



PIAZZOLLA

Time of Life

Arrangements for
accordion and piano

Geir Draugsvoll,
Classical Accordion

Mette Rasmussen,
Piano



Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992)

Time of Life

Astor Piazzolla's energetic and melancholic music appeals to listeners of all ages throughout the world, and *Time of Life* is a tribute to his music and his importance as a composer. Using elements of jazz and classical music together with the traditional Latin American tango, he managed to create a whole new world of sounds and expressions in the *Nuevo Tango* genre.

Considering his background and life in Argentina, the US and Europe, it is perhaps natural that he tried to combine these impulses into a new style. His fundament as a composer was made during his younger years through studies with Alberto Ginastera and Nadia Boulanger.

Astor Piazzolla composed more than 400 works in a variety of different settings such as film music, ballet, orchestral music, chamber music and of course within the more traditional tango genre. His musical spectrum is so colorful, that it has been a challenge to decide what to perform. However, we have picked carefully from his wonderful garden of music, and *Time of Life* represents a bouquet of some of his very best pieces throughout his career.

Geir Draugsvoll and Mette Rasmussen

About Astor Piazzolla

Astor Piazzolla's name has become synonymous with tango, the signature dance of his native country, Argentina. Like Johann Strauss, Jr. with regard to the waltz, Piazzolla transformed a popular idiom into sophisticated art music that reveals a complex, enormously gifted and prolific composer, performer and cultural icon whose influence continues to be felt across musical genres.

The tango is notoriously resistant to simple definitions. It contains within its hypnotic pulse an amalgam of diverse influences out of Europe and Africa, which were stirred together in the slums and brothels of

Buenos Aires. Immigrant workers within that great port city in the late 19th century shaped the unmistakable rhythmic gestures, instrumentation and general attitude of the tango. It then crossed lines of class and milieu. But the tango has always been defined by paradox. It can be heard in the tension between a strict, tight rhythmic control and the sensuous freedom suggested by the melodic line. Melancholy is countered with menace, while genuine passion faces up to dissembling masquerade.

Tradition and innovation are another paradox inherent in the tango as Piazzolla came to experience it. The son of Italian immigrants to Argentina, he moved with his parents to New York City, where he had a streetwise upbringing in Little Italy. As a young boy, Piazzolla had little interest in the music from back home until, at the age of eight, his tango-loving father bought him a bandoneon, or button accordion, at a pawn shop. The young Piazzolla fed his growing interest in classical music while becoming a prodigy on the instrument. In 1936, while he was still a teenager, the family returned to Argentina, and before he was 20 Piazzolla was already playing in Buenos Aires' top-notch tango orchestra, led by Anibal Troilo. Piazzolla acquired practical experience from countless nights in smoky clubs, but he already had a hankering for innovation – which proved to be a problem during this golden age of the cabaret tango. Its aficionados tended to be ultra-traditionalists, resistant to any tinkering with the now familiar formulas of tango culture (an irony, considering how dramatically the tango had evolved in just a few decades).

Inevitably, Piazzolla stirred up resentment when he began experimenting with new tango hybrids. His approach was iconoclastic and gave birth to a revolutionary musical movement, dubbed *Nuevo Tango*, which borrowed elements from jazz and classical music (from the Baroque to contemporaries such as Stravinsky and Bartók). *Nuevo Tango* had greater complexity in terms of rhythmic patterns, harmonic vocabulary and contrapuntal textures. Piazzolla also began exploring longer forms suggested by

classical music. Moreover, he bypassed the sacrosanct instrumentation of the standard tango orchestra and added electric sounds to the acoustic mix.

Piazzolla said that Buenos Aires taught him the secrets of the tango. He learned these 'in a cold room in a boarding house, in the cabarets in the 1940s, in the cafes with balconies and orchestras, in the people of yesterday and today, in the sounds of the streets.' But in addition he singled out his two great teachers from the classical world: Nadia Boulanger and Alberto Ginastera.

Thomas May

The Music

Astor Piazzolla was a master of beautiful melodies, and his *Milongas* are world famous and performed on practically all kinds of instruments. Maybe this is why he was extensively used as a film composer throughout his career. *Tanti anni prima* and *Oblivion* were both written for the film *Henry IV*, which was directed by Marco Bellocchio, and they turned out to be some of his most

popular melodies. As is his famous *Milonga del ángel*, and his beloved song, *Chiquilín de Bachín*. This lyrical waltz tells the sad story about a boy begging at the restaurant Bachín as Piazzolla was dining with his friends. *Michelangelo 70* is, however, a very energetic tango, with sharp rhythms and special effects.

The *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* are four individual tangos which was originally written for piano solo, but was later made famous in the arrangement for his own Quintet. This beautiful suite is inspired by the impressions of the contrasting seasons in Buenos Aires.

One of Astor Piazzolla's most classically orientated compositions, is without doubt his *Hommage à Liège*, originally composed for bandoneon, guitar and string orchestra. It is regularly performed in concert halls around the world in its original version, but has also been arranged for various combinations. From the improvisational and playful *Introducción* to the beautiful *Milonga* and the catchy *Tango*, this composition sums up most of the characteristics that Astor Piazzolla shared with us during his 'Time of Life'.

Geir Draugsvoll and Mette Rasmussen



Geir Draugsvoll

Geir Draugsvoll is considered to be one of the most versatile musicians on the classical accordion. He has performed with world class orchestras, conductors and musicians such as the London Symphony Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Münchener Philharmoniker, the Berkeley Symphony, the Stockholm Philharmonic and the Mariinsky Orchestra, with conductors including Valery Gergiev, Donald Runnicles, David Geringas and Joana Carneiro, among others. He has released many albums including *Fachwerk* by Sofia Gubaidulina on Naxos (8.572772). www.geirdraugsvoll.com

Mette Rasmussen

Mette Rasmussen studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, and at Artlife International in Paris. She has performed as soloist and chamber musician in Scandinavia, Switzerland, France and China, and has broadcast on radio and TV, as well as appearing at several festivals and important venues. She has previously released the French piano music album *Sentiments*.

Astor Piazzolla's name is synonymous with *Nuevo Tango*, an experimental compound of traditional and contemporary influences, and this recording offers a bouquet of his finest music in wholly original arrangements for classical accordion and piano. This selection includes the unforgettable *Milonga del ángel* as well as the evocative suite *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*. The *Double Concerto 'Hommage à Liège'* is one of Piazzolla's most classically orientated works, by turns playful, catchy and lyric, while the examples drawn from his film music are among his most enduring.

Astor
PIAZZOLLA
(1921–1992)

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|--|---|
| 1 Tanti anni prima ('Many Years Before') (1984) 4:31 | 8 Milonga del ángel (1965) 5:24 |
| Las cuatro estaciones porteñas ('The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires') (1965–70) 17:51 | Double Concerto 'Hommage à Liège' (arr. Anatolijus Šenderovas, b. 1945) (1985) 16:40 |
| 2 Primavera Porteña 5:37 | 9 Introducción 4:15 |
| 3 Verano Porteño 3:18 | 10 Milonga 5:54 |
| 4 Otoño Porteño 4:44 | 11 Tango 6:31 |
| 5 Invierno Porteño 3:59 | 12 Chiquilín de Bachín ('The Little Boy at Bachín') (1968) 3:15 |
| 6 Oblivion (1984) 3:34 | |
| 7 Michelangelo 70 (1969) 2:36 | |

Geir Draugsvoll, Classical Accordion
Mette Rasmussen, Piano

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