

PIAZZOLLA

Music for Guitar

Tango-Études

Cinco piezas • Tango Suite

Yuri Liberzon

Piotr Pakhomkin



Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992) Music for Guitar

Astor Piazzolla, though born in Argentina, grew up in New York. He first heard tangos played at their finest at the age of 13 when Carlos Gardel (1890–1935), a major exponent of the form, visited the United States. Piazzolla returned to Argentina in 1937, performing in leading tango bands and creating his own orchestra. Seeking wider horizons he studied composition in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. From this time Piazzolla introduced new rhythms and harmonies into the tango, a development which ultimately won him worldwide fame. He wrote over 750 compositions, including film scores, operas and chamber music, and made over 70 recordings.

Tango Suite for two guitars, composed in 1984 and published by Bèrben in 1985, fingered by Mario Fragnito and Lucio Matarazzo under the general editorship of Angelo Gilardino, is one of the finest duo works in the guitar repertoire.

During the period of composition Piazzolla asked his close friend, the guitarist Oscar López Ruiz, to look over the score. *Tango Suite* was written for the Brazilian guitarists Sérgio and Odair Assad. López Ruiz is quoted in the Piazzolla biography *Le Grand Tango* by María Susana Azzi and Simon Collier as saying that the score 'was difficult and complicated but perfectly playable by virtuosos like the Assads'.

The first movement, *Allegro*, begins with fireworks in the form of exciting percussive effects matched against rapid fragments of melody. The melodic line in the original score shifts between the partners allowing complete equilibrium in the distribution of guitaristic virtuosity. The movement is well extended with ever increasing rhythmic tension and quick-fire semiquavers supported by full chords until ultimately slightly pausing for breath in a beautiful *lento, molto cantabile* episode. A recapitulation of the opening theme follows leading to a dazzlingly dramatic coda.

The second *Tango* presents one of the most exquisite melodic statements of Piazzolla's works. Richly melancholic, poignant and utterly memorable, the movement has ample time to explore the musical possibilities of that wonderful opening theme.

The final part of *Tango Suite* offers a dazzling display of pyrotechnics for two guitars with the emphasis on close coordination between the duo partners in various rapid semiquaver sections as well as integrated rhythmic basses supporting syncopated melodic lines. There are also occasional percussive elements which intensify as the movement reaches its climax. But, in between, the music takes us into a few pages of intricate development initially marked *cantabile*. A dramatic coda brings both partners in the duo into a fascinating display of virtuosity.

Oblivion, composed in 1984, was part of the score for Marco Bellocchio's film *Enrico IV*, a screen adaptation of Luigi Pirandello's classic play. *Oblivion* is considered a highlight of the score and was described by Piazzolla's biographers as 'an almost unbearably nostalgic tune – one of Piazzolla's true gems'. The piece suits the guitar extremely well and has also been arranged for orchestra, violin, and piano as well as other ensembles.

The *tango-milonga* is a strictly instrumental form with a distinct rhythmic character, much performed by popular orchestras in Buenos Aires. Piazzolla explores the tango's more introspective aspects and incorporates a religious element. His *Angel Suite* is in the form of a virtual triptych with *Milonga del ángel* (composed 1962), *La muerte del ángel* ('The Death of the Angel') (1962), and *Resurrección del ángel* (1965).

La muerte del ángel, performed here, is a frequently played guitar solo full of rhythmic vigour, colour, and touches of the unpredictable. The energetic movement suggests struggle and anguish rather than any sense of repose or tranquillity.

The composition of *Cinco piezas*, Astor Piazzolla's first work for classical guitar, was inspired by the Argentinian guitarist Roberto Ausel (b. 1954). The two artists met in Paris and Ausel played a number of pieces to the composer including William Walton's third *Bagatelle, Alla Cubana*. Piazzolla immediately recognised the idiomatic qualities of the piece as having distinct resemblances to his own style of music. Within a few weeks of their meeting, the composer

had written the *Cinco piezas*, beginning with the final work in the sequence, *Compadre*. (This information was given by Aussel in an interview on YouTube with *Guitar TV World*.)

Campero (rural, of the countryside), marked *molto accentuato*, recalling in its opening mood the energetic peasant dances of Argentina, progresses to the gentler rhythms of the *milonga*, the light-hearted song genre popular in both Argentina and Uruguay. A *lento* episode follows leading to the recapitulation of the main theme. *Romántico* expresses the lyrical nature of the tango, rich in melody and sensuously beguiling harmony.

The third piece, *Acentuado*, begins with strident octaves matched by dramatic percussive effects and is marked *Ritmico, molto accentuato*. The introduction is followed by complex cross-rhythms of chords leading to a compact *cantabile* episode before progressing to the recapitulation.

Tristón (in a sad mood) is in two sections: a funereal *cantabile* episode, dependent on weighty chords in minor keys, and a final *lento* section of great subtlety and sensitivity.

Compadre ('Godfather' or 'friend') begins with a rhythmic introduction, some percussive effects and a superb *cantabile* section, the latter to be played 'with freedom'. The dance itself then begins, concluding with strummed chords. This

leads back to a reprise of the opening section, finishing in an expressive coda.

In a doctoral thesis on *Tango-Études*, Asis Reyes comments that this sequence is Piazzolla's 'only composition for an unaccompanied purely melodic instrument, and to my knowledge the only one ever attempted by a tango composer. When composing the flute studies, Piazzolla had to grapple with similar problems faced by J.S. Bach in his unaccompanied works for flute, violin, and cello'.

Manuel Barrueco's transcription of *Tango-Études* (composed by Piazzolla in 1987), provides in essence a new and innovative set of studies for the guitar. The metamorphosis from flute to the plucked strings requires a number of additions and emendation, extra harmonies, some ornamental notes omitted, occasional variations in phrasing and accentuation. Ultimately a novel virtuosic sequence of considerable substance has been created which conforms precisely to the fundamental idioms of the classical guitar. The whole range of the guitar is covered in this compendium of technically difficult but musically rewarding individual pieces.

Graham Wade



Photo: © Sena Z Studio

Yuri Liberzon

Internationally acclaimed guitarist and recording artist Yuri Liberzon was born in Novosibirsk, Russia and raised in Israel. He has given countless concerts across the United States, alongside numerous appearances in international media. Liberzon's discography includes an album of works by Konstantin Vassiliev (Naxos 8.574315), and three releases in collaboration with GRAMMY Award-winning sound engineer and producer Nahuel Bronzini: *Ascension* (2015), *¡Acentuado!* (2017, Soundset Recordings), and *J.S. Bach – 3 Violin Sonatas* (2020, Laudable Records). Liberzon has transcribed the music of Scarlatti and J.S. Bach for guitar, and these have been published in Soundboard Magazine and distributed in Europe by Bergmann Edition. While in Israel, Liberzon studied with Yaron Hasson, and was the recipient of multiple America-Israel Cultural Foundation scholarships and grants. In 2000, Liberzon relocated to the US to study for his Bachelor of Music and Graduate Performance Diploma at the Peabody Conservatory with Manuel Barrueco, subsequently earning a Master of Music from Yale University with Benjamin Verdery, being awarded full scholarships at both institutions. Liberzon is endorsed by Royal Classics Strings and is a professor of guitar at California State University Stanislaus. www.yuriguitar.com

Piotr Pakhomkin

Piotr Pakhomkin has performed and given masterclasses across Europe, Central America and the United States. After completing his studies with Manuel Barrueco at the Peabody Conservatory, he was awarded First Prize at the 2012 International Guitar Competition in Culiacán, Mexico, and took top prizes at the Boston GuitarFest and Montreal international guitar competitions. After finishing the prestigious Strathmore Artist in Residence programme in 2014, he returned to serve as a faculty member and mentor at its Institute for Artistic and Professional Development. As the winner of the 2016 Respighi Prize, he made his Carnegie Hall debut in the Chamber Orchestra of New York's Masterwork Series in 2018. He is currently a professor at the University of Maryland Global Campus in Germany. Pakhomkin performs exclusively on a Ross Gutmeier guitar. <http://www.piotrguitar.de>

Photo: © Jonathan Timmes



