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4.1 Gustavo Beytelmann - Introduction

Pianist, arranger and composer (1945)

In recent years, many innovations have been made in tango. One such innovation is a fusion of genres, which, to a greater or lesser extent, build on or redefine structural elements of tango. The work of Gustavo Beytelmann is exemplary of such innovation: it features a fusion of 20th century Western art music and popular music (tango).

According to Esteban Buch, who submits that tango is undoubtedly the main reference for Beytelmann's music:

The generic complexity of Piazzolla's music opened up new possibilities that have seldom been explored in a truly original fashion. Gustavo Beytelmann's work [...] may well represent the most relevant proposal in this regard, capable of adding what Piazzolla's world precisely lacked: the 'true' contemporary music that since the fifties did not turn to Nadia Boulanger but to Pierre Boulez, and in Beytelmann's very case, to Francisco Kröpfl.²⁵⁵

Born in Venado Tuerto, Argentina, to a family of musicians and music lovers, Beytelmann played classical and popular piano repertoire from a very young age. The experience of performing in *orquestas típicas* and various ensembles, some with his father, a violinist, exposed him to a myriad of popular music genres, deeply influencing his career. The connection between popular and art music continued during the years he studied classical piano, harmony and composition in Rosario, where his activities as a tango pianist for composer and bandoneonist Domingo Federico also marked a milestone in his musical life. According to Beytelmann:

Astor Piazzolla once said that Aníbal Troilo passed down the secrets of tango music to him. I can say that the very same thing happened to me with Domingo Federico. Also because of the age difference we had... he had worked with the best orchestras and had a clear perception tango.²⁵⁶

Having settled in Buenos Aires in 1968, he worked as a pianist in jazz groups and a variety of record productions, in addition to working as a composer for films. While in Buenos Aires, he studied composition with Francisco Kröpfl²⁵⁷, which greatly enriched his experiences with popular music, leading him towards a more unique, personal voice. His relation with Kröpfl led him to work more deeply on an elaborate study of rhythm and accentuation, both being central characteristics of his music that, in Buch's words, "seems to be always in a state of dialectic tension between a metric

²⁵⁵ Buch, Esteban (compiler): *Tangos Cultos: Kagel, J. J. Castro, Mastropiero y otros cruces musicales*; Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2012, p. 19.

²⁵⁶ Personal interview, April 2012.

²⁵⁷ Kröpfl is considered to be one of the most important Argentinian composers. He was one of the pioneers in electro-acoustic media in Latin America and in 1958 he founded the Musical Phonology Studio of the University of Buenos Aires, the first institutional electronic music studio in Latin America. The catalogue of his works includes chamber music, orchestral music, electro-acoustic music and mixed music. He developed the analytical method of "accentual prototypes", as he himself described in magazine Lulú, first issue (1991), p. 113: it comprises a "basic repertoire of accentual units, minimal sets or patterns of strong and weak associated elements, useful for describing any rhythmical complexity." Beytelmann used these concepts in his works from then.

conception and an agogic or dynamic conception of accentuation”²⁵⁸.

But it was in Paris, his place of residence since 1976, that his relationship with tango deepened, where it began to become central in his work. Tango helped further to define his aesthetic, ‘despite’ his academic background. As Beytelmann himself explained:

I had prepared myself to be a composer, and for no other purpose. Though I had the *métier* – I knew how to write for films, I wrote arrangements for commercial music, rock, I knew these well – I was prepared to be a composer in the social sense of the term ‘composer’ [of Western art music]. I went through a period not of crisis proper, but of much perplexity of what was to come for me [tango]; the situation put me in an awkward position, as it did not correspond to what I had hoped for myself, the image I had of myself. It took me a while to synthesize both what I expected from myself and what comes to me from ‘within’. Those two elements guided my life somehow into the direction it has taken until today, that is, how to make one out of two, not two out of one, which is rather what I do, in the music that I conceive; it’s kind of a synthesis or an end point that two sources merge and become one. At this point my music is my own music rather than the result of putting heterogeneous elements together. Today things are so fused that I am that. You have to resign yourself to that what you are. My job was that. As Borges says that “the duty of each is to find their voice within language”. I think I’ve found mine but I worked for it. From a plural I, I tried to make a singular I; that’s a bit of my story in a nutshell.²⁵⁹

In 1977 Beytelmann participated in the European tour of Astor Piazzolla’s octet, and in the same year, he founded ensemble *Tiempo Argentino* along with other Argentine musicians²⁶⁰, within which he would head into an important stage in his composing career. “*Tango Rojo*”, the only album they recorded, shows the close relationship of the composer with diverse popular genres, particularly with jazz. A text accompanying the album, written by celebrated writer Julio Cortázar, clarifies some of its particular traits:

When horror forces men to abandon their homeland, poetry and music depart with them; nobody will be surprised to see how numerous Argentinian artists are in Europe today. For them, one of their few joys is to give away whatever they have, and musicians of *Tiempo Argentino* give tango away as those who confess their longing while they reassure their hope in a bright future back home. This music is nurtured by old popular roots, and at the same time breaks worn out molds, venturing into beautiful, surprising sonorous fields. What is sung here helps denounce and repudiate the oppression that hits our country, and this way of conceiving and making use of tango transforms the genre and projects it to new paths. Behind all this, invariable and faithful, the rhythm of Buenos Aires beats as

²⁵⁸ Buch: *Tangos*, p. 156.

²⁵⁹ Personal interview, June 2011.

²⁶⁰ The ensemble was made up by Juan José Mosalini on bandoneon, Tomás Gubitsch on guitar, Enzo Gieco on transverse flute, Jacques Paris on drums, Francis Le Guern on double bass and electric bass, singer Néstor Gabetta and Gustavo Beytelmann as composer, arranger, pianist, and musical director. It was formed in 1977 and lasted until 1979.

a heart that cannot be changed by anyone or anything, as its name is the People.²⁶¹

Beytelmann's definite embracing of tango is best perceived in pieces composed for the Mosalini-Beytelmann-Caratini trio. According to musicologist Ramón Pelinsky, in this ensemble the careers of its musicians seem to complement each other as "the three musical traditions that have most contributed to nomad tango come together: tango *porteño* [Mosalini], art music [Beytelmann], and jazz [Caratini]"²⁶². In the three albums they recorded since 1980²⁶³, arrangements from traditional tangos including *La bordona*²⁶⁴ and *La cumparsita* are true avant-garde re-creations and pointedly exhibit features of the language Beytelmann would develop later in life. As for the impact they had not only in the sphere of art music and jazz, but also, surprisingly, in the tango circles of Buenos Aires – where negative reception of much of the new trends in tango abounded – we can quote Pugliese's comment after attending a concert by the trio in 1986: "You have reached the city centre, and we have stayed in the quarters", referring to the modernity and innovation of the music he had just listened to.²⁶⁵ In personal interviews I conducted in 2008, great maestros of the history of tango praised Beytelmann.²⁶⁶ Thus, Leopoldo Federico²⁶⁷ pointed out: "Beytelmann writes like hell. I first knew his work through Mosalini, when they had a trio with Caratini, so good!" Moreover, Atilio Stampone²⁶⁸ called him "a great arranger; a truly great arranger", and composers of later generations such as Pablo Mainetti consider him a primary influence: "For writing tango, I learnt a lot from Stravinsky, Bach, Beethoven, Miles Davis, Beytelmann, Boulez, Troilo, Pugliese, Arolas, Mederos, Marconi, and the list goes on."

From then on, Beytelmann has composed pieces in the Western art and popular fields in parallel with his activities as a performer. Since 1993, he has intensified his composing and teaching work, and his music has been regularly performed in Europe.²⁶⁹ His works have served as "an example of how tango can represent a true

²⁶¹ Buch: *Tangos*, p. 163.

²⁶² Pelinsky, Ramón. *El tango nómada. Ensayos sobre la diáspora del tango*; Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2000, p. 51.

²⁶³ "*La bordona*" (1983), "*Imágenes*" (1987), and "*Violento*" (1988), released by Label Blue (Amiens, France).

²⁶⁴ This work will be further analyzed later in this chapter.

²⁶⁵ This anecdote, recalled by Beytelmann in a personal interview, appears as a quote of Mosalini in Esteban Buch's *Tangos Cultos* (p. 150), lightly paraphrased and spiced with football references: "We kept playing in the playground, while you made it to the premier league!"

²⁶⁶ These interviews were conducted for the unpublished written dissertation: "Musical Arrangements in Tango: an encounter with their creators", Varassi Pega, Bárbara, codarts Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 2009.

²⁶⁷ Leopoldo Federico (1927), orchestra conductor, composer and one of the greatest tango bandoneon players ever. He played with great figures including Juan Carlos Cobián, Alfredo Gobbi, Víctor D'Amario, Osmar Maderna, Héctor Stamponi, Mariano Mores, Carlos Di Sarli, Horacio Salgán, Alberto Marino, Atilio Stampone, and Astor Piazzolla, among others.

²⁶⁸ Atilio Stampone (1926) is an outstanding Argentinian tango musician, piano player, arranger, conductor, and composer. He played in numerous ensembles with Astor Piazzolla, Julián Plaza, Juan Carlos Cobián, Pedro Maffia, Alfredo Marcucci, and Mariano Mores, among others. In 2000 he was appointed conductor of the National Orchestra of Argentine Music "Juan de Dios Filiberto".

²⁶⁹ Beytelmann held residencies as a composer at Dijon (1995/1998) and Guebwiller (2002/2003), France, and in Moritzburg (2008), Germany. He was invited by Seattle University and Bellingham University to give master classes about his music (2002), by the Académie de Musique in Monaco to give master classes (from 2005) and to perform in the Tango Festival of the city of Buenos Aires.

inspiring element for contemporary music; not a concession to popular music made by cultivated composers from time to time, but something that can renew the universe of classical tradition materials”.²⁷⁰ Besides having composed contemporary music, tango, jazz and jazz-rock, and having made arrangements for rock musicians, he produced works for radio, television, and Argentinian, Italian, French and German films. In addition, he served, as the artistic director of a recording company, in the musician’s union, as a political activist, and the artistic director of the Tango Programme at the Rotterdam Conservatoire, The Netherlands.

Analysis of works

In order to determine the structural characteristics of his language, I have analyzed three pieces composed by Beytelmann and one representative arrangement for the Mosalini-Beytelmann-Caratini trio. The pieces chosen for this purpose are:

- *Otras voces*, composed by Beytelmann
- *Encuentro*, composed by Beytelmann
- *Preludio N. 1*, composed by Beytelmann
- *La bordona*, composed by Emilio Balcarce.

There, in 2004, he gave a solo piano concert at Teatro Colón. Since 1996, he has been the artistic director of the Tango Department of Rotterdam Conservatory of Music, the Netherlands.

²⁷⁰ Monjeau, Federico: “Presencia del tango en la obra de Julio Viera”. Paper presented at “Tango: Créations, Identifications, Circulations”, organized by “Centre de recherché sur les arts et le langage (L’Ecole des hautes etudes en sciences sociales, EHESS, and Centre national de la recherche scientifique, CNRS) as part of the Globalmus Program, Paris, 2011.