ARGENTINE TANGO, ITS ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

By Eduardo Lazarowski

Tango is one of the most beautiful, elegant, and sensual dance of modern times. It has its origins in South America on both sides of the Rio de la Plata, whih separates the Argentinean province of Buenos Aires (and its city-port by the same name) from Uruguay and its capital Montevideo. By 1870-1880, waves of immigrants mainly from Italy, but also from Spain, England, and central-eastern Europe, arrived to the ports of Buenos Aires and Montevideo attracted by the prospect of jobs. Cultures and dialects mixed at the Sunday parties of the poor in the suburban neighborhoods, where waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, and habaneras blended with black candombes and gaucho's tonadas. Tango was born as a dance and music of the lower class, but gradually metamorphosed into a sensual, elegant dance that conquered Buenos Aires society and the rest of the world.

The details of when, where, and how Tango happened are elusive. Technically speaking, tango was born around 1900, when well-structured compositions of a style definitively different from the habanera and other popular tunes were written for first time on the pentagram. Initially, tango was danced and played as a fast, happy, very rhythmic music that resembled that of marching bands, but by 1920-1925 the genre had adopted elements of erudite music, evolving into a polyphonic kind with multiple musical subjects, accentuated phrasing, complex rhythm, and a rich melody, as it is known today. A major event in this transformation was the incorporation of the bandoneón, a distant cousin of the accordion, into tango orchestras. With its lengthy and nostalgic phrasing, the bandoneón has become the soul of tango music.

The Orchestra of Osvaldo Pugliese.

Tango, the most relevant cultural phenomenon of the Argentinean society, had its golden époque during the so-called "the Decade of the Forties". During this period, which actually expanded from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, thousands of musicians in hundreds of orchestras embraced tango music, and millions of Argentineans poured onto the dance floors. Musicians such as Juan D'Arienzo, Carlos Di Sarli, Anibal Troilo, and Osvaldo Pugliese (see photo) were celebrities of the highest imaginable popularity. Just the announcement of any of these names was enough to fill out the biggest music halls; their soundtracks beat records of diffusion.

Economic and political factors along with the surge of rock and roll music in the 1950s gradually displaced tango music from its privileged place in the mind of Argentineans, but the tunes of the golden époque remained alive in their souls, subtlety passing to the

new generations. Astor Piazzolla genially fused tango with erudite chamber music and jazz. His New Tango privileged the music over the dance and, while resisted by traditionalists, conquered new audiences worldwide. Piazzolla's popularity together with the success of "Tango Argentino" and other majestically choreographed presentations of tango dance companies in Europe, Japan, and the U.S. contributed greatly to the renascence of tango traditions and opened the door to the return of tango as a social dance in the 1990s.

Today, Tango is danced again not only in countless "milongas" (dance floors dedicated to tango music) in Buenos Aires, but all over the world. In 2009, UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization declared tango dance Cultural Patrimony of the Humanity.

The tango embrace is a unique element that distinguishes tango from other popular dances, most of which are danced by partners that move separately from each other. The embrace also defines the two major styles of Argentinean tango dance: the "salon" style is danced in relatively close but not strictly tight embrace; and the "milonguero" style, which is danced tightly embraced to allow couples to navigate in crowded floors. Irrespective of differences in the embrace and figures of embellishment associated with these styles, the most important features that tango dancers care about are sentiment and elegance.
Argentine tango has a significant presence in the Triangle area since 2000. We have a vibrant community that has been strong for many years.

More articles on History of Tango by Eduardo Lazarowski

The International Day of Tango

THE BANDONEÓN (first posted at www.triangletango.com in 2014)

Part I
"*Each 11 of July is celebrated as the National Day of the Bandoneón As homage to the birthday of Aníbal Troilo*" …

Thus read a headline on a major Argentine newspaper on July 2014. Neither Troilo's name nor the instrument that contributed to his rising as one of the greatest personalities in tango history are foreign words to tango dancers around the world. But not many tango lovers know the history of the "tango wind box". So, let's examine the major technical and historic features of the instrument considered the "soul" of tango music.

The bandoneón was invented to substitute the otherwise expensive and not always available church organs in rural communities of north Germany around 1835. Technically, the bandoneón is a portable wind instrument that belongs to the subgroup of "aero-phones" together with the accordion and the concertina, and it is played by depressing a series of buttons (keys) capriciously distributed on the surface of its two side panels. Opening and closing the blower produce the vibration of metal

wedges. Professional tango musicians use the so-called achromatic bandoneón, which produce different notes (by the same key) during the opening and closing of the instrument. A standard modern bandoneón has 71 keys (38 and 33 on the right and left panels, respectively), generating 142 voices.
The bandoneón owes its name to its inventor, Heinrich Band and the cooperative (Union) created to financially support its manufacturing. Thus, when the instrument arrived to Buenos Aires, it was phonetically called by its trade-mark label "Band-Union" and the voice soon mutated from bandunión to bandoneón. How the first bandoneón made its way to Buenos Aires is not known with certainty, but one credible hypothesis is that it was introduced to the Argentine main port by German sailors around 1860.
A relatively well-accepted story tells us that José Santa Cruz, a slave descendant and skilled accordion player, acquired a primitive 32-key bandoneón, the first to arrive to Buenos Aires, from a sailor. Soon after, Cruz was drafted by the army and sent to the front line during the ill-fated war against Paraguay (1865-70). José survived those years playing polkas, mazurkas, habaneras, and marching tunes on his bandoneón, entertaining the demoralized Argentine troops. Against the odds, he was one of the few black soldiers that made it back to Buenos Aires as war ended. His son Domingo was born in 1884 and learned to play the bandoneón at an early age. Later, Domingo paired with his younger brother Juan Carlos, a pianist, to play together the new music of the street, the nascent tango. By the end of the XIX Century Domingo Santa Cruz was a recognized bandoneonist, who had even opened an academy to teach the technique of playing the bandoneón. The Santa Cruz brothers teamed up with other young musicians to form trios and quartets that spread the tango in bars and cafes of poor suburban neighborhoods (the *arrabale*s), and later in salons and theaters of the city.
Domingo Santa Cruz is also remembered for his tango "Union Cívica", composed in 1905 and dedicated to a local leader of the disarraying old Union Cívica Nacional party. In 1916, when the newly named Union Cívica Radical party led by Hypólito Yrigoyen won the presidential election, Yrigoyen supporters adopted the tango "Union Cívica" as party anthem. "Union Cívica" became a popular tango at the dance floor thanks to the version recorded by Rodolfo Biagi in 1939.
In spite of Domingo Santa Cruz efforts, the secrets of the fine execution of the bandoneón remained largely unveiled for other 10-15 years, until Pedro Maffia …, but this is another story.

Part II
Several bandoneón players had gained popularity at the beginning of the XX Century. An incomplete list of these pioneering bandoneonists should include Juan Maglio ("Pacho"), Augusto Berto, Vicente Loduca, José Severino, Genaro Espósito, Arturo Berstein, and Vicente Greco. However, with the exception of Berstein, who had received formal music instruction, most bandoneonists of the 1900's played intuitively, "by the ear". Because they were not digitally fluent on the keypads, the bandoneón sound was dominated by the bursts produced at the closing of the blower, with rapid digital flute-like whistles in staccato tempo interposed during the opening of the box.
Unlike the piano, guitar, flute, and violin for which learning methods were available, no written method existed for the bandoneón. Learning how to play this instrument was a formidable challenge. The bandoneón player is a "blind" musician because he cannot see

the 71 keys distributed along eight or nine rows at the sides of the instrument. In addition, the musician needs to coordinate the digitalization on the keypads with the opening and closing of the blower. When the piano became the dominant rhythmic voice of the Oquesta Típica (circa 1910), bandoneonists struggled to catch up with the colorful new style. The bandoneón voice became slower, lazy, and dragged. Around 1910, Vicente Greco introduced the "ligados" (linking the notes played on the right keypad, as opposed to the short strikes of the stacattos), thus imprinting a slower, more melodic voice to the instrument.

However, a fundamental factor contributing to the evolution of tango music was the new interpretative style in the execution of the bandoneón that took place around 1920. Eduardo Arolas, "El Tigre del Bandoneón" (The Tiger of the Bandoneón), with his romantic and at times dramatic style, proposed a more melodic role for the fueye, signaling a transition towards the modern bandoneón school. He also composed beautiful tangos that remain young and vibrant nowadays. But, like the preceding guardiaviejistas (Old Guard men), Arolas did not dominate the execution technique needed to lift the bandoneón to its current role in tango orchestras. This task was reserved for the New Guard generation of bandoneón players.

Pedro Maffia was the most salient expression of this group. Pedro Laurenz, Luis Petrucelli, Ciriaco Ortiz, Minotto De Cicco, and Carlos Marcucci also made enormous contributions to the new bandoneón school.

At the age of 12, Pedro Maffia accompanied his father to a Buenos Aires downtown café where famous bandoneón player Juan "Pacho" Maglio was performing. So much was Pedro impressed by Pahco's bandoneón, a novel instrument to his eyes, that he became obsessed with learning how to play it. He soon took initial lessons from a neighbor, a self-proclaimed bandoneonist that hardly knew the basics. After a week into bandoneón lessons, the improvised teacher gave up; the young student had overcome the rudimentary music knowledge of the good neighbor. Losing his instructor did not discourage Pedro from continuing making progress on the bandoneón. By adopting old piano exercises that he had learned at the conservatory, Maffia developed a method for studying the "fueye". Soon he attained such a digital domain of the instrument that a short age he began creating harmonies that would become the foundation of the modern bandoneón school.

A turning point in the evolution of the role of the bandoneón within tango orchestras was the pairing of Pedro Maffia and Pedro Laurenz –the "Great Pedros", as first and second bandoneonists, respectively, of the Julio De Caro's Sextet in 1925. Maffia and Laurenz had contrasting personalities and styles. But they understood and complemented each other to the point that they formed the best bandoneón duet of tango history; an orchestra inside the orchestra. Maffia and Laurenz played together within the De Caro Sextet for a brief period (Maffia formed his own orchestra in 1926 and Laurez did the same in 1933), but they maintained a close friendship and continued collaborating as musicians and composers for the rest of their lives. Both Pedros also were a source of inspiration to younger musicians that would become icons during the Golden Forties. The most salient follower of Maffia and Laurenz was Aníbal Troilo ("Pichuco"), for whom the "Day of The Bandoneón" is celebrated every 11th of July. Pichuco, in turn, was the inspiring genius for another genius, Astor Piazzolla, but this is a story for the pages below.

Part III

Anibal Troilo “Pichuco”, also known as “El Gordo” (the fat man), was an icon of the greatest period of tango music and his name remains a symbol of both Tango and Buenos Aires. Troilo was a great bandoneón player, conductor, and composer. He inspired and continues inspiring generations of tango musicians around the world.

Pichuco was born in 1914 in the porteño district of Almagro, close to El Abasto market, the neighborhood that witnessed the rise and glory of Carlos Gardel. Thus, Pichuco’s childhood was marked by tango. As most kids, Pichuco loved playing futbol (futbol, deformation of the word football, i.e. soccer). Running after a loose ball during a street game was precisely how he ended up next to a group of tango musicians, who were entertaining the public during a neighborhood outdoor party. The impact of seeing the bandoneón up close was so strong that, that night at home, he started “practicing” the instrument with … a pillow!!! Soon after, his mother (his dad had just passed) purchased a real bandoneón and encouraged the boy to take music lessons. Pichuco was very intuitive and had a gifted musical ear. At 11, after six months studying the bandoneón with Juan Amendolaro, he had outplayed his teacher. After a few more private lessons, this time with none other than the great Pedro Maffia, Pichuco had acquired a vast domain of the instrument technique; he was ready for the big challenge.

Pichuco began playing the bandoneón, professionally, in nearby theaters during the screening of silent movies. His career spanned from his debut in an “orquesta de señoritas” (orchestra of young ladies) in 1927, to accompanying Juan “Pacho” Maglio in 1929. During these and following years, anticipating the glorious times in tango history known as the Decade of the Forties, Pichuco played with other rising stars, such as Elvino Vardaro, Osvaldo Pugliese, Alfredo Gobbi, and Orlando Goñi. He was recruited by Julio De Caro during a grand orchestra presentation series in 1932. Under the conduction of maestro De Caro, Pichuco played the bandoneón next to Pedro Laurenz, who also had an important influence on Pichuco’s style. Having accompanied Pedro Laurenz and studied with Pedro Maffia could have fulfilled the greatest expectation of any young bandoneón player of those times. Pichuco had more than such a luxury in his curriculum – he also scored a “bonus goal” when he was recruited as accompanying bandoneón by Ciriaco Ortiz.

When in 1937, at the age of 22, Pichuco formed his own orchestra to debut at Café Marabú in downtown Buenos Aires; he was a mature musician who had absorbed the best from the best masters of his time. He symbolized in one person the technicality of Pedro Maffia, the energy of Pedro Lauernz, and the digital fluidity of Ciriaco Ortiz. Inside Pichuco’s bandoneón hid the soul of these three “monsters of the fueye”. As a conductor, Pichuco was influenced by Julio De Caro’s style, a style that he helped to expand to new frontiers. Pichuco’s 38 year-long career in front of his orchestra was only ended when he died in 1975.

Pichuco was a great composer. Paired with his friend, poet Homero Manzi, they wrote some of the most beautiful chapters of the tango-canción (tango song). Tangos such as Sur, Barrio de Tango, Romance de Barrio (waltz) and Che Bandoneón were the work of the Pichuco-Manzi collaboration. He composed other jewels, including Toda Mi Vida, Pa’ Que Bailen los Muchachos, Garúa, María, Una Canción, La Cantina, and La Última Curda in collaboration with José M. Contursi, Enrique Cadícamo, and Cátulo Castillo, as well as Resposno, La Trampera (milonga), Tres y Dos, and many more instrumental

compositions.
Several tango singers who were celebrities during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, were first "discovered" by Pichuco. Francisco Fiorentino, Alberto Marino, Florial Ruiz, Edmundo Rivero, and Roberto Goyeneche became famous while singing for Troilo's Orchestra. All of them initiated successful careers as soloists after singing for Pichuco.
Everything that Pichuco touched was magically transformed to gold. His bandoneón, his orchestra, his singers, and his compositions are unpaired icons of a time that would be hardly repeated.
Describing the role of Aníbal Troilo as a bandoneón player is not a simple task. Nothing that we could say about the miracle of his bandoneón's sound would be enough to explain the feeling inspired by Troilo's tender and unique execution of the instrument. Just listen to his solos in his orchestras recordings such as La Maleva or El Marne, to name a few, or the many beauties with his quartet (with Roberto Grela on the guitar) to feel a magical joy in the heart. It is no wonder he was called "The Greatest Bandoneón of Buenos Aires".
Troilo is synonymous with Tango in the most liberal meaning of the word: Tango to dance, Tango to sing, and Tango to listen to. In other words, Tango to be felt and lived.
Two years from now, on the 11th of July 2014, the world will celebrate the 100th birthday of Anibal Troilo. During our recent visit to the 2012 World Tango Festival of Buenos Aires, we had the honor of meeting the organizers of Trolio's 100th Aniversary celebration (see picture). The celebration will be centered around the Obelisk of Buenos Aires, where 100 bandoneón players will converge to honor Pichuco. One hundred milongas and tango festivals around the globe will accompany the celebration. A campaign to collect 50,000 signatures is now in place to ask the UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization) to declare the 11th of July as the International Day of the Bandoneón.
This series of articles about the bandoneón could not be complete without mentioning another great bandoneonist, composer, and conductor, who was born in the Atlantic coastal city of Mar del Plata, south of Buenos Aires, and grew up in New York. Back in Buenos Aires as a teenager, the still unknown musician spent entire nights at café Marabú, admiring Trolio's performances. When on one night of 1939, a bandoneonist of Troilo's orchestra called in sick, our young musician offered his service as a substitute. Troilo was skeptical, but after auditioning the young man, he accepted to include him in his orchestra for that night. The new bandoneonist performed brightly and was so well-received by the audience that Trolio offered him a fixed post within his group; they became life-long friends and collaborators. Astor Piazzolla, thus the name of the Mar del Plata-born musician, spent five years as a member of the Troilo group. Eventually, he initiated a career as conductor of his own orchestra, taking tango music to new boundaries. Astor Piazzolla fused tango with erudite chamber music and jazz. His New Tango favored the music over the dance and, while resisted by traditionalists, conquered new audiences worldwide. Piazzolla's popularity together with the success of "Tango Argentino" and other majestically choreographed presentations of tango dance companies in Europe, Japan, and the U.S. contributed greatly to the rebirth of tango traditions and opened the door to the return of tango as a social dance in the 1990s. But this is another story.