

Viva Tango!

[Pablo Aslan](#) (bass)
[Alex Brown](#) (piano)
[Hector Del Curto](#) (bandoneon)
[Cho-Liang Lin](#) (violin)
[David Shifrin](#) (clarinet)
[Satoshi Takeishi](#) (percussion)

Program

Letters from Argentina (San Antonio Premiere)

Lalo Schifrin (b.1932)

Tango del Atardecer
Pampas
Tango Borealis
Danza de los Montes
Tango a Borges
Malambo de los Llanos

Intermission

Selected Tangos

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

Michelangelo 70
Verano Porteño
Adios Nonino
La Muerte del Angel
Oblivion
Libertango

From the Composer

“Like the clear sky, like the rain, like the clouds, music has always been part of the Argentine atmosphere. The strumming of the Gaucho’s guitars, the rhythms of the Indian drums, the expressive melodies of the bandoneon were the aural medium in which I grew up. In Argentina, the music was ever present in the literature, in the visual arts, and in the history of the country.

“*Letters from Argentina*” are the musical memories enhanced by my imagination and converted into impressions of my homeland. Working on this project helped me to recreate an unreal past in which a memory persists and invites us to a journey full of promises and dreams.” – *Lalo Schifrin*

Program Notes

Where did tango, a dance form that was denounced by Pope Pius X at the start of the 20th century as mere 'barbarian contortions' come from? This is a rags to riches story, for tango was born in the most humble circumstances, in the back streets of Argentina's Buenos Aires in the 19th century. With its heady combination of catchy rhythms, sultry melodies and a melancholy that gave it heart as well as rhythm, it is no surprise that it became a worldwide phenomenon. The secret of its allure doesn't merely lie with the notes on the page, but the all-important bandoneón, a button accordion, which brings to it a soulfulness, and an irresistible streak of sadness.

Though tango spread all over the world, its tradition – particularly in South America – was fiercely guarded, with tango ensembles and orchestras protecting the precious flame. In fact, as recently as 2009, its importance was such that it was added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists. As a genre it has many permutations, but syncopation plays a key role, as does the close embrace of the two dancers.

Both **Astor Piazzolla** and **Lalo Schifrin** are key figures in the history of tango. Both Argentinian, they were born 11 years apart, Piazzolla in 1921 and Schifrin in 1932. The latter had a classical background – his father was a violinist in the opera orchestra in Buenos Aires. Both Piazzolla and Schifrin subsequently travelled to Paris, a city that shaped them in important ways. Schifrin not only performed as a pianist with Piazzolla but he also met the legendary jazz trumpeter and bandleader Dizzy Gillespie, who invited him to join his quintet.

Schifrin has since pursued a career as pianist, arranger, composer and conductor, excelling in every field. His film and TV scores, of which he has written over 100, include the classic television series *Mission: Impossible*, the *Dirty Harry* films with Clint Eastwood and, in 1998, a film called *Tango*, which reunited him with a genre in which he had long excelled. Seven years later, at a point where many might be considering retirement, or at least slowing down a little, Schifrin wrote *Letters from Argentina*, a musical love letter in eight parts (of which we hear six) to his native land. He has described it poetically as being an 'unreal past in which a memory persists and invites us on a journey full of promises and dreams'. And the music does exactly that. Along the way, we encounter diverse landscapes and characters, much of them expressed through tango, the musicians evoking everything from strummed guitars to catchy drum rhythms, while the sound of the violin, now setting off on a catchy dance, now wistful, now improvisatory, is surely a fond tribute to Schifrin's own father.

Astor Piazzolla's trajectory was different from Schifrin's. Though he was born in Argentina, his family moved to New York and it was here that he experienced lots of different forms of music – not just tango but also (crucially) jazz and classical music; it was tango that particularly caught his attention, however, and he became an outstanding bandoneón player (so much so that he came to the attention of the great tango conductor Carlos Gardel, whose orchestra he was invited to join, though he was in fact too young to tour). Piazzolla was also composing by this point, writing his earliest tango at the age of just 11. He moved to Buenos Aires six years later and joined a tango orchestra, learning the ropes the best possible way – by performing. But he was keen to expand his horizons so studied classical music with Alberto Ginastera, the leading light among Argentine composers, with whom he mastered orchestration. This in turn took him to Paris, where he met Schifrin and studied with the legendary pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, who taught everyone from Aaron Copland to Burt Bacharach.

It was all of these experiences that allowed Piazzolla the confidence not merely to tinker with the tradition of tango, but, in his forties, to create a whole new strand – nuevo tango (new tango), which expanded it in several vital ways. For a start, it now enjoyed a new range of rhythmic possibilities but equally crucial was the way it could inhabit bigger structures than before, and become more sophisticated in its musical working-out. Also key was the way that nuevo tango entered into a conversation with different musical genres – such as jazz. Piazzolla was naturally one of music’s great collaborators, and it was this cross-fertilisation with other genres that helped breathe new life into the tango. We can relive that journey today, through some of his most memorable tangos, which often coincided with significant points in his life. Piazzolla’s touching *Adios Nonino*, for instance, commemorates the death of his father and establishes the structure that was to become a favourite of his, with fast section followed by slower moving music and then a coda. *Libertango* is the title-track of an album released in 1974, while Piazzolla was living in Italy. Its subject of freedom is highly political – he’d left his beloved Argentina a year earlier in order to escape the increasingly heavy-handed ruling regime. For Piazzolla, tango and life were inextricably linked, which is what makes his music as vital and relevant today as it ever was.

Program note by Harriet Smith