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Faculty Recital: Quatro Estaciones Porteñas- "The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires"

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FACULTY RECITAL

Quatro Estaciones Porteñas

The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires

A Four-Hand Piano Recital accompanied by tango dance and live mix multimedia projections

Hockett Family Recital Hall
Thursday, November 16, 2006
7:00 p.m.
PROGRAM

Quatro Estaciones Porteñas
(The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires) 1964-1970

Astor Piazzolla
(1921-1992)

Otoño Porteño (Autumn)
Invierno Porteño (Winter)
Primavera Porteña (Spring)
Verano Porteño (Summer)

Diane Birr and Jairo Geronymo, pianists
Joaquin Canay and Larisa Kuznetsova, tangueros
Tom Nicholson, live video mixer
Pamela Wintle, consultant and senior archivist,
Smithsonian Institution
Human Studies Film Archives of the Smithsonian Institution, collaborative partner
Patricia R. Zimmermann, writer/producer

Sponsored by:
The School of Music
The Division of Interdisciplinary and International Studies
The Roy H. Park School of Communications and
The Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival at Ithaca College
Program Notes

Tango. A meme circulating through in popular culture in the North that conjures sexuality, syncopation, South America, seduction, sad longing, subconscious desires. Yet in Argentina, tango is considered the second national anthem, an expression of collective national consciousness, social and political displacements, melancholy and loss. Tango embodies a way to think through Argentine history and geography through its elaborate rhythms and inescapable tragedies. Pianists Diane Birr and Jairo Geronymo will play the complete set of Quatro Estaciones Portenas, by Astor Piazzolla.

Born in 1921 in Mar Del Plata, Piazzolla is the 20th century Argentine composer known for combining erudite musical structure with the textures, melodies and rhythms of tango, a form of music and dance arising from Buenos Aires' urban culture. He was so prolific a composer that his estate is still—15 years after his death—finding and compiling new works. Piazzolla produced a radical reinvention of tango. He renewed tango music with experimentation and transnational fusions of musical forms. As Marcha, the Montevideo newspaper noted in 1961, "Piazzolla...has dared to defy a traditional Establishment grater than the State, greater than the Gaucho, greater than Soccer. He has dared to challenge the Tango."

Although Piazzolla was the seminal figure in Argentine tango in the 1950s, his music generated controversies. Piazzolla's tango nuevo, as it was called, presented an avant garde interpretation of the tango, often moving it beyond danceable music into an exploration of dissonance, texture, rhythm and tonalities within a rigorous classical structure. In this context, Quatro Estaciones Portenas (The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires) alludes to Vivaldi's Baroque suite structured around the four seasons. However, Piazzolla stretches and saturates the suite form with dissonance, unmeasured rhythms, combinations of different textures, and exploration of the more emotionally resonate themes of tango. Piazzolla's music returns to tonality, but enriches and complicates it with dissonances from 20th century music. Driving rhythms, memorable melodies, and repetitions of small motivic figures constitutes three of the central elements of Piazzolla's compositions.

This performance of Quatro Estaciones Portenas explores and opens up the four programming streams of the 2007 Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival—Maps and Memes, Metropoli, Panic Attacks, Soundscape—through a combination of music, dance, and live video mixing. This ensemble performance maps the meme—an idea that travels through culture—of tango.

Piazzolla's music operates within a conceptual mix of local and global, classical and popular music, complex formal musical structures and emotional address. Piazzolla's compositions invoke three different global metropoli—Buenos Aires, Paris, New York City, cities where he lived and worked and also places where tango migrated. This performance creates a visceral rereading of the complexities of Piazzolla's music. It combines two pianists, two tango dancers (tangueros), and live video mixing multiscreen projections of archival footage from Latin America and Europe. It physicalizes the layers in the music through the juxtapositions of different media, art forms and sensory experiences. Soundscape here suggests a
new geography of musical performance that travels through multiple senses of the ear, eye, and touch.

Tango is a distinctly Argentine form of dance and music. It developed in the late 19th century among immigrant populations in Buenos Aires in working class neighborhoods, in brothels, and in gangster gatherings. Tango blends European and African musical forms with folk traditions. In the early part of the 20th century, many more men lived in Buenos Aires than women. These immigrant men from Europe longed for home. As a result, men often practiced tango together. The opportunity to dance with a woman was viewed as a special event.

Throughout the 20th century, the middle and upper classes—as well as the Catholic Church—tried to restrict tango. They associated it with violence, the underclass, and political destabilization. Identified with the proletariat and creolized culture, tango was often banned not only in Argentina but also in Europe. After the end of the Argentine military dictatorship and the guerra sucia (dirty war, a state sponsored war on citizens in response to strikes and dissident activities from 1976-1983 where the desaparecidos, the disappeared, are estimated between 6,000 and 30,000 people), tango experienced a resurgence as a nationalistic expression of Argentina’s culture.

Often identified as a melancholic, sometime violent, frequently eroticized, highly intricate dance form unique to Argentina, it is also a style of music characterized by assertive syncopation, passionate flourishes, elaborate textures, and abrupt changes. In its popular form, tango interweaves sensitivity with aggression. With its rapid, unexpected alterations in mood, tone, key, motivic material, Piazzolla’s Quatro Estaciones Portenas can be seen as a musical and aesthetic graphing of the more general cultural phenomenon of the panic attack. The music shifts between intense excitement and contemplative quietude. It connects the inexpressible emotions of panic—psychic, political, physical—with continuous tempi and textural changes, reflected in the “legato” and “martellato” (hammered) section.

It was during his composition studies with the legendary Nadia Boulanger in Paris that Piazzolla discovered his new approach to tango. This distinctive musical idiom was in many ways the opposite of the more European compositional trends of the 20th century. Tango is emotional, populist, sensuous, embodied, transgressive. It reveals a longing beyond words.

Tango also was a form of music most identified with an instrument never found in classical chamber music or orchestras: the bandoneon. Developed in Germany, the bandoneon, a button squeezebox instrument constructed of wood, metal, leather and mother of pearl, is a formidably difficult instrument to play. It sustains the distinctive sonorities of tango. Piazzolla was considered one of the great virtuosos of the bandoneon. He played Bach, Mozart and Gershwin on his bandoneon. The rhythmic chordal textures of Quatro Estaciones Portenas directly quote the sonic attributes and techniques of the bandoneon.

After Boulanger heard Piazzolla play a tango, she exclaimed “Here is the true Piazzolla—do not ever leave him.” Piazzolla’s compositions from that point
on elaborately wove together a range of musical forms. His music combines the rhythmic and chordal structures of Stravinsky, the counterpoint of Bach, the dissonance of Bartok, the improvisational elements of jazz and the emotional valences of Argentine tango. Many experimental music aficionados know Piazzolla through the landmark Kronos Quartet 1991 recording, Piazzolla: Five Tango Sensations. One of his last recordings, Piazzolla wrote the music for the Kronos Quartet and plays bandoneon himself on the CD. Piazzolla’s voluminous recordings span 1944 to 1991 and three continents. Musicians such as Daniel Barenboim, Gidon Kremer, the Assad Brothers, Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma have recorded his music. At the end of the 19th century, classical music followed a path that eventually separated itself from popular culture and the masses, reorienting it towards abstraction, form, and innovative techniques that were often totally alien to the musical tastes of the masses. Perhaps one of Piazzolla’s major contributions and advancements as a composer was in how his music creates a balance between these contrasting poles of structure and compositional freedom, passion and contemplation, abstraction and accessibility, the global and the local. The power of his music resides in the liminal zones between all of these oppositions, a space for contemplation and intervention.

Piazzolla’s music is often described as simultaneously refined and emotional. The unified structures establish a workshop for new musical ideas imported from tango, 20th century dissonant techniques, textural changes, chords in different keys, and polyphony. While Piazzolla possessed a deep understanding of classical music’s compositional traditions, he also had his pulse on the popular music of tango and Argentina. His music resists the contradiction between individual formal experimentation and a more populist, accessible, and democratic sonic environment. His music exemplifies a series of border crossings that reject the idea of smooth assimilations of influences. Instead, it generates arenas for a series of musical explorations, combustions, and attacks.

Piazzolla lived and performed in Buenos Aires, New York City, Paris. His compositions provoke a dialogue between European classical forms, American jazz, and Argentine national identity. In this historical and musical context, the multimedia projections for this evening’s performance of Quatro Estaciones Portenas visually score the music by combining and intermixing images from Latin America and Europe. The two screens suggest a metaphorical mapping of Piazzolla’s music as investigations into different locations and sonic environments. They also refer to Piazzolla’s long time involvement as a composer of film scores. The live video mix is based on ideas derived from the score itself, where elements are combined and physicalized to generate new ideas and spaces.

This video mix migrates across two screens, suggesting the sense of displacement that immigration and movement across borders provokes. The visual projections do not create a unified filmic text with a narrative arc or argument. Rather, they function as textural elements to create a transnational space for the performance. The rare archival footage, comprised of amateur travelogues and expedition footage shot between 1915 and 1936 from Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Rome, Venice, London, Spain, New York, has been generously provided by the Human Studies Film
Archives of the Smithsonian Institution. This quotidian footage, located outside and beyond commercial cinemas, suggests the populist expression imbedded in tango. This footage also represents unofficial—as opposed to official—cultural representations of Latin America and Europe.

The multiple screens, the dancers, the costuming of the pianists and low key lighting are designed to move the music from the abstract to a more concrete zone of embodied contemplation. They address senses beyond the ear alone.

Patricia R. Zimmermann and Jairo Geronymo

Biographies of Quatro Estaciones Portenas Ensemble

Diane Birr, associate professor of piano at Ithaca College holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music (D.M.A), Indiana University Bloomington (M.M.); and the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point (B.M.). She has studied with Jean Barr, Marion Hall, Brooks Smith, and Gwendolyn Koldofsky. She has also taught at the University of Northern Iowa and is the current President of the New York State Music Teachers Association. She keeps an active performing career and has collaborated with Doriot Anthony Dwyer, François Rabbath, Christian Lindberg, Meir Rimon, Joseph Alessi, M. Dee Stewart, and the flute duo ZAWA! Past events in which she was featured as official accompanist include International Workshops, International Trombone Festival, Music Teachers National Association national competitions, International Brass Congress, and International Horn Society Workshop. Birr has recorded for Liscio, Crystal Records, and Houston Publishing.

Joaquin Canay was born and raised in Buenos Aires. Joaquin moved to Ithaca in 2003 to join Rina Gendelman in teaching and performing. He began dancing tango as a teenager, under the tutelage of Oscar Caballero, on the north side of Buenos Aires. Marta Echeverry, Adrian and Sandra, the Blanco Family, Cesar and Isabel Fernandez, Davel, and Maria and Roberto Contreras had a significant impact on his development as a dancer. Before moving to Ithaca, Joaquin lived in New York City. Since then he has kept a busy schedule teaching in Ithaca, Geneva, Corning, and Binghamton. Joaquin has also given special workshops in Rochester, Scranton, Princeton, Hana, Pukalani, Buffalo, San Francisco, and other cities. His focus is on a strong foundation for social dancing. His gentle and enthusiastic approach to teaching creates classes one can look forward to and has made him one of the most sought after tango instructors in upstate New York.

Jairo Geronymo was born in Brazil, where he studied with Attilio Mastrogiovanni and Gilberto Tinetti at Sao Paulo State University (B.M.). Currently assistant professor of Piano at Ithaca College, he has studied with Caio Pagano at Arizona State University (M.M.) and Craig Sheppard at University of Washington (D.M.A.). An enthusiastic pedagogue and presenter, he lived for twelve years in the Seattle area, teaching at Pacific Lutheran University and Western Washington University. A winner of many competitions in Brazil and the United States, he maintains a busy schedule as a recitalist, chamber musician and orchestral soloist. He has
performed as a soloist with the Sao Paulo State Symphony, Brazilian Symphony (Rio de Janeiro), Northwest Sinfonietta (Tacoma), LUCO and Eastside Symphonies (both in Seattle) and as a solo recitalist in Brazil, Canada, and Portugal.

Larisa Kuznetsova is a native Russian, born in Siberia near Lake Baikal. Larisa is a musician and a teacher of Russian language. Currently, she works in an early education program in Ithaca. She started studying international tango dance in 2000. Three years later, she was charmed by Argentine tango—and fell in love with it. Since then, tango has become a large part of her life. She has been teaching and performing with Joaquin Canay since January 2006.

Tom Nicholson, assistant professor in the Television-Radio department, holds a B.A. in Film Studies from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.S. in Television, Radio and Film from Syracuse University. Before joining the Ithaca College faculty, he worked for over twenty years in the film and television industry as a director and editor. As a producer, director, and editor, his documentary work has been broadcast in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Throughout his career, he has participated in and produced projects across a wide variety of media institutions, including National Geographic, the BBC, and PBS. Most recently, he worked on The Gold Rush for the American Experience series, airing this fall on PBS.

Pamela Wintle is Senior Archivist at the Human Studies Film Archives of the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. In 1981, she founded the Human Studies Film Archives and has continued to guide this collection of cultural moving images from around the world. She is also a founding board member of Northeast Historic Film and an active participant in the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA). Currently, she is serving a five-year term as AMIA’s alternate representative on the Library of Congress’ National Film Preservation Board. Wintle is an alumna of the Theater Department at Ithaca College.

Patricia R. Zimmermann is professor in the Department of Cinema and Photography at Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York, and codirector of the Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival. She is the author of Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film and States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies. She was coeditor with Erik Barnouw of The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema. Her forthcoming book, coedited with Karen Ishizuka, is Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories. She has worked extensively in the United States and internationally as a curator and programmer. In addition, she has produced and directed a variety of collaborative live music and archival film remix performances performed at Ithaca College, Vassar College, University of South Carolina, Concordia University in Montreal, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.
Suggested Further Reading

Maria Susan Azzi and Simon Collier
Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla

Simon Collier, Artemis Cooper, Maria Susana Azzi, Richard Martin
Tango
(New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997)

Natalio Gorin, Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir
(Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2001)

Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela R. Montaldo, editors
The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics

Julie Taylor
Paper Tangos

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