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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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1.1 Osvaldo Pugliese - Introduction

Pianist, composer, arranger and conductor (1905–1995)

Osvaldo Pugliese received his first musical education from his father, an amateur flautist who played in amateur tango quartets. He first learnt violin, like his brothers, and then studied piano in local music conservatories. As a teenager, his music accompanied silent films, his professional career beginning in a bar called “Café de la Chancha”.⁶⁴ Later, he worked as a replacement musician in a number of dance orchestras and then joined the ensemble led by legendary Paquita Bernardo⁶⁵, where he met violinist Elvino Vardaro, with whom he would later form the Vardaro-Pugliese sextet in 1929. The ensemble was disbanded due to lack of commercial success, but was reformed with a new line-up in 1930, including such luminaries as Alfredo Gobbi on second violin, and with Aníbal Troilo and Ciriaco Ortiz on bandoneon. By the time Pugliese assembled his own orchestra in 1939, he was already a professional pianist of renown who had collaborated with the most outstanding figures and ensembles of the time: Enrique Pollet’s⁶⁶ sextet, and the orchestras conducted by Pedro Laurenz⁶⁷, Miguel Caló⁶⁸ and Pedro Maffia⁶⁹. He produced his most refined works with his *orquesta típica*, to which he was devoted exclusively until he died. We will give special attention to this ensemble.

Pugliese’s aesthetic stance within the context of the historical development of tango can be appreciated through some of his statements:

Tango has two well-defined traits: the melodic trait and the rhythmical or milonga-oriented trait. The expression of melodic tango ended with pianists Francisco De Caro, Carlos Flores and, to a certain extent, Juan Carlos Cobián. They were all the products of an era, back in 1926. The other trend is the most popular, since people who went to dance balls and cafés embraced it as tango that could be listened to and danced to as well. It is the path of tango milonga characteristic of [violinist and pianist] Agustín Bardi, [bandoneonist] Eduardo Arolas, [bandoneonist] Pedro Maffia, [violinist] Julio De Caro, [bandoneonist] Pedro Laurenz. When I had the chance to assemble my own orchestra, I thought which line to choose. I chose the milonga line, and I have always remained true to this trend, in terms of feelings and consciousness. We always followed an evolutionist line, yet always within the popular tradition of tango.⁷⁰

I come from the school of Julio and Francisco De Caro, Pedro Maffia, Pedro Laurenz. Through their legacy I was merged into a style based on adaptation and the addition of musical forms characteristic of tango. My style is a cultural heritage from those creators. The way I perform quite resembles Francisco De Caro, an exquisite creator of unparalleled musical

⁶⁴ *Café de la Chancha* (“Pig’s café”) was a neighborhood bar where tango performances took place regularly. The saying goes that the café was called so due to its owner’s poor personal hygiene.

⁶⁵ Bandoneon player and composer (1900-1925).

⁶⁶ Bandoneon player, conductor and composer (1901–1975).

⁶⁷ Bandoneon player, conductor and composer (1902–1972).

⁶⁸ Bandoneon player, conductor and composer (1907–1972).

⁶⁹ Bandoneon player, conductor and composer (1899–1967).

⁷⁰ Keselman, Julio and García Falcó, Marta: *Osvaldo Pugliese*; Buenos Aires: author, Centro Cultural Osvaldo Pugliese, 2005, p. 35.

richness. Our repertoire is indeed the result of those initial roots. We based our works on that very repertoire when we started to play together in 1939. We cannot overlook the tango movement driven by Julio De Caro, who incorporated the orchestral arrangement into the genre and rendered it a well-defined musicality.⁷¹

In the seventies, Julio De Caro⁷² considered himself to be Pugliese's spiritual and artistic father. He deemed Pugliese to be his "best son"⁷³. In this respect he stated:

Troilo and Federico are also my sons. [Violinist] Gobbi and [bandoneonist] Piazzolla himself were, too. But Pugliese was my first son. Also, if Cobián was a man ahead of his time, if Pedro Maffía and Francisco De Caro were pioneers in their instruments, Pugliese was a precursor of modernism in tango.⁷⁴

In fact, Julio De Caro's pieces recorded by Pugliese's orchestra in the 1940s were played almost with the same original arrangements as in De Caro's. The renewal of tradition, carried out by Pugliese, began with *La rayuela* (1953), whose arrangement he commissioned to Emilio Balcarce⁷⁵, requesting it should be different from Julio De Caro's. From then on, with the re-creation of many tango pieces, the orchestra gradually developed a style that reached its apex in the late 1950s. The orchestra shaped up an original, vigorous *marcato*: the so-called *yumba*⁷⁶, which would become their distinctive mark:

Tango has a characteristic trait of the *folklore* of the Pampas: the *arrastre*⁷⁷ or dragging especially practiced by the school of Julio De Caro, [pianist] Di Sarli and our ensemble. On the other hand, you have *marcato*, which Julio De Caro accented in the first and third beats, in some cases by means of *arrastre*. We have combined both things: the *marcato* of the first and third beats, and the percussive, shaking dragging.⁷⁸

The essence of Pampa (*folklore*⁷⁹) has a deep meaning in Pugliese's conception of tango. For him, "vernacular traits are akin to *porteño* [from Buenos Aires] traits."⁸⁰

In the words of Mauricio Marcelli⁸¹:

The orchestra was more melodic in its beginnings; it had more strings. Then it gradually added a rhythmical sense that is unique, absolutely personal, resulting from experiences previous to the ensemble itself, created by Julio De Caro. Pugliese's orchestra was a version of Julio De

⁷¹ Del Priore, Oscar: *Oswaldo Pugliese. Una vida en el tango*; Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada S.A., 2007, p. 60.

⁷² Julio De Caro: violin player, conductor and composer (1899–1980); Francisco de Caro: pianist and composer (1898–1976).

⁷³ Keselman and García Falcó: *Oswaldo Pugliese*, p. 22.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Violin and bandoneon player, conductor, arranger and composer (1918–2011).

⁷⁶ See Glossary.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Del Priore: *Oswaldo Pugliese*, p. 72.

⁷⁹ See Glossary.

⁸⁰ Keselman and García Falcó: *Oswaldo Pugliese*, p. 12.

⁸¹ Violinist, conductor, composer and arranger (b. 1941).

Caro's, only much more modern, which also resembled Alfredo Gobbi in some aspects. As Pugliese shaped his style, the orchestra gradually improved.⁸²

In this respect Pugliese stated:

I did not create Pugliese style, the public did. As I learnt new things, new ideas came to my mind. I rehearsed them and presented them to the public. If they approved of them, it meant I had apprehended their sensitivity, their aspirations. And the idea was kept. And that is how the so-called Pugliese style took shape.⁸³

On the other hand, the continuity of the orchestra allowed Pugliese to reinforce his style and ideas, based on valuable contributions from his musicians. Among them, Aniceto Rossi provided a distinct rhythmical sensibility with his bass playing, while Osvaldo Ruggiero learnt his sense of phrasing on bandoneon. Violinist Enrique Camerano, an exemplar of the De Caro style, brought contrasts of poignant *marcato*, alongside long, lyrical solos, of high expressive power, and “a certain gypsy air”.⁸⁴

Astor Piazzolla claimed:

If Gobbi's merit lies in having introduced harmony in tango, Pugliese's is having rendered its rhythmical essence. For me, they are both admirable. Gobbi is a sort of Pugliese today, and he will be tomorrow, as he plays in the manner typical of his times and he is, first and foremost, a true scholar. I wish there were many Puglieses. Young people who love tango and people who play tango need them.⁸⁵

“The composers' orchestra”

The origins of what we know today as Osvaldo Pugliese's orchestra was the ensemble that made its debut on August 11th, 1939, in café “El Nacional”, Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was formed by Enrique Alessio, Osvaldo Ruggiero, Luis Bonnat (bandoneons); Enrique Camerano, Julio Carrasco, Jaime Tursky (violins); Aniceto Rossi (double bass), and Amadeo Mandarino (voice), with Pugliese on the piano. All of Pugliese's musicians were outstanding performers and arrangers, both roles being essential requirements for joining the group. Pugliese would encourage his musicians to make arrangements, motivating them with the phrase “get sheets dirty”⁸⁶. During rehearsals, each musician made suggestions and pieces were revised until a final version was agreed upon.⁸⁷ Because of the way they worked, Pugliese's orchestra became known as “the composers' orchestra”.⁸⁸ According to bandoneonist Daniel Binelli, Pugliese rejected certain arrangements for having “too many ideas together”⁸⁹. Pugliese aimed at removing superfluous notes, keeping only the essential

⁸² Keselman and García Falcó: *Osvaldo Pugliese*, p. 62.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸⁴ Del Priore: *Osvaldo Pugliese*, p. 62. As pointed out by Szymia Bajour.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸⁶ Keselman and García Falcó: *Osvaldo Pugliese*, p. 65.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸⁸ Keselman and García Falcó: *Osvaldo Pugliese*, p. 64.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

ones in order to present the structure with the fewest elements possible. Once the arrangement was deemed acceptable, it would be premiered. If, subsequently, it proved a success, it would be added to the repertoire, if not, it would at least be recorded.

Another singular feature of Pugliese's orchestra was its embrace of a cooperative system of self-regulation. There was a grading system that allowed for penalties, given for certain forms of misbehavior, like truancy, with penalties such as lowered pay. Each musician received a grade depending on his seniority and his degree of popularity. Thus, on occasions, Osvaldo Ruggiero, greatly successful as a composer, earned more money from the orchestra than Pugliese himself. This element of the ensemble originates in Pugliese's political activism, which he demonstrated in both his personal and professional life.⁹⁰ He was a member of the Communist Party, whose affiliation led to bans on his orchestra's broadcasting. As Pugliese recalls: "in 1948 I was virtually wiped off the map. Nobody offered me a job, I suffered humiliations; yet the orchestra kept playing, with no piano, while I was in jail, with a red carnation on the piano."⁹¹ His politics also influenced his creation of the foundation "La Casa del Tango" in Buenos Aires, for which he had long struggled. "La Casa del Tango" was a life concept for Pugliese, it was the embodiment of a musician's solidarity in that it provided a place to learn, practice, and experiment. In 1985, Pugliese stated, "Among other dreams, we want to build a small university where, besides specific subjects such as performance and singing techniques, lectures are given and research is carried out [...], and also a first-class library".

1968 marked a milestone for the ensemble, as six of its best musicians decided to form a sextet in the Julio De Caro style for night shows. Bandoneon players Osvaldo Ruggiero and Víctor Lavallén, violinists Oscar Herrero and Emilio Balcarce, pianist Julián Plaza (formerly a bandoneon player in Pugliese's orchestra), double bass player Aniceto Rossi and singer Jorge Maciel left the orchestra due to shortage of work and Pugliese's decision to keep it mainly for performing on TV and live shows. The new ensemble, known as "Sexteto Tango", would perform simultaneously with Pugliese's orchestra, but their increasing popularity led to the Sexteto's abandoning Pugliese.⁹² Pugliese was thus forced to form a new ensemble, after some attempts with minor groups. In this new line-up, remaining more or less stable till his death, Pugliese kept Arturo Penón on bandoneon, Raúl Domínguez on violin, and Abel Córdoba as singer. New musicians included Enrique Lanó on cello, Omar Murtagh on double bass, Daniel Binelli, Rodolfo Mederos and Juan José Mosalini on bandoneons, Mauricio Marcelli on solo violin, Santiago Kushevatzky on violin, Bautista Huerta on viola, and Fernando Romano on double bass. The last show given by Pugliese and his orchestra was in "La Casa del Tango" in June 1995, shortly before his death.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 58: "The whole group also decided whether to embark on a tour or not, whether they accepted a show or not, and the artistic fee. In some cases, they even decided to play for free because, upon debate, it was considered to be fair."

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁹² Ibid., p. 72.

Works

Although Pugliese composed more than 100 pieces, many of them were never recorded: of a total of 363 tangos recorded by his orchestra by 1976, only 22 were his own compositions.⁹³ He was only a teenager when he composed the well-known *Recuerdo* (1924). Pedro Laurenz took the score to Julio De Caro to record it for the first time with his sextet in 1926. De Caro commented:

Recuerdo marks a milestone in tango composition. It embraces a modern concept in its harmonic structure, in the unforeseen development of its melodic line, in its color, in its well-achieved changes in tonality, in the appropriate arpeggios, in its original variation. It is one of the works of art in our tango that will last forever.⁹⁴

Among the pieces he wrote, *La yumba* (1943), *Negracha* (1947) and *Malandraca* (1948) make up Pugliese's innovative trilogy. In 1961, Astor Piazzolla endorsed this idea when he claimed that *Malandraca* was the most modern tango written so far.⁹⁵ In his words:

Pugliese is very important for me musically because he is part of my formation [as a musician]. I would slip from the cabaret where I played with Aníbal Troilo to listen to Osvaldo perform with Alfredo Gobbi. All of my music has been influenced by his. *La yumba*, *Recuerdo*, *Negracha*, *Malandraca*, *La Beba* [...]. This music runs in my blood. I always say that the most important aspect of Osvaldo's works is that he found that magical thing called style. He built the Pugliese style. The way he played the piano, used accents, and phrased with the orchestra.

In line with Astor Piazzolla, pianist Atilio Stampone noted:

As a composer, Pugliese was avant-garde, mainly with *Negracha*, *La yumba*. And I believe that Osvaldo created many of the new, modern tangos. However, Osvaldo did not continue this musical line, probably due to a certain doctrine. *Negracha* and musical pieces of the sort were really groundbreaking for the times. Then he went back to the traditional line, De Caro pieces, and he managed to line up an unparalleled group. Ruggiero could not play the bandoneon unless it was that style. For the Pugliese style, there was nothing comparable to Osvaldo Ruggiero. In so many years, I never heard him miss a note. It is worth mentioning that he found musicians of the standing of Aniceto Rossi on double bass and Enrique Camerano on violin; it was a whole group that helped define style. Indeed, Osvaldo's music could wake a dead man. I have to admit it, even if I am more of a supporter of the Troilo line.⁹⁶

⁹³ Keselman and García Falcó: *Osvaldo Pugliese*, pp. 34-35.

⁹⁴ Del Priore: *Osvaldo Pugliese*, p. 35.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁹⁶ Keselman and García Falcó: *Osvaldo Pugliese*, p. 214.

Analysis of works

In order to determine the structural characteristics of his language, I have analyzed two pieces composed by Pugliese and two representative arrangements of the orchestra. The pieces chosen for this purpose are:

- *El andariego*, composed by Alfredo Gobbi
- *La mariposa*, composed by Pedro Maffia
- *Negracha*, composed by Pugliese
- *A los artistas plásticos*, composed by Pugliese.