham

Glenn Basham is a professor of instrumental performance at the University of Miami Frost School of Music. He has been a member of the Frost artist faculty since 1992 and the concertmaster of the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra since 1994. He is also first violinist in the Bergonzi String Quartet, the quartet-in-residence at the Frost School of Music. Glenn Basham has a B.M. degree from the North Carolina School of the Arts and an M.M. degree from Indiana University. Previously he played with the Detroit Symphony under Antal Dorati and was a member of the Chester String Quartet. As a jazz musician, he has performed with Ira Sullivan, Simon Salz, and John Blake, and is featured on recordings with the Miami Saxophone Quartet and Skitch Henderson.

Photo: Lynn Parks

for him to live in a remote villa where actors perform the parts of courtiers and simulate the medieval environment.

*Aire de la zamba niña* was composed in 1986. This version is an instrumental arrangement of the original song with lyrics by Pocha Barros about love and sorrow. *Zamba* is the national dance of Argentina. The name refers to a style of Argentine music and Argentine folk dance. *Zamba* has six beats to the bar and is a majestic dance, performed by couples that circle each other while elegantly waving white handkerchiefs.

*Le Grand Tango* was written in 1982 for the Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, who gave the première of the piece in 1990 in New Orleans. When Rostropovich received his copy, he had never heard of Piazzolla and didn't look seriously at the music for several years. When he finally sat down with the score, he was reportedly "astounded by the great talent of Astor." In this case the transcription was made by the Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina.

*Libertango* was recorded and published in 1974 in Milan. It was produced during a musical period in Piazzolla's life when he was working with the electric ensemble Conjunto 9. His work had a more commercial, rock and jazz influenced sound, compared with the traditional Tango. The title of his work is a portmanteau word merging *libertad* (freedom) and *tango*, symbolizing the composer's break from the classical Tango and his embrace of the *Nuevo Tango*.

Tomas Cotik

**Tomas Cotik**

The Argentinian violinist Tomas Cotik was the First Prize Winner of the 1997 National Broadcast Music Competition in Argentina and winner of the Government of Canada Award 2003–2005. He has collaborated extensively in chamber music with renowned musicians, including members of the Miami, Cleveland, Pro Arte, Bergonzi and Vogler String Quartets. He holds a doctoral degree and was educated in Canada, the United States, and Germany where he has undertaken research into Piazzolla's music. He has worked closely with the Vermeer, Tokyo and Endellion String Quartets, as well as notable artists including Midori, Christian Tetzlaff, Nicolas and Ana Chumachenko, Heinz Holliger and Leon Fleischer. Tomas Cotik and Tao Lin's first volume of the *Complete Works of Schubert for Violin and Piano* was released in 2012 on Centaur Records to enthusiastic reviews. Other scheduled releases include among others the completion of that major project and an album with music for solo violin. Tomas Cotik is represented by Lisa Sapinkopf Artist Management.

**Tao Lin**

Shanghai native and Florida resident Tao Lin has been a prize-winner at the Palm Beach International Invitational Competition, the International Piano e-Competition, the William Kapell International Piano Competition and the Osaka International Chamber Music Competition. He has given recitals at the Kennedy Center, National Gallery, 92nd Street Y, Rockefeller University, Chautauqua Institute, Minnesota Orchestra Hall, Izumi Hall (Osaka, Japan) and Norway's Edvard Grieg Museum. He has collaborated with the St Petersburg, Miami and Bergonzi Quartets, as well as distinguished colleagues Elmar Oliveira, Roberto Díaz and Eugenia Zukerman. A prolific recording artist, Tao Lin can be heard on the Naxos, Artek, Centaur, Romeo, Poinciana and Piano Lovers labels. He is represented by Lisa Sapinkopf Artist Management.

Photo: So-Min Kang



The tangos of legendary performer and composer Astor Piazzolla are informed by a multicultural upbringing which saw him introducing the influences of Classical, Jazz, Rock and Klezmer music into a unique *Nuevo Tango* style which still sounds fresh and modern today. *Histoire du Tango* sums up the genre's entire evolution, *Le Grand Tango* is a virtuoso show-stopper, while *Melodía en la menor* expresses deep personal turmoil. Renowned Argentinian violinist Tomas Cotik's special arrangements also include *Oblivion* and *Libertango*, two of Piazzolla's most popular and enduring pieces.

## Astor PIAZZOLLA (1921–1992)

### Tango Nuevo

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| <p><b>1</b> La muerte del ángel *<br/>Histoire du Tango<br/>(arr. Dmitriy Varelas) 18:34</p> <p><b>2</b> I. Bordel 1900 3:58</p> <p><b>3</b> II. Café 1930 6:46</p> <p><b>4</b> III. Night-club 1960 5:04</p> <p><b>5</b> IV. Concert d'aujourd'hui 2:34</p> <p><b>6</b> Melodía en la menor<br/>(Canto de Octubre) * 2:54</p> <p><b>7</b> Tango en la menor (Tanguano)<br/>(No. 1 from <i>Dos piezas breves</i>) 3:15</p> <p><b>8</b> Milonga sin palabras 5:14</p> | <p><b>9</b> Fuga y misterio (No. 2 from<br/><i>María de Buenos Aires</i>) * 3:23</p> <p><b>10</b> Ave María (Tanti anni prima) 4:05</p> <p><b>11</b> Yo soy María (No. 3 from<br/><i>María de Buenos Aires</i>) *+ 3:06</p> <p><b>12</b> Oblivion *+ 3:32</p> <p><b>13</b> Aire de la zamba niña * 2:36</p> <p><b>14</b> Le Grand Tango<br/>(arr. Sofia Gubaidulina) 7:32</p> <p><b>15</b> Libertango * 1:50</p> <p style="text-align: right;">* arr. Tomas Cotik</p> |
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**Tomas Cotik, Violin • Tao Lin, Piano**  
+ with Glenn Basham, Violin



Recorded at Gusman Concert Hall, Florida, USA, 1, 13 & 14 May, 2012 • Producer: Tomas Cotik  
Engineers: Paul Griffith & Kyle Marcolini, P&A Audio • Mastering: Paul Griffith • Violin: Marc de Sterke (2000)  
Bow: Eugene Sartory (c.1893/94) • Piano: Steinway D • Piano Technician: Bruno Paul Anthony  
Booklet notes: Tomas Cotik • Cover painting: *Red Field* by Sebastian Spreng (by courtesy of the artist)