ENDS AND BEGINNINGS: A CYCLE OF SYMPHONIC TANGO SONGS

by

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A THESIS

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree in the School of Music and Dance by:

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Music

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Title: Ends And Beginnings: A Cycle of Symphonic Tango Songs

This piece is an exploration of tango music. Having immersed myself in this

music since 2011, I consider myself steeped and well-versed in the culture and

musical language of tango. This piece is an attempt to synthesize this rich body of

music with my own personal style. This work is firmly grounded in the aesthetic of

tango dance music from the "Golden Age" of tango in Argentina (1935-1955) and

post-Golden Age music. The intent is to create music that is immediately accessible

to a layperson, recognizable as tango to someone conversant in the genre, yet

distinctively new and part of the evolution of this music.

The instrumentation is a cross between a chamber orchestra and a tango

ensemble. Strings, flutes, clarinets, F horns, and percussion are joined by a rhythm

section of piano, classical guitar, and two bandoneons (tango concertina).

It comprises five movements and runs approximately 25 minutes.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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I must also give special thanks to the faculty of Tango For Musicians, notably the composition teachers, Diego Schissi and Exequiel Mantega. Their deep knowledge and love of tango, and their clear generosity and love of sharing their passions with others, is inspiring.

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Ends and Beginnings

A cycle of symphonic tango songs a master's thesis

Azalea Bradley

Score

Instrumentation

2 Flutes (2nd doubling Piccolo) 2-4 Bandoneons (1-2 on each part)

2 Clarinets in B Guitar (nylon)

2 Horns in F Piano

Violin 1 (4-6) Contrabass (1)

Violin 2 (4-6) Percussion (one player):
Viola (3-5) Snare Drum

Viola (3-5) Snare Drum Cello (2-4) Small Triangle

Suspended Cymbal

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II. Portland Hora Cero

The young composer finds themself in a practice room at midnight. Their piece is being read tomorrow. Will they finish the parts in time?





















































III. Milonga del Otoño

The milonga rhythm is infectious.

Autumn is here. The changing leaves want to dance with you.



















































poco accel.





4. Vals Entre Sueños

Never except in her dreams could she dance to a waltz so slow,





































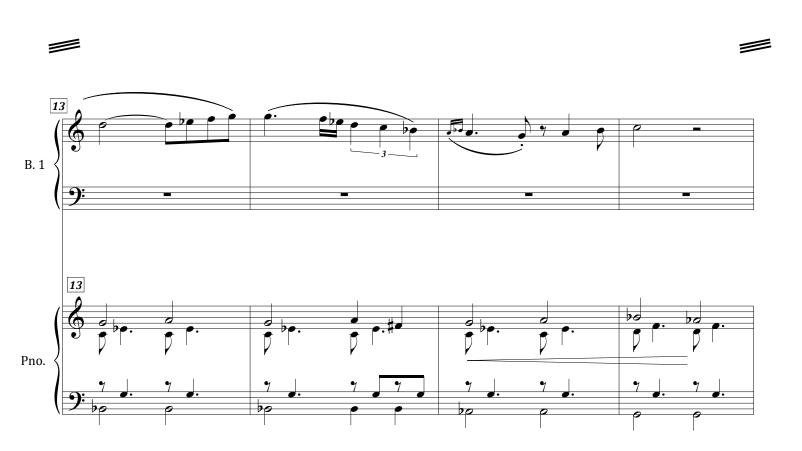


5. Elegy And Fugue

A song grieving the passing of the self I never was. A song celebrating myself as I am.







































































APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENTATION

2 Flutes (2nd doubling Piccolo)
2 Clarinets in Bb
Cuitar (nylon)
2 Horns in F
Piano
Violin 1 (4-6)
Contrabass (1)
Violin 2 (4-6)
Percussion (one player):
Viola (3-5)
Cello (2-4)
Small Triangle
Suspended Cymbal

APPENDIX B

NOTES ON THE ORCHESTRATION AND LAYOUT

This ensemble was conceived as an extension of the Orquesta Típica - the traditional tango orchestra. The traditional instrumentation consists of piano, upright bass, a line (fila) of 4 or more bandoneons, and a roughly equal number of violins. This ensemble rarely used a traditional conductor unless it was particularly large. Sometimes the director of the orchestra would stand aside and visually coach the orchestra; more often the orchestra was led by the pianist or principal bandoneonist.

Because of this, it is perhaps advantageous to modify or completely abandon a traditional orchestral seating layout. The following guides are recommended when deciding the layout (which will vary depending on the exact number of instruments and the presence or absence of a conductor):

- The piano can be seen as the "glue" that holds the ensemble together. The part is more demanding than most of the other parts, and must be played by a very rhythmically solid player who can hold the beat without always looking at the conductor. The piano should be prominently situated, toward the front.
- The contrabass is the rhythmic anchor of the entire group. It is not part of the string section, but rather part of the rhythm section, and should be placed close to the piano, where the two players can see each other -- or at least, the pianist can see the bassist.
- The concertmaster should, as with symphonic orchestras, be close to the audience.
- The bandoneons should be in a line (fila) in the front of the group, next to the piano and bass, with the principal closest to the rhythm section, where, ideally, they have visual contact with the bassist and pianist.
- The guitar and percussion should also be close to the piano and bass.
- Percussion is not part of the traditional orchestra. The percussion in this ensemble should not be overpowering or even prominent; it is mostly there to add texture rather than to provide rhythmic anchor. The snare drum should not ring loudly, but have a softer, more muffled effect. Ideally it is not a deep drum. The triangle should be small and tinny.
- It is likely that the guitar and possibly the bandoneons will have to be amplified, even if the rest of the ensemble is not.

APPENDIX C

ABOUT THE BANDONEON

This work calls for two bandoneons. This instrument, sometimes called a "tango accordion", is a free-reed instrument with bellows, somewhat resembling a large concertina. It has a total of 71 buttons, each of which produce a single note, distributed among the two sides. It has a chromatic five-octave range.

The instrument is extremely common in Argentina and can be considered the backbone of the tango sound. It can play very expressively as well as percussively.

Accordions may be substituted, but this is not ideal, and the players must learn to play in such a way that emulates the bandoneon, particularly percussive chords.

APPENDIX D

PERFORMANCE NOTES

This piece is notated to be accessible to accomplished musicians with little to no background in tango. However, knowledge of certain techniques among, at least, the concertmaster, the contrabass player, the pianist, and the bandoneon players is highly recommended. (With bandoneon players in North America, it is highly likely that they will already be somewhat familiar with tango.) The materials published by the Argentine organization Tango Sin Fin are very useful, especially their Método de Tango books.

With this music, the feeling and the rhythm are more important than the notes. It is imperative that the players play very rhythmically precisely. It might help to think of being "locked in" with the beat rather than following or reacting the conductor. It might also help to practice or rehearse certain passages by singing the rhythms on any pitch before playing them.

Some instruments have chord symbols. Chords are to be interpreted thusly:

- Rhythmic notation with chord symbols can be interpreted by the player in whatever voicing is most idiomatic to the instrument and the musical context.
- Chord symbols above notated chords show that the player may slightly alter the voicing of the chord if they deem necessary.
- Chords with no chord symbols must be realized in the voicing they are written.

APPENDIX E

SPECIAL TECHNIQUES

Arrastre - notated as a diagonal line leading up to the note. The effect is a buildup -- in volume and/or pitch -- to the main note, starting usually approximately a half-beat or a beat before the main note, which is usually accented. This effect is different on each instrument:

- Contrabass: a short glissando starting a tone or semitone below the arrival note, all under one bow. The beginning of the note is indistinct; the arrival note is strong and accented and usually staccato.
- Other strings: similar to that of the contrabass, sometimes without the glissando.
- Piano: a short run of two or four sixteenth notes in a chromatic run leading to the arrival note. Depending on context, this may also be realized as grace notes rather than measured notes. This is always notated out in this piece.
- Bandoneon: the note (usually a chord) is sounded softly before the arrival note, increasing in volume until the beat, with a sharp accent on the arrival note.

Chicharra - an effect in stringed insruments where the bow is drawn in short, percussive strokes over the third string on the other side of the bridge, producing a chirping or scratching effect.

Látigo - a whip-like, very fast rising glissando on the first string of the violin. Start and end pithces are indeterminate.

Knock - the player may find a way to knock their knuckles or tap their fingers on their instrument in such a place that produces a nice resonant effect.

Phrasing

The word *fraseo* in a tango context refers to the practice of distorting the rhythmic values of a melody. This is most commonly done by transforming a group of four eighth notes, which start on a strong beat, by elongating the first two notes and shortening the second two. This is done without changing the tempo. Longer groups of notes can be transformed in a similar aesthetic, which usually involves some or most of the notes being "behind" where they are notated, sometimes "catching up" for an arrival at the end of the phrase, and sometimes ending late. The melody is almost never played ahead of the beat for longer than a few notes.

Trained tango musicians playing in a small group where they are one to a part (more akin to a jazz combo) will intuitively interpret music this way. In a written-out arrangement for many players, these fraseo passages must be notated exactly. Passages containing triplets (e.g. mm. 1 and 7 of the first movement) are almost always written-out fraseo. It is helpful for the players to know that they are playing written-out phrasing, the notated values are approximations, and the underlying values fit an 8th-note grid.