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Creating and re-creating tangos : artistic processes and innovations in music by Pugliese, Salgán, Piazzolla and Beytelmann

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Citation

Varassi Pega, B. (2014, December 11). *Creating and re-creating tangos : artistic processes and innovations in music by Pugliese, Salgán, Piazzolla and Beytelmann*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/30110>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



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Author: Varassi Pega, Bárbara

Title: Creating and re-creating tangos : artistic processes and innovations in music by Pugliese, Salgán, Piazzolla and Beytelmann

Issue Date: 2014-12-11

Creating and Re-creating Tangos: Artistic Processes and Innovations in Music by Pugliese, Salgán, Piazzolla and Beytelmann

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden

op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,

volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties

te verdedigen op donderdag 11 december 2014

klokke 16.15 uur

door

Bárbara Varassi Pega
geboren te Rosario (AR)
in 1977

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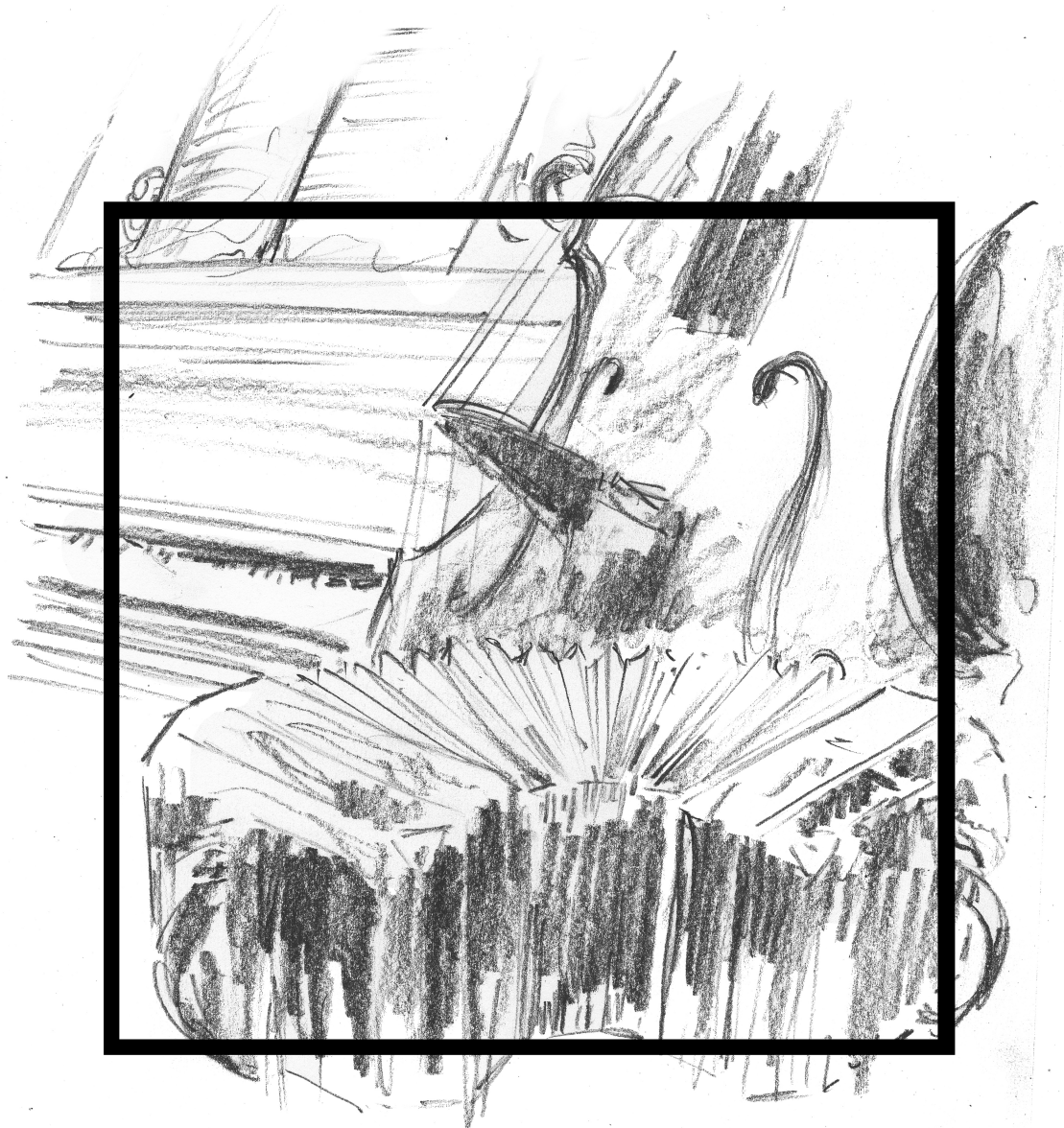
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A 'la' tía, que baila feliz en un campo de flores.

Dit proefschrift is geschreven als een gedeeltelijke vervulling van de vereisten voor het doctoraatsprogramma docARTES. De overblijvende vereiste bestaat uit een demonstratie van de onderzoeksresultaten in de vorm van een artistieke presentatie.

Het docARTES programma is georganiseerd door het Orpheus Instituut te Gent.

In samenwerking met de Universiteit Leiden, de Hogeschool der Kunsten Den Haag, het Conservatorium van Amsterdam, de Katholieke Universiteit Leuven en het Lemmensinstituut.



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Preface

This PhD dissertation is the result of the artistic research undertaken at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University, the Netherlands. It has been completed within the framework of docARTES programme at the Orpheus Institute, Gent, Belgium, with the following supervising team:

Directing supervisors: Joep Bor and Frans de Ruiter.

Academic specialist: Edgardo Rodríguez.

Artistic specialist: Gustavo Beytelmann.

These four years have been a challenging journey, in which intense work in both the artistic and theoretical domains have come together with the aim of exploring the art of creating and re-creating¹ tango music.

Aims and contents of the dissertation

In this research I analyse, decode and reflect on certain significant arrangements and compositions by Osvaldo Pugliese, Horacio Salgán, Astor Piazzolla and Gustavo Beytelmann in order to gain a deeper understanding of the artistic concepts and theoretical foundations of tango, as well as my own creative work.

I have chosen the four above-mentioned artists for two main reasons: first, for their contribution to the definition of the model² of tango language; second, for their ‘thickening’ or enlarging of that model through their numerous, ever-lasting contributions to tango. I use the term ‘thickening’ since I understand the development of this music as a clear continuity, with its luminaries – always rooted in the tango tradition – both combining the already existing techniques and materials in new ways, and providing additional ones from other practices through a process of borrowing and transforming. I strongly believe that the four musicians I have examined were able to stretch tango boundaries precisely because they knew the codes of the language so well.

In the case of Pugliese and Salgán, they were pillars in the 1940s, when the main features of this music were fixed and standardized. Moreover, they developed some traits of tango further while introducing new materials, techniques and concepts that were integrated into the general model, becoming in turn models for new compositions, arrangements and styles. As for Piazzolla and Beytelmann, a similar process occurred: they took a step forward in the development of tango language by pushing its boundaries and exploring its constituent elements further. Again, by introducing new materials, techniques and concepts, they defined new models which, in Piazzolla’s case, are already standards in their own right. Regarding Beytelmann, I believe he will inspire new generations of musicians with his fresh, innovative techniques and ideas.

¹ See The Fundamentals.

² Ibid.

My research project has a two-fold purpose:

1. To dig into the constituent elements of tango in order to decode how specific musical materials were organized and combined by the musicians. For this purpose, I have analysed a select number of representative pieces through a study of their scores and recordings. Special attention has been paid to the perception of phenomena beyond the scores, which are often incongruous with what is heard. This part of the work has led to the definition of certain artistic processes within the genre, theoretical foundations for such processes, and, in all, a deeper understanding of the art of composing and arranging tango, in addition to an overall, chronological view of the development of the genre and its techniques. The articulation and dissemination of this (partly) embodied knowledge has resulted in an original contribution to the field, providing new insights with which both I and the greater artistic community will be able to enrich our skills in arranging, composing and performing tango music.
2. To develop myself as a musician by distilling difficult-to-find information on the music created by the four artists under research. By reflecting on and experimenting with the outcomes and findings of this research, I can now determine which concepts work best within my own tango language, and discover new possibilities and standards for my production. As Beytelmann states about his own musical experience, quoting the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges: “It is everyone’s duty to find their own voice within language”³, the search for *my* voice being essential to this project. This drive has guided my research and musical life during the last years.

Research methodologies

Diverse approaches, activities and methodologies have been explored and applied to conduct this research in-and-through artistic practice and creation. This includes bibliographic research (books, published interviews, magazines, journals, symposium reports, CD/DVD booklets); data collection (audio-visual media, documents, original scores, programme notes, the internet); structural analysis of scores and recordings; interviews, and the translation of the outcomes into my own productions through empiric methods that allowed for experimentation with my findings.

The initial search for bibliographic material took place in Argentina. Books quoted in the Bibliography were classified, studied and used mainly for framing and contextualizing the research, describing the state of the art of the subject, and obtaining biographical (and anecdotal) data of musicians and their works. The study of related media, through the internet as well as through visual material and recordings, served the same purpose. A few books⁴ specifically focused on musical features were helpful for the definitions provided in the Glossary, which includes several examples taken from them.

³ Personal interview, March 2011.

⁴ Gallo, Ramiro: *El violín en el tango*; Munich: G. Ricordi & Co., 2011; Peralta, Julián: *La orquesta típica: mecánica y aplicación de los fundamentos técnicos del tango*; Buenos Aires: author, 2008; Salgán, Horacio: *Curso de tango*; Buenos Aires: author, 2001.

Although most books and articles dealing with tango focus on historical or biographical issues, several published interviews with the musicians under analysis have proven to be quite useful. Even though the artists themselves do not explicitly say much about their way of writing and arranging tangos, some interviews provide invaluable information about their professional lives and opinions about their own music and tango in general. In this respect, the interviews I personally conducted in Argentina and Europe both for my Master's research and for the present dissertation, produced crucial pieces of information while allowing me a closer contact with the world of tango. Luckily enough, I was able to discuss many of Beytelmann's pieces directly with the composer himself, several features of Salgán's music with his son César (who has continued his father's quintet and plays the same repertoire), and certain issues regarding Pugliese and Piazzolla's oeuvre with musicians who played side by side with them or knew them well (Marconi, Lavallén, Stampone, Marcelli, Garello, among others). This was a privilege of immense value and gave me the chance of meeting generous and kind people, listening to fantastic anecdotes and music, as well as embracing the tango world from many different angles.

Apart from the data taken from existing literature, all other information presented in this dissertation is original and arises from my engagement with – and reflections on – tango music in two interlinked domains: my practice as pianist, arranger and composer, and the theoretical work fulfilled during the last seven years, first for my Master, later for this PhD trajectory.

The main body of this dissertation results from the structural analysis of certain pieces by the four key musicians in this research. A significant amount of scores and audio material was gathered by visiting libraries, archives, collectors and musicians, both in Argentina and Europe. After examining a substantial number of audio tracks and sheet music, making transcriptions of recordings into scores, and correcting incomplete or mistaken ones, I carefully selected the pieces I consider most representative of the four composers I had chosen and went back to them for a deeper analysis. My choice of the tangos for the case studies is specified in each instance, and was based on both the judgement of the composers themselves (when available) and my own, as well as – oftentimes – public consensus. The multiple perspectives that were used for structural analyses seek to go beyond partial approaches that do not address works in a comprehensive way. This gave me the opportunity for a close observation of many issues with the aim of discovering and decoding the elements, techniques and procedures they were based on and that could define the stylistic traits of their composers. I have classified the main characteristics and innovative peculiarities of those pieces by taking into consideration formal, textural, harmonic and melodic features, rhythm and meter, techniques of variation, orchestration and segmentation, timbral and percussive effects, the use of register, performance techniques, and the relationship between the main lines and the diverse accompanimental archetypes. The same parameters and techniques were observed throughout all the pieces, taking into account perceptive and performative issues, and they were formalized in:

a) chapters 1-4, constituting a precise summary of the stylistic traits and language of each composer;

- b) chapter 5, presenting a comparative analysis of the same piece by three of the four artists under research – showing their common points and contrasts;
- c) the general conclusions – contributing a complete overview of the composers' oeuvre, their influences, and the development of tango music in the last seventy years.

In addition, and parallel to the above-mentioned methodologies, I engaged in complementary activities. Consulting tango and non-tango musicians has contributed indispensable insight and information for my research. Working together with researchers and Western art music⁵ composers who were not familiar with tango language was also essential. The former helped me to define a vocabulary and forced me to the difficult task of transforming my sometimes confusing and passionate ideas and intuitions into clear and objective explanations and conceptualizations. The latter helped me to discover musical possibilities outside the genre that I could combine with traditional tango elements, and led me to consolidate my views and taste through experimenting with different kinds of materials and techniques alien to the tango tradition.

Last but not least, the formulation of hypothesis and conclusions, and the translation of the findings into my own production through empiric methods and experimentation were executed alongside the analytical part of the work. The continuous exchange between the practical and theoretical aspects of this research project was essential, always strengthening and feeding back each other. I have successfully integrated many of the findings into my own music, be it compositional or performative. This becomes clear in the last chapter, which includes the analysis of three compositions and their complete scores. Then follows a list of the pieces arranged and composed during these four years, some of which will be performed in the final concert preceding the public defence of this written dissertation.

Organization and specific contents of the dissertation

The dissertation is organized as follows:

- a) An Introduction contextualizes the research, the musicians studied and tango music in general, while establishing a connection with the current situation of the subject under analysis.
- b) “The Fundamentals” introduces key features of tango music.
- c) A Glossary defines the vocabulary used in the dissertation, and provides explanatory annotations.
- d) The main body of the research is divided into four sections, each devoted to a different artist: Pugliese, Salgán, Piazzolla and Beytelmann. Every section begins with a brief biography, continues with the analysis of the pieces, and ends with a concise summary of the techniques found. The CD accompanying this dissertation contains the respective pieces, which carry the timing of the main issues described in the analyses.
- e) A comparative analysis of a traditional tango, *El entrerriano* by Rosendo Mendizábal, will follow the chapters about the four artists. In this section,

⁵ See Glossary.

three of the four musicians' arrangements will be looked at to further highlight their different approaches to the same musical material.

- f) A chapter devoted to the music I have composed in the light of my findings and as a result of experimenting with the materials.
- g) And finally, a closing chapter devoted to the general conclusions.

This dissertation is focused only on instrumental music; thus, sung tangos will not be analysed. Although some of the pieces under analysis had lyrics in their original version, they will be studied in their instrumental arrangements with little or no reference to the lyrics. Aspects related to the dance and other artistic expressions that are part of the tango universe will not be included either. Biographical, historical and social references are aimed at complementing the main subject of this dissertation (the creation and re-creation in instrumental tango by the four above-mentioned composers); consequently, they are not meant to be exhaustive.

In any case, unless otherwise noted, all quotes (both from material sources and from the interviews) are translated into English by me.

Significance and results of the dissertation

Having to solve many issues in my everyday practice of writing and performing tango music was how this research got started. I had to combine my interest in composing and arranging, and my experience in performing this music, with research methods to gain data and to fill what I perceived to be a large gap in information on tango. Therefore, I can state with confidence that this research would not have been possible without being myself a tango musician – with a classical background – for so many years. This gives me several advantages: first, I am in the middle of music practice, as a performer, arranger and composer. Second, from this position, when doing research I am able to pose different questions and draw different conclusions, whilst grasping the codes of the genre in an all-embracing way. Moreover, many of the pieces included in this dissertation are part of the repertoire I have played with different ensembles, as are many other compositions and arrangements by the selected masters. This gives me a larger picture and deeper understanding of their production and the necessary perspective for fully comprehending those pieces. Through analysis and theoretical research I have discovered a great deal of features and details of which I was unaware while playing. Likewise, my style of performing and writing tango music after doing this research has new attributes and a new approach.

In addition, playing with many tango musicians of both the current and older generations has provided me with a unique, first-hand insight into distinctive features and tricks of tango, and into the stories behind this language. As many clues are actually passed on through oral tradition, and much knowledge lies in and behind its shared codes, I assume that a non-tango musician could not have grasped this language in the same way as I do. In fact, many of the relevant issues result from the inseparable combination of my musical background and knowledge, and my activities in research, through which I could access further information and explore new paths with respect, intuition and a strong sense of belonging to the genre.

Below are the results of my search and research.

Acknowledgements

One of the rewards of working on this research project was that it gave me the chance to meet so many great people. During these intense and challenging years I was not alone but accompanied by an extended team of experts, colleagues, friends and family. For this, I would like to kindly thank them.

The docARTES team

Frans de Ruiter has been the ‘brain’ organizing the whole team and the complex system behind it. With extreme efficiency he has solved many problems, put people coming from diverse countries and professional fields together and supported my requests. He also did a careful editing of the English version of this dissertation.

Gustavo Beytelmann has been an invaluable asset to this research as an artistic specialist. Many concepts and ideas exposed in this dissertation have been worked out together with him, and his own experience and deep knowledge of the tango language have always been both useful and inspiring for my own arrangements and compositions. Last but not least, his creative remarks on my music have always been enlightening and ever-lasting pieces of advice.

Joep Bor has been supportive and generous. His advice was indispensable to enter the docARTES programme in the first place. His ideas on how to structure the dissertation were useful and necessary.

Edgardo “Chino” Rodríguez’s contribution has been essential for my research. Finding a professor who knew about tango music and even played, arranged and performed it, who was an expert in musical analysis, who was a researcher and willing to join the project seemed a dream. Chance made that happen. He helped me with the difficult task of transforming my sometimes confusing and passionate ideas and intuitions into clear and objective explanations and conceptualizations. He fully edited the Spanish version of this dissertation.

Thanks to all the docARTES team for their outstanding work within the realm of artistic research.

Experts outside the docARTES programme

Omar García Brunelli provided me invaluable pieces of information and material.

Leo Vervelde gave me free access to the transcriptions and scores in the Tango Archives from codarts, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Composers Giacomo Platini and Jacopo Baboni Schilingi have taught me a great deal of techniques and processes from classical Western art music composition to apply in my tango pieces. Their help has been indispensable in my creative process.

Sam Wamper has been a great harmony and counterpoint teacher.

Composers Ethan Braun and Brendan Faegre have been of great help with the technical vocabulary used and with my English version of this dissertation.

Javier Martínez Lo Re provided useful pieces of information, scores and arrangements.

Mauricio Martínez drew all the illustrations present in this dissertation.

Patricia Labastié, friend and sister, was a great supporter, helping and always ready to give advice and encouragement.

The musicians who tried my pieces out all these years, giving useful advice and encouragement, special thanks to Gerardo Agnese, Virgilio Monti and Vincenzo Albini.

Other people I would like to thank for diverse reasons include: Wim Warman, Kiki Kossmann, Mauricio Martínez, Martina Angelino Catella, Matías Pedrana, Elisabetta Gri, Henrice Vonck, Federico Monjeau, Esther Van Fenema, Santiago Cimadevilla, Janine Krueger, Julián Peralta, Verónica D'Amore, Maurizio Maioli, Claudio Constantini, Mark Wyman, Ruzana Tsymbalova, Víctor Villena, Álvaro Rovira Ruiz, Alejandro Schwartz, Francesco Bruno, Anahid Khatcheressian, Micha Molthoff and Alicia Alonso Baeza.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends both in Europe and Argentina for their love and support.

N.B.

In 1993, Dr. Joep Bor, then principal of the World Music Department that he created at the Rotterdam Conservatoire, The Netherlands, appointed Pugliese as Honorary Artistic Director of the Argentine Tango chair, under the tuition of professors Leo Vervelde and Carel Kraayenhof. In 1996, this chair was held by Maestro Gustavo Beytelmann. It is my great honor to have Mr. Bor and Mr. Beytelmann as supervisors of the present research, and I am truly grateful for their invaluable contributions.