

***Tracing Tangueros: Argentine Instrumental Tango Music*<sup>1</sup>**  
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Tango. The word alone conjures up images of a couple sensually dancing or sounds of a lamenting bandoneón. But, what is Argentine tango? What are its defining musical characteristics? How has it changed over the last century? Who are the key figures that have shaped its development? Based on our active involvement with tango in Argentina for over twelve years, we aim to answer these questions by describing our understanding and interpretation of this art form.

Our session at the April 26, 2013 Encounters/*Encuentros* at University of California, Riverside (UCR) presented a snapshot of our work. First, we established the musical parameters of the art form by asking the question, “What Makes It an Argentine Tango?” For the sake of time, we concentrated on the key musical elements that especially define *Argentine* tango, namely rhythm, melody, and instrumentation. We explained the key accompanimental tango rhythms of *marcato*, *síncopa*, and 3-3-2, along with the anticipatory sliding instrumental technique *arrastre*. Next, we discussed the key elements of tango melodies, including two distinct melodic styles “*tipo melódico*” and “*tipo rítmico*” and the interpretive practice of *fraseo*. Then, we showed examples of the evolution of the tango orchestra, including early ensembles that consisted of flute, guitar, violin, and bandoneón, larger orchestras of the 1930s and 1940s, and chamber configurations of the 1950s to today.

We illustrated distinct instrumental techniques that further define Argentine tango by showing a portion of our video footage of *tangueros* executing these special techniques. The first clip showed bandoneonist Nicolás Enrich, a young rising star in Buenos Aires, demonstrating *marcato*, *arrastre*, and *síncopa*; the second showed violinist Damián Bolotin demonstrating *chicharra*, a key violin percussive *yeite* that accentuates rhythm; and the third showed Juan Pablo Navarro demonstrating the famous bass technique, *strappata*. We also gave a live demonstration of the *yumba* technique on the piano.

Next, we presented a timeline of key *tangueros* from *la guardia nueva* to today. Accompanying musical examples illustrated our discussion of the connections between the *tangueros* and how tango instrumental music developed. We included samples by the *tangueros* Julio De Caro (“Maipo”), Osvaldo Pugliese (“La yumba”), Aníbal Troilo (“Pa’ que bailen los muchachos”), Horacio Salgán (“A fuego lento”), Astor Piazzolla (“La camorra”), Julián Plaza (“Danzarín”), Leopoldo Federico (“Eramos tan juvenes”), and Néstor Marconi (“Para el recorrido”).

After establishing the fundamental features of tango style and technique from a broad historical perspective, we focused on contemporary tango, or what many *tangueros*

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<sup>1</sup> *Tracing Tangueros: Argentine Instrumental Tango Music* is also the title of our contracted book with Oxford University Press.

are calling the “The Music of Buenos Aires.” We examined in detail the biographical background, compositional style, and performance practices of three *tangueros* working in the art form today. First, we presented Damián Bolotin and his tango “Soniada” for string quartet; second Sonia Possetti and her “Dalo por hecho” for a sextet of piano, violin, bandoneón, percussion, bass, and trombone; and finally Juan Pablo Navarro and his “Contra todos los que rayen” for double bass and piano.

The larger, more comprehensive version of our work, under contract with Oxford University Press under the same title, examines Argentine instrumental tango music and traces the connections between *tangueros*. Part One of the book establishes basic parameters for tango studies by describing and defining the art form’s multi-dimensions, fundamental musical elements, broad historical and stylistic trajectory, and arranging and performance techniques. Part Two provides twelve in-depth profiles of representative *tangueros* within the genre’s historical and stylistic trajectory. Through this focused examination of *tangueros* and their music, we show how the dynamic Argentine tango grows from one *tanguero* linked to another. We conclude that the composition techniques and performance practices of each generation of *tangueros* is informed by that of the past.