Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

**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

## The Fundamentals

Tango is a living, dynamic music and its function as a social code goes beyond the realm of popular music. In traditional tango, the idea of composition is substantially different from its counterpart in some forms of Western art music. The practice of tango involves looking at various artist's output (signed compositions) as 'open' objects; in other words, tangos have always been freely manipulated by both performers and arrangers based on tastes, modes, times and styles. This represents one of the main features of the genre, and also an important act of translation: the arrangements of the same piece by different musicians over time result in a diversity of works, which enrich both the genre and the original pieces. The roles of 'author' (the composer) and 'manipulator' (the arranger or performer) often overlap. This is the reason I prefer the term 're-create' to the more common 'arrange', being different versions of the same tango so elaborated and distinct to stand up for themselves as almost new compositions. In fact, the public expects arrangers/performers to come up with a personal version of the pieces, which is not only a stamp of authenticity as could be desired in any other kind of music, but goes even further, allowing the artists to vary, fundamentally, the structural materials[18] of the music, or even to add new ones. The specificity of the musical language of tango makes it possible to expand borders on one side, while maintaining the music's character on the other; this will become clear in the pieces studied in this dissertation. A strain of familiarity is expressed in every instance of the compositions, but each one is unique.

### The available scores

Traditionally, the edited tango scores are simplified versions for solo piano. The melody in the upper staff is generally written *cuadrado*[19] with an approximate rhythm, and, in the lower staff some rudimentary accompanimental patterns set the harmony, simplified as well and based on progressions of I-(IV)-V-I. Thus, if one is unfamiliar with the vocabulary of tango that enables a 'creative' reading of these scores, it is impossible to reach a stylistically correct interpretation. Besides, the arrangements made from these scores were not printed, making the work of the arranger indispensable. For this dissertation, it was necessary either to transcribe or to obtain the transcriptions of certain versions in order to be able to analyse them. The figures that exemplify many of these analyses thus show a way of writing that is more faithful to the recording than to the scores musicians used to read, which indeed were altered in performance and recording situations.[20]

---

[18] See Glossary.

[19] Ibid.

[20] This study will not analyse possibilities for interpretation of individual rhythmical or melodic figures, articulations and other features, which in themselves provide enough material for further research.

**The model**

First of all, I would like to define what I call the 'tango model', which encompasses the manifold of contents that shape this music. These are the tools being used in a certain framework to host a certain (in this case, tango) language, which serves to understand newly introduced parameters or modifications over time. Therefore, what is part of the consolidated model belongs to the knowledge and expertise of all tango musicians. Influences from outside the model can enter the system and become part of it (as is the case of many features introduced by the musicians studied in this dissertation) or just used for a while and then left behind (as has happened with drums, nowadays only occasionally used). I have strived to consolidate into my tango model those most common elements of the language, which are nearly all listed in the Glossary. What has been introduced to the genre by the artists under research will be studied in the ensuing analyses.

A main case of systematization of new forms was enabled by the sextet conducted by Julio De Caro[21] in the 1920s. Those musicians provided new means of musical notation and instrumental skills that overturned the tango music at the time and served as a point of departure for the following generations, which include the four musicians studied in the present dissertation. These new means, at first considered 'exceptions', triggered a revolution in tango, but were later incorporated to the genre.[22] Another process of renovation occurred in the beginning of the 1960s when Astor Piazzolla introduced elements from outside the current musical codes of tango. His contributions to the genre included much longer melodic phrases and periods, and their combinations, which he took from the music of his youth: jazz. Still, he kept the contrast between rhythmical and cantabile phrases, each distinctive elements of tango music. Again, after their immediate reception as being odd, Piazzolla's stylistic contributions became part of the norm.

**Form**[23]

Old tangos are typically in three sections[24] (tripartite form: **A** + **B** + **C**, with **C** commonly referred to as *trio*); however, following the 1920s-1930s musicians composed mainly in two parts (bipartite form: **A** + **B**). The formal structure is usually organized both by thematic and by articulation contrasts, alternating rhythmical, articulated motives[25], phrases[26] and sections with lyrical, legato ones. Sections are further differentiated through changes in tonality, as well as modulations commonly

---

[21] Julio De Caro: violin player, conductor and composer (1899–1980).

[22] "As from 1924, violinist Julio De Caro established a new and far-reaching style with his sextet. This would gravitate, as no other style had, in the tango history to come by widening its spiritual horizon. So much so that since then, the De Caro school, in the instrumental level, and the Gardel school, in the vocal level, were considered simultaneously but separately the supreme guide to tango interpretation in their corresponding areas. De Caro maintained the essence of the tango originated in the slums, brave and playful as in the beginnings, but blending it with a sentimental and melancholic expressivity unknown up to then, so reconciling the folk root with the pro-European influence". http://en-us.todotango.com/Creadores/Biografia.aspx?id=34. Accessed April 13, 2012.

[23] See Glossary.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

moving between parallel, relative or other closely-related tonalities. Contrasts can also be made through registration, instrumentation, rhythmical organization and tempo. Each section usually consists of two eight-bar phrases, and therefore in traditional tango they are mostly sixteen bars long. Apart from few exceptions, the last phrase of each section is harmonically resolved with an authentic cadence and melodically resolved in the first beat of the last bar. On the other side, phrase endings that are not section endings avoid creating cadential resolutions and resolve otherwise, or do not resolve at all.

**The basic syntactic structures**

1- Reiterative: imitation, ostinato. E.g. Beginning of *Gallo ciego* by Agustín Bardi.



GALLO CIEGO

TANGO

Música de: AGUSTIN BARDI

2- Period: phase and counterphase, providing a sense of interdependence. E.g. *La casita de mis viejos* by Juan Carlos Cobián.



Al Doctor Alberto Viñas

## LA CASITA DE MIS VIEJOS
### TANGO

Letra de
ENRIQUE CADICAMO

Música de
JUAN CARLOS COBIÁN

3- Evolutive: presentation and evolution. Such structures can take different paths but always return to an initial point: a, a', a'', etc. E.g. *Tanguedia* by Astor Piazzolla; beginning of *Inventario* by Gustavo Beytelmann.
4- Contrastive: consecutive, different units (a, b, c, etc.). E.g. *Retrato de Alfredo Gobbi* by Astor Piazzolla.

These four structures may also be combined, redefining the parts and the general form.

**The main rhythmical and accentual structures in tango**

The ***strong-weak*** (*S-W*) rhythmical organization is preeminent in tango, and is typically established in a 4/4 bar. As this popular music traditionally has neither rhythm section nor a conductor outside the ensemble, an accompanying rhythmical base[27] fulfils the task both of maintaining a steady beat and guiding the ensemble. Everything that happens within tango music evolves around this *S-W* structure, be it to emphasize, alter or counteract it. There are many musical materials in tango that are used to counter the pulse: tango surrounds the pulse, plays around it.

The clearest evidence of development in tango music is the transitional process from a total convergence of musical materials with the steady, accented beat to contrapuntal features meant to enliven the *S-W* structure. It is due to this steady beat that musicians needed to find alternatives in order to avoid predictability, and thereby developed devices and techniques that would become definitive traits of tango. According to Novati tango is made up of:

---

[27] See Glossary.

20

a series of little devices, always used with better precision and elegance, which constitute a discontinuous rhythm. Rests, syncopation, accent displacements and phrases starting with eighth-rests on the downbeat are all outstanding traits of this unique rhythmical shape. However, on top of all these elements and the effects obtained, there is an essential aspect: these devices are utilized in such a way that they do not constitute something perceived as permanent in their audition. They constitute, in general, unexpected rhythmical events.[28]

As can be deduced from the Glossary, most features of tango language departed from the need of altering the steady beat. One primary example of this is syncopation[29], which generates destabilization by shifting the accents from the beats. Salgán is particularly extreme in the use of syncopation. In his *La llamo silbando*, for example, both the melody and the accompaniment play mostly on the upbeat. There are plenty of examples where notes or figures come immediately before or after the *S*. In Pugliese's *yumba*[30], for example, the *S-W* steady beat is strongly emphasized, but his great device is avoiding playing beats 1 and 3 precisely in tempo. In fact, they are slightly anticipated, provoking tension and generating motion.

*Sine qua non* in tango music is the *fraseo*[31], which generates dialectic (or even tensioning) relationships between beat and melody organization and has a double function. Firstly, it serves personal expression. Piazzolla has a way of phrasing which tends to rush; bandoneonist Aníbal Troilo, to drag; and Salgán a mix of both, depending on the mood of the music. There exist as many variants as artists; notation is only a means to ends determined far more by individual artistic sensibility. Secondly, phrasing is the possibility of counteracting the steady beat: it enlivens music by bringing it out from the mundane of a regular 1-2-3-4. Among the luminaries of tango, we can observe one fundamental: sneaking melodic convergence with the beat through their phrasings (mainly avoiding the downbeat), all of which creates great tension with the steady accompanying base. An additional strategy to play around the steady beat is through syntactic organization by phrases. The phrase is the most highly lauded element of tango interpretation. Musicians generally play phrases freely, 'floating' with a rubato, non in tempo melodic line over steady accompanimental patterns, which are always played a tempo. Be it phrased or *cuadrado*, melodies played over an accompanying base constitute the main texture of tango, the accompanying base also having the role of expressing the harmonic materials.

The use of dynamic accents and articulations that serve convergence and divergence from the steady beat in 4/4 is essential. The extreme dynamic differentiation between accented, percussive elements and unaccented, staccato and almost not played elements is both a device to compensate for the lack of percussion and to alter the steady beat, representing one of the main traits of tango music. In addition, the use of both rubato (accelerandos and ritardandos) and sudden tempo changes serve the same purpose. Dragging, rushing, sudden stops, anticipating or delaying, and changing tempo in short time spans are each part of the standard vocabulary of tango playing. It

---

[28] Novati, Jorge (editor): *Antología del tango rioplatense, Vol. 1 (desde sus comienzos hasta 1920)*; Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de Musicología Carlos Vega, 1980.
[29] See Glossary.
[30] Ibid.
[31] See Glossary.

is noteworthy that all these techniques are used in the course of a piece three minutes long (the average length of a tango).

As regards melody, convergence and divergence with the rhythmical base are determined by the relationship of the notes that belong to the underlying harmony and their position in the bar. In the harmonical-melodical organization the use of simple chords of three or four notes is enriched with the addition of grace notes contrasting both with the harmony (they do not belong to the chord) and with the steady beat (they usually counteract meter).

The aforementioned variables represent only a small amount of the possibilities, but are surely primary features of tango music. Due to the intimate correlation and combination of parameters and materials (register, instrumentation, harmony, articulations, texture, etc.), they will be treated simultaneously in the analyses included in this dissertation; this study will deal with the interplay of all of these.