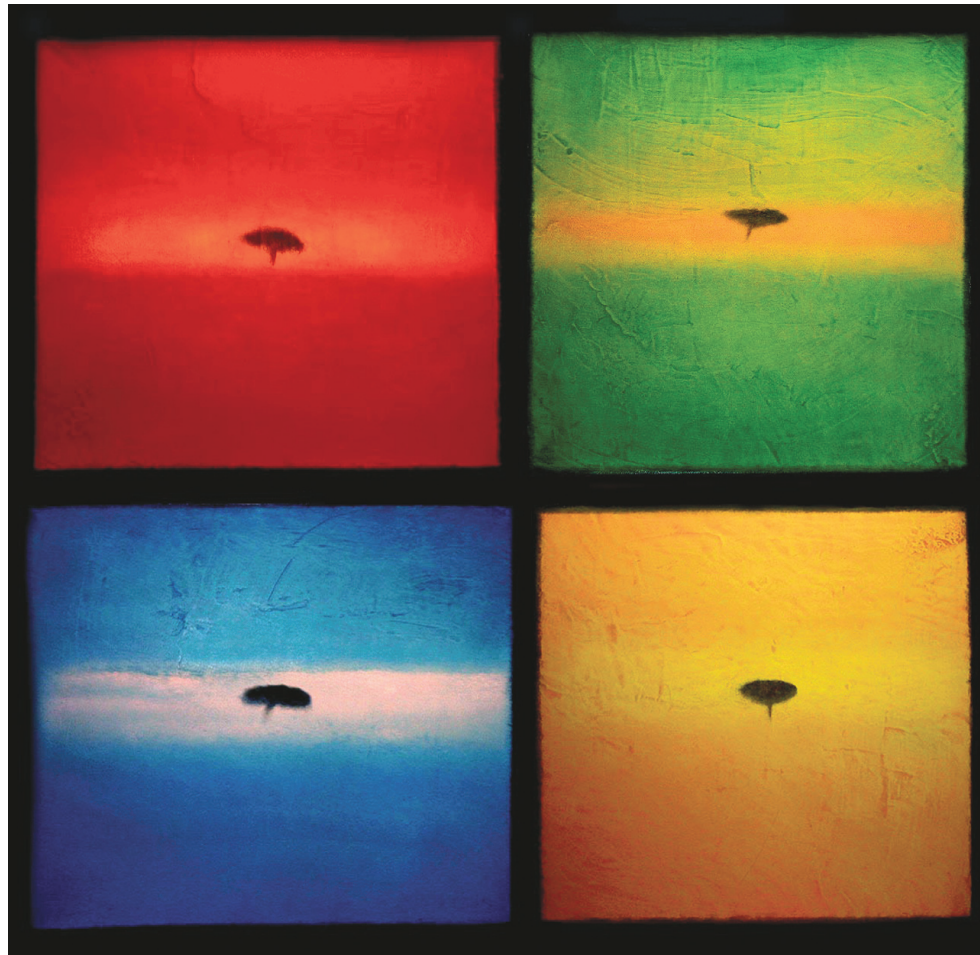


Astor
PIAZZOLLA
Legacy

Tomás Cotik, Violin • Tao Lin, Piano
Jeffrey Kipperman, Double Bass • Alfredo Lerida, Voice
Alex Wadner, Bradley Loudis, Percussion



Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992) Legacy

Nuevo tango master Astor Piazzolla (born 11 March 1921, died 4 July 1992) packed a lot of living into his writing and his playing.

Tango is the music of Buenos Aires, but the man who would challenge so many of the traditions and clichés within tango, and in doing so create the revolutionary *Nuevo tango*, was not even a *porteño*, as the inhabitants of Buenos Aires are called. Astor Piazzolla was born in Mar del Plata, a resort town on the Atlantic coast of Argentina, about 250 miles south of Buenos Aires. When he was just four years old, his family moved to New York's Lower East Side, then a tough neighbourhood populated by gangsters seemingly from every denomination. Astor was short and walked with a limp due to a congenital condition, so he fought his way to respect. The other kids called him 'Lefty', acknowledging his punch.

He grew up listening to Italian songs, klezmer music, jazz and, late at night, the tangos his father played at home to alleviate his homesickness. Piazzolla hated tango, but when his father bought him a bandoneon, the button squeezebox that is the quintessential instrument of tango, he set out to learn it 'just to please him', he once said. There were no bandoneon teachers around, so he learned the instrument by playing transcriptions of Bach, Schumann and Mozart. He was 13 when he met the iconic tango singer Carlos Gardel, in town to shoot a couple of movies for Paramount. After hearing him play, Gardel famously told him 'Mirá pibe, el fuelle lo tocás bárbaro, pero al tango lo tocás como un gallego' ('Look kid, the squeezebox you play great, but the tango you play like a *gringo*').

Piazzolla was still very much a *gringo* when the family returned to Argentina in 1937, three years later. Even his Spanish was not that good. While in Mar del Plata, he took bandoneon lessons and also heard violinist Elvino Vardaro's sextet on the radio. His modernist approach awakened in him a new interest in tango. In 1939, he left Mar del Plata to try his luck in Buenos Aires. He joined the orchestra of the great bandoneonist and composer Anibal Troilo, and after a four-year apprenticeship, he left to form his own orchestra.

But playing tango for the dancers in a cabaret was never Piazzolla's goal. He studied with composer Alberto Ginastera, wrote music for film and won a classical music competition that led to studies in Paris with Nadia Boulanger in 1954. Whatever musical technique she taught him, the most profound impact was her blessing of *his* tango. He didn't have to be a classical musician to write serious music, he could be Piazzolla. So, upon his return to Buenos Aires in 1955, he formed his Octet, which marked a before and after in tango history.

Still, three years later, unhappy with the audience response to his music, Piazzolla was back in New York, where he would stay until 1960. During that time, he not only wrote new music and worked as an arranger for hire, but formed, and recorded with, an ensemble he called the J-T Quintet, or Jazz Tango Quintet, which included electric guitar and vibraphone. It was an extraordinary time in music. In jazz, Miles Davis released *Kind of Blue*; Ornette Coleman, who played a now legendary two-week residency at the Five Spot club in Manhattan, released *The Shape of Jazz to Come*; and Charles Mingus contributed his epochal *Ah Um*. But the death of his father in 1959 (which inspired the moving tribute *Adiós Nonino*), and his lack of success, nudged Piazzolla back to Buenos Aires.

In light of these events and more, Piazzolla constructed a distinct musical universe that has its roots in tango but, at certain points, might draw from European classical music and jazz, to klezmer and rock. The musician who once pined to be a 'serious' composer, found his place in the classical repertoire and the great concert halls with his *Nuevo tango*.

Piazzolla's music is all written out but open to broad interpretation, at times suggesting the freedom of improvisation in jazz. He eschewed conventional tango orchestras and groups and, perhaps drawing from his experiences in New York and with jazz, settled on the quintet as his instrument of choice: rich in sonorities, flexible and compact. Once he had selected his musicians, he wrote specifically for their talents and personalities — not unlike what Duke Ellington did with the great soloists in his orchestra.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Piazzolla's music sounds at once vaguely familiar yet profoundly different. It also sounds deceptively simple to play — instrumental brilliance is a minimal requirement. The late pianist and composer Gerardo Gandini, a member of Piazzolla's final group, issued a cautionary warning for performers: 'La música de Piazzolla es Piazzolla tocándola' ('Piazzolla's music is Piazzolla playing it').

These are the challenges violinist Tomás Cotik and pianist Tao Lin face when approaching this music. On *Legacy*, their second album of Piazzolla's works, they address the composer's history as they put their imprint on his music. It's an expansive programme, set by personal resonances rather than thematic ideas.

Vardarito and *Escualo* ('Shark') suggest bookends of Piazzolla's relationship with the violin in his music. The former was dedicated to violinist Elvino Vardaro, so influential in Piazzolla's rediscovery of tango and, fast forward to the late 1950s, a member of his Octet and his first Quintet. The latter suggests both a tribute and a dare by Piazzolla to Fernando Suárez Paz, his phenomenal last violinist who, as a youngster, had stood in for Vardaro on the occasions when the old master fell ill.

Balada para un loco ('Ballad for a Madman'), with lyrics by Uruguayan poet Horacio Ferrer, became a *cause célèbre* when it was voted second prize at the first Latin American Festival of Song and Dance in 1969. No one remembers the winner, but the *Balada* became a major hit and is now considered a landmark in the evolution of the tango-song —

even if Piazzolla appeared not to think much of it himself. 'It is audacious to play a song that's not for us violinists', says Cotik, tongue in cheek. 'But then again, I chose the songs I wanted to play, I *needed* to play.'

Revirado ('Crazy'), written in 1963, nods at the bright sound and fast pace of the Old Guard tango — while showing a way forward in harmony and counterpoint. *Jeanne y Paul* is one of two pieces written by Piazzolla for Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Last Tango in Paris* — which by then had already been scored by Argentine saxophonist Gato Barbieri. Both were eventually used in Francesco Rosi's 1976 thriller *Cadaveri Eccellenti*.

Piazzolla demanded from his musicians *roña* ('dirt'), a certain griminess in their playing. Music is not about perfection — and certainly not Piazzolla's music. Instead, his music is about profound, imperfect humanity. It is violent and tender, it pushes and probes but also comforts, and while it can be nakedly emotional, it also seems to mock the melodrama so dear to tango.

Throughout this recording, Tomás Cotik and Tao Lin distill the sound of the various Piazzolla ensembles into mostly duets and trios. They often attack the music on the page as if to demand that it relinquish its secrets, pushing hard at fast tempos, feelings exposed on a knife edge, no chance for sentimentality. It is how a celebration of Piazzolla's legacy must sound.

'Lefty', the small, lame, immigrant kid, who fought his way to respect on the tough streets of the Lower East Side, would have appreciated it.

Fernando González

Fernando González is a GRAMMY®-nominated independent music journalist and critic. He translated and annotated 'Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir' as told to Natalio Gorín, and wrote liner notes for four Piazzolla recordings. He is based in Miami. www.fernandogonzalezwords.com

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Tomás Cotik

Hailed by Michael Tilson Thomas as ‘an excellent violinist’, Tomás Cotik was a first-prize winner at the National Broadcast Music Competition in his native Argentina in 1997, and the winner of the Government of Canada Award for 2003–05. An avid recording artist, Cotik is currently involved in more than 14 recordings for Naxos and Centaur Records, which have received over a hundred reviews and the highest praise from some of the best-known publications such as *Fanfare*, *American Record Guide*, *Downbeat* and *MusicWeb International*. A former rotating concertmaster with the New World Symphony and a leader with various other orchestras in the United States and abroad, Cotik has performed with internationally prominent conductors such as Michael Tilson Thomas, Valery Gergiev, Roberto Abbado, Yakov Kreizberg, Marin Alsop, Stéphane Denève, Roger Norrington and Robert Spano, in notable venues such as Carnegie Hall. Tomás Cotik has performed hundreds of recitals and chamber music concerts across the globe. He has worked closely with artists such as Joseph Kalichstein, Franklin Cohen and members of the Cleveland, Miami, Pro Arte, Vogler, Vermeer, Tokyo and Endellion string quartets. Tomás Cotik earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Miami. He holds Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from Freiburg University of Music in Germany and an Artist Diploma from the Glenn Gould School in Toronto. Committed to passing on his passion for music, Dr Cotik was appointed Assistant Professor of Violin at Portland State University in 2016. He previously taught at West Texas A&M University, Florida International University, and at the University of Miami’s Frost School of Music. www.tomascotik.com

Photos: So-Min Kang



Tao Lin

Chinese-American concert pianist and Steinway Artist Tao Lin has performed in Asia, North America, and Europe and is renowned for his keen musical intelligence and an opulent, romantic tone. As a recitalist, he has performed at such prestigious venues as the Kennedy Center, National Gallery of Art, 92nd Street Y, Rockefeller University, Chautauqua Institute, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Minnesota Orchestra Hall, Izumi Hall in Osaka, Japan, and the Edvard Grieg Museum in Norway. A devoted chamber musician, Lin has performed throughout the United States as a member of the Berlin Piano Quartet (with the Jacques Thibaud String Trio) and the Brahms *Piano Quartet* (with the St Petersburg String Quartet). He has also appeared in concerts with the Miami, Bergonzi, Alcon and Rosalyra string quartets, as well as distinguished musicians such as Elmar Oliveira, Roberto Díaz, William De Rosa, Charles Castleman, Eugenia Zukerman, Claudio Bohorquez and members of the Metropolitan Opera, Philadelphia, Saint Louis, National, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Atlanta, and Berlin Staatskapelle orchestras. www.taolin.net

In the year of the 25th anniversary of Piazzolla's death, Argentinean-born violinist Tomás Cotik and Chinese-American pianist Tao Lin follow their critically acclaimed *Tango Nuevo* [8.573166] with more of Piazzolla's richest and most exciting compositions. These fresh adaptations for mostly two or three musicians preserve and celebrate the *Nuevo tango* master's legacy. 'I think that lovers of tango music will definitely want this fascinating disc', wrote *Fanfare* of *Tango Nuevo*.

**Astor
PIAZZOLLA**
(1921–1992)

Legacy

1 Escualo*	3:02	8 Adiós Nonino⁺	5:46
2 Vardarito*	6:48	9 Introducción al ángel*	5:00
3 Milonga del ángel⁺	6:00	10 Jeanne y Paul*	4:36
Las cuatro estaciones porteñas*	21:35	11 Balada para un loco*	5:03
4 I. Primavera porteña	4:27	12 Revirado⁺	3:23
5 II. Verano porteño	6:11	13 Fracanapa⁺	2:36
6 III. Otoño porteño	4:44	* Adapted by Tomás Cotik	
7 IV. Invierno porteño	6:12	+ Arranged by Osvaldo Calo	



Tomás Cotik, Violin • Tao Lin, Piano
Jeffrey Kipperman, Double Bass **2 3 9 11**
Alex Wadner, Bradley Loudis, Percussion **2 4 10 13**
Alfredo Lerida, Voice **11**



Recorded: 18–21 December 2014 at Gusman Concert Hall, Coral Gables, USA
Producers: Alejandro Sánchez-Samper and Tomás Cotik • Recording engineer: Edward Stalzer
Editor, Mix and Mastering Engineer: Alejandro Sánchez-Samper • Assistant editing and mix engineers: Carlos Patiño, Luis Alejandro Castillo, Joel Iglesias and Adestin Grant • Booklet notes: Fernando González
Violin: Marc de Sterke (2000) • Bow: Eugene Sartory, c. 1893/94 • Piano: Steinway D
Cover painting: *The 4 Seasons* by Sebastian Spreng (by courtesy of the artist)



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Playing Time
64:01



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