

DJ workshop

El Corte

May day 2005

Contents

0 Introduction

1 Part 1 Circumstantial conditions

- Space
- Lights
- Dancefloor
- Musical equipment
- Time
- Popularity
- Special activities
- Dancers & visitors

2 Part 2 History of tango

- Prehistory
- Birth of tango
- Guardia vieja
- Tango mania
- Guardia nueva
- Epoca de oro
- Tango nuevo
- Joven guardia
- Neotango

3 Part 3 Classification of music

- Instrumental & vocal
- Rhythmical & lyrical
- Slow & fast
- Energetic & melancholy
- Regular & irregular
- Old & modern

4 Part 4 Structuring a milonga

Tanda
Musical arch
Cortina's
Specials

5 Part 5:Do's & don'ts

Concentration
Read your audience
Know you audience
Dynamic performance
Bias
Don't try to attract attention
Requests

Appendixes

A Suggested reading
B Music labels
C Sound engineering for DJ's
D Important orchestra's and orchestral types
E Musica Maestro! Musical evolution of tango music

Introduction

For a number of years El Corte organizes a May Day DJ workshop. We felt a need to restructure and update the text. Of course we are very grateful for Ad van de Brekel's preparatory work, which did provide an extensive summary we used for so many years in foregoing DJ workshops.

This workshop is primarily set up for people who want to start or have recently started DJ-ing in tango salons. We want to provide DJ's (especially starting DJ's) with tools that will make their jobs easier. Mind you, we don't want to impose a set of rules. Use them as a guideline or a framework to test your own notions. Everybody is free to go his or her own way. The only thing we will do is, hand you some material to think about, which might open doors for you. Wasn't it Robert Blake who said "There is the known and there is the unknown, between which are doors of perception"?

This set up will also make this workshop interesting for experienced DJ-s, because there always is a chance getting stuck in the groove and fall into a routine way of playing the same music in the same structure over and over again.

In the second place this workshop aims at people who are interested in tango music and/or want to give their local DJ fundamental feedback, but don't speak the lingo.

What are the subjects we will deal with in this workshop?

In **part 1** we discuss the circumstantial conditions of a tango salon. As a tango DJ you don't perform in a vacuum. There are factors, which will influence a salon, either in a negative or positive way. Some of these factors can be influenced, some of them can't.

In **part 2** we will give a short sketch of the history of tango as a

dance, a musical form and as a social phenomenon. It helps a DJ if s/he has some knowledge of the fundamentals of the tango's history.

Part 3 is about the musical classification of tango music. Classifying music serves a dual goal. First of all, the enormous amount of music that is available, will make it easy to lose your self in a musical labyrinth with no way out. Secondly, classifying music provides a DJ with an instrument in to balance or vary a salon.

How to structure a salon is a challenge we deal with in **part 4**. We will give you some instruments, which will enable you to create an atmosphere in a salon that is balanced and healthy: tanda and tandacycle(s), musical arches, cortina's and specials.

Part 5 concludes with some practical hints we learned the hard way; that is from experience.

In the appendices we will deal with some subjects, which do and at the same time don't really belong in this workshop, because they are either too technical and/or only interesting for a few participants.

May-July 2005

Nijmegen

Arnoud de Graaff

Michiel Lombaers

Eric Jeurissen

Part 1: Circumstantial conditions

A DJ can make or break a salon. Before starting to play music there are some conditions of a salon, a DJ should pay attention to. The success or failure of a salon depends on it. Not all circumstantial conditions can be influenced. The conditions that do contribute to the success of a salon are:

Space

Is there a single space to dance or are there more spaces? How is the dance floor situated? Where is your workspace and how is it situated?

To start with the last question: the DJ-s workspace is best situated close to the dance floor. The DJ has the best overview of the dance floor and that is the place where it is all happening. And also to feel the atmosphere on the dance floor, a place close by is logical.

The music should be heard everywhere but not in all places in the same volume. Most dancehalls have a space for dancing and a space for "lounging" (drinking, talking, sitting down and meeting people to dance with and maybe a little flirting). If possible, the sound volume should be a little less in the lounge area than in the dance area. If people have to shout, the music is too loud. The way a space is decorated with tables, chairs and other obstacles is also essential for traffic and communication. See to it that there are not too many obstacles. It hinders people in mixing freely and may cause a salon to be static.

Tables and chairs should be situated at the side of the room in a way that makes it possible for dancers and visitors to mix freely. If this is not possible you can try to create more dynamics in a static crowd by playing cortina's, specials or shorter tanda's of tangos, valsas and milonga's.

Lights

Is it possible to adjust the lights to the atmosphere of the night, the music you are playing or an atmosphere you want to create or change? Are there colored lights?

The lights play an important role in creating an atmosphere. By playing with lights you can accentuate the music or trim down the effects that music has on an audience. Colored lights (if available) do enlarge these possibilities but there is also downside to this; it may create a restless atmosphere if you play too much.

Red lights usually symbolize romantic, even "sexy" music like Fresedo's and Calo's slow lyrical tangos. However, too much and too long red lights subconsciously irritates your audience. This is the case with all types of colored lights: too long and too much is annoying. It is wise to vary colored lights regularly. Blue and green neon lights have a cool feeling, which you can use for tango-nuevo's and neo-tangos.

When there are no colored lights and dimmers, the possibilities of playing with lights are of course limited, but not impossible. You can decide to use or not to use a certain light or place/ aim a lamp on another spot.

Experiment with lights. DJ-ing is more than only playing some music and as a DJ you also have a responsibility for creating an atmosphere people enjoy.

Dance floor

What is the quality of the floor? How big is the floor?

The roughness (texture) of a floor will determine if it is fit for dancing or not. Roughness and texture of a floor can be treated although not all dancehall owners are happy if you do. Always ask if it is allowed to make the floor more slippery (in case it is to strewn) or less slippery (when it is like an ice rink's floor).

Try to adapt the music to the state of the floor. Don't play "big" or very fast music on a slippery floor, for it invites people to

dance "big" or too fast and accidents are prone to happen. The bigness of a floor is relative. If there are many dancers on a small floor it is crowded: play "intimate" music. If there are few dancers, there is enough space and you can play "big" music like Pugliese.

Time

What is the duration of a salon? When is the focal point of the salon? On what day of the week the salon is organized?

Most salons have a fixed time of beginning and ending. So as a DJ you know how many time you have. You can make a scenario that you can adjust depending on what sort of responses you will get. Or you can improvise all the way. Whatever you like!

Salons without a fixed ending time will make it a little more difficult but poses a greater challenge. Will you slowly let it go down (until the last dancing couple leaves the floor) or do you create a climax at a certain time, after which people go home?

Most salons will take from 3 to 8 hours. Whether a salon is a short one or a long one does make a difference. A long salon has a different dynamic than a short one.

A long salon does require a long stretch of concentration. To stay alert for 8 hours in a row is mentally exhausting. Take care in preparing yourself for it (maybe a scenario to fall back on when it doesn't go the way you want it to go). See to it that you are rested as you start.

The main characteristic of a long salon is that the audience you start with will not be the same you will end with. Dancers who visit a salon can be divided into three groups:

- The early birds: they arrive early and leave on time (family, job, other activities and obligations, etc.)
- The latecomers: they arrive late and usually stay until the end
- The diehards: they don't want to miss anything of a salon

In the middle of a salon you will notice a "changing of the guards". The early birds are planning to leave and the latecomers are starting to arrive. This can create some unrest. For a DJ this creates a challenging dilemma. At the same time s/he has to create a musical climax for the early birds and create rest for the newcomers who start to dance.

A short salon has a different dynamic. The "changing of the guards" effect will be much less prominent. Usually you will be able to make a musical arch that covers the salon from begin to end. In longer salons there will be more musical arches.

If you use specials to break the habits of dancers, use them in the beginning sparingly or not at all. Later in the evening, when the dancers have built up confidence and dancing routine, you can decide to play specials more often.

On which (part of a) day the salon is taking place is also important. A salon on weekdays will end earlier than in a salon in weekends. In weekends you can expect the atmosphere to be more relaxed than on weekdays. This effect will be intensified when the day(s) before were also spent dancing. The El Corte brunch salon is a good example.

Popularity

It is difficult to estimate in advance how many people will come to a salon. There are a lot of complicating factors:

- What is the weather like?
- How was the advertising?
- Is there another salon (or another competing event) close by?
- What is the reputation of the salon?
- Is the salon well organized?
- Is the dancehall easy to find?
- Is there a good parking facility?
- Etc.

Suppose all traffic lights are green and a lot of people come to dance: for a DJ there are some pitfalls. What are those pitfalls you should pay attention to?

- Don't play too big, energetic music. You are inviting dancers to bump into each other. Too much bumping spoils everybody's fun, for a collision tends to influence far more than just four dancers. Certainly at the busiest part of a salon requires you will have to play not too energetic and big music. Stick to rhythmical mainstream music from the epoca de oro.

- If you use specials, use them sparingly. Specials tend to excite dancers and afterwards you will have to cool down the dancers again. To calm a crowd you can play d'Agonstino and Fresedo. Also milonga camperas will do the trick.

- Don't play too much unfamiliar music in the first few hours. Stick to music everybody knows and appreciates. Think about de Angelis, Troilo, d'Arienzo and Tanturi. You will build up a lot of goodwill and that will give you enough opportunity for creating a more exciting atmosphere later on.

Special activities

Are there any special activities, like a dance performance, a speech and/or a live orchestra? There should be a balance between special activities and dancing, for dancing is what most people come for. Too many special activities will ruin a salon and leave the dancers frustrated.

Some organizers of a salon do not realize this. They love to hear their own voice (for too long) as they announce a show pair, etc. If you know this, you can tell them the effects it will have on the salon.

Here are some points that might be useful:

- Keep the breaks between the sets of an orchestra to a maximum of 15-20 minutes.

- Know the schedule by heart, for dancers will ask for it. If you

can get a play list, you can even tell them more.

- As a DJ you shouldn't try to compete with the orchestra and/or dancing performers. They are the stars, not you. So don't play music they are performing to or any other music of their genre.

- Play good danceable music that even might sound a bit boring. Don't attract attention by playing (too much) specials, for they involve a risk.

Dancers & visitors

The dancers and other visitors will influence the atmosphere. They can make or break a salon. Are they in a good mood or energy or are they tired? Do they arrive with expectations or do they have an open mind?

Try to "read" the audience and try to play music they want to hear. Doing so you will sometimes be able to sustain a "good energy" or change a "tired" atmosphere.

Visitors are another story. Ask them what they expect. Sometimes you can please them with some specials. Everybody knows Piazzolla's Adios Nonino. You can also resort to playing well know tangos like La Cumparsita or El Choclo.

Conclusion

So DJ-ing is a lot more than playing music. There are much more things you will have to pay attention to than you might have thought. However if you are alert and creative, you will notice things that threaten the success of a salon. By DJ-ing a lot at different salons, you will build up experience in DJ-ing as well as controlling (if possible) circumstantial factors.

Never hesitate to give the organization feedback in a professional way (that is respectful, constructive and not personal).

Part 2: History of tango

The prehistory: 1850 – 1880

In the nineteenth century, Argentina was a vast country, rich in raw materials, but scarcely populated. The ruling class wanted to reform Argentina into a modern nation by European standards, which meant Paris, at that time being the cultural centre of the world.

To develop this enormous potential meant a lot of labor and laborers were needed. The Argentine government solved this problem by developing an immigration policy. Their motto was to govern is to populate. Starting around 1860 this resulted that in over the following 80 years approximately 4 to 6 million immigrants entered Argentina. The majority of the immigrants came from the poorer southern regions in Europe (Italy, Spain, etc.), as well as the rest of Europe (Germany, Poland, England, etc.) and a considerable minority from Middle East.

In their attempt to convince Europeans to immigrate to Argentina, the recruiters sketched an image, which was too positive. Argentina wasn't the land of milk and honey, but a country that couldn't fulfill the high-strung expectations. The prospects of the immigrants were far from promising. This was caused by poverty, bad housing conditions, little chance of moving upward on a socio-economical scale and the melting pot of many different nationalities and cultures.

Most of the immigrants wound up in the capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires. From 1869 to 1914, Buenos Aires grew from a relatively small South American capital (ca 180 000 inhabitants) to a metropolis (ca 1 500 000 inhabitants).

The immigrants mostly lived in large overcrowded conventillos where a family all too often had only one room to live in. The conventillos were situated in the suburbios, an area where rural and urban values but also different cultures and nationalities clashed. The suburbios were generally viewed as the source of evil: crime, immorality, epidemics and ... tango!

The birth of tango: 1880-1890

Tango probably materialized around 1880-1890. There is very little known about this period. What is known, however, is the atmosphere tango was born in. Tango was born in a society that was experiencing rapid socio-economical changes, which caused a lot of social stress. In a society that was characterized by a great cultural diversity (many nationalities from immigrants) with little perspective for a better future, immigrants looked for solace by making music and dancing to vent their feelings of nostalgia and frustration.

Intermezzo

The original tango, both dance and music, may have evolved somewhere on a patio of a conventillo. Immigrants met there at night to talk and drank a glass, while reminiscing of their fatherland, where maybe it wasn't so bad after all. A Spaniard sang a sad ballad. A Greek came out of his room and accompanied the song by guitar. A Rumanian neighbor remembered that his violin had survived the harsh journey to Argentina.

Together they made music, and most of all they improvised. A musical mishmash was the result. After some time, a few Italian mothers danced a few steps of a folk dance, which they remembered from their childhood. Later that night, other immigrants played their music in a constantly changing musical set up and danced a lot. At the end of the evening everybody danced with everybody. This might have been the way tango started.

The many musical variants, from a variety of cultures the immigrants came from, may have met and interacted in the conventillos and later on the festivities in the barrios. Tango was thus formed by a great diversity of musical influences. Dominant influences in forming the tango were the habanera (Cuba), milonga (Argentina) and the candombe (Africa). Other minor musical influences were tango andaluz, klezmer, polka, waltz and fandango.

La guardia vieja: 1890-1917

Around the turn of century, tango was a controversial phenomenon in Argentina. Tango was born in the lower class. Opponents came mostly from the upper class, a minority with a lot of influence. They saw tango as something to be ashamed of, a dance of thieves and whores. From 1910 onwards a middle class emerged. The rigid two-class division had disappeared as a consequence of social unrest. Education became available to more people than only the happy few. The middle classes also started to organize themselves politically. Backed up by an improving economical situation, they became a factor to be reckoned with. This development contributed to the growing popularity of tango.

As a dance, tango changed in this period from a sinful dance in the brothels to a more respectable dance in the cafetins. In this process the dance was also simplified. Tango became more and more accepted, although it took many more years before it was generally accepted. Lyrics, if used at all, were short and spicy, often in lunfardo. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the roughness of the lyrics was somewhat softened. Tango lyrics were in this time of minor importance. It was mostly about music. Only after Gardel sang *Mi Noche Triste* in 1917, tango cantando became popu-

lar. Well-known exponents of this era were the composers Villoldo and Mendizábal and the musicians Maglio, Greco & his Orquesta Típica Criollo, Arolas, Canaro and Firpo.

In this time musicians were mostly amateurs without much musical education. Most of them couldn't even read music and played by ear. Improvisation and paying attention to what the public and dancers really wanted, was essential. Tango music formed the dance and the dance formed the music. Musicians moved from party to party and from barrio to barrio in regularly changing musical formations. This had as a consequence that most of the music from this early period was relatively simple and the styles of the orchestra's were quite similar. Canaro and Firpo, however, already clearly stood out with their own sound.

Tangomania: 1912 – 1917

Rich Argentines were used to spend their holidays in Paris. For their sons it was not unusual to make the grand tour through Europe as a rite de passage. Already in 1903, Argentine tango musicians came to Europe in the slipstream of the rich. Among them were Villoldo, Saborido and the married couple Gobbi-Rodriguez. Paris was famous for its recording techniques. Starting around 1905 the first tango records were produced. The market for records was good, because most of the dancehalls were not rich enough to afford a "live" tango orchestra.

In 1912, tango became quite suddenly very popular. It became the topic of conversation. There were tango dinners, tea dances where you could dance and also learn tango. Furthermore there were tango exhibitions and even a color tango, which ranged between an orange like brown and yellow ochre.

The sudden outburst of tango in Paris is hard to explain. Most likely it can be traced back to the longing for the exotic and aesthetic, which was characteristic for the belle époque. The Argentine elite, however, was shocked to see that tango, which they saw as disgusting and immoral, to be so favorably received in Europe. Tango's victory didn't come without counter forces. When tango started to become fashionable in Europe (first of all in Paris), the Argentine elite saw this as a deplorable thing: "Tango is in Buenos Aires a dance which is only danced in houses of ill repute and bars of the worst kind. Decent people never dance tango in decent salons. For Argentines tango music evokes very unpleasant feelings". Thus spoke the Argentine ambassador in Paris.

Conservative forces in Europe were unanimous in their verdict: tango was evil because "of its sinful and voluptuous character which conflicted with morality".

Religious force both in Europe and the United States condemned tango. In Germany Kaiser Wilhelm II forbade his officers to dance tango in uniform. The attempts to ban tango were futile of course and may even have contributed to the popularity of tango. Tango became an overnight sensation and spread quickly all around the world: North America and Canada, Europe and even Japan, where baron Megata popularized tango on his return from Paris.

La guardia nueva: 1917 - 1935

When the economic situation in Argentina deteriorated, tango also experienced its negative effects. In the twenties, tango lost much of its attraction. Many orchestras fell apart because its members made a career switch or emigrated. For this waning popularity several other causes can be mentioned: competition from American swing music and jazz, the talking pictures etc.

The character of tango music also changed in this period. It

evolved from simple folksy dance music to more complicated listening music. In the early twenties, a division had arisen in tango between traditional tango and evolutionary tango. Canaro, Lomuto, Filliberto and de Angelis can be labeled as traditionalists. Examples of innovating evolutionary tango music are de Caro, di Sarli, Troilo and Pugliese. Evolutionary tango became the more dominant form during the twenties and early thirties. The period of la guardia nueva ended in 1935, when Gardel died in a tragic plane crash and d'Arienzo formed his famous orchestra.

La epoca de oro: 1935 –1954

With his rise to fame, d'Arienzo started the golden age of tango, which was to last to 1952 - 1954. By playing old guardia vieja tunes in a modern rhythmical version d'Arienzo caused a sensation and lured the dancers back to the milongas. When in 1939 the Second World War started, the economy of Argentina got an extra stimulus, because Argentina exported food to America and Europe.. People earned enough money and partied a lot. These are the years that the grand orchestra performed in open-air concertos for thousands of dancing people.

After Juan Peron came to power in 1946, it even went better with tango. Peron broke with the liberal tradition of the thirties, when a lot of nationalistic values had been cast aside. The nationalistic Peron government orientated itself to conservative and religious values. For tango this was, curiously, a stimulus. The government decreed that radio should pay significant attention to Argentinean culture (music). This law had a downside, for radio was also to censor music they broadcasted. The aim was of course to protect morality. Lunfardo was to be avoided and lyrics were reshaped, so that it became decent. As a consequence some songs became nearly unrecognizable.

In a relatively short period, there was enormous amount of talent gathered together in Buenos Aires. The orchestras were full of talented musicians, which at their time started their equally successful orchestras. For example, Piazzolla played for some years with the Troilo orchestra before forming his own orchestra and Biagi played with the d'Arienzo set-up before going solo. The best example of an orchestra literally bursting with talent is Miguel Calo's Orquesta de los Estrellas, which hosted at one time or another Salgan, Francini, Pontier, Federico and Maderna.

La epoca de oro ended in the period 1952 –54. In 1952 Evita Peron died, which had as a consequence that the political stability deteriorated. In order to restore order, a curfew was issued. For tango this was a handicap. In 1954 Piazzolla left for Paris, which may be considered the final accord of this period.

Tango-nuevo: 1954 –1976

In the fifties, a worldwide youth culture emerged, with pop music as an important exponent. Tango was viewed by the youths as nostalgic and nostalgia was clearly out of fashion. In Argentina a new generation grew up, who saw tango as a boring activity, something their old fashioned and square parents engaged in. Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley and later on the Beatles and the Stones pushed tango to a marginal position. Within tango there was also a great musical innovation going on. Piazzolla changed the concept of tango music definitively by developing tango-nuevo arrangements. In the sixties and seventies, Piazzolla drifted away from mainstream tango, while experimenting and innovating with jazz and electronics. In the eighties, Piazzolla managed to find a balance between innovation and tango. Other exponents from tango-nuevo

are Salgan and Stampone.

La joven gaurdia: 1976 – 2000

In the seventies pair dancing revived after two decades of “free dancing”. This was caused by the disco successes Saturday Night Fever and Grease. The many tango celebrities that toured Europe, North America and Asia in the early eighties caused a new interest in tango: Pugliese, Piazzolla, Sexteto Mayor and Color Tango. The dance show Tango Argentino also contributed a lot to the new fascination with tango. At the end of the eighties there was a renewed musical fascination for music from the Rio de la Plata region.

Another cause was, that under the junta that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983, thousands of political opponents disappeared, were tortured and murdered. Many Argentineans fled to Paris. Among them were the musicians Cedron, Mosalini and Beytelmann. The second tango wave also started in Paris, noting that it was much less forceful than the tango mania of the beginning of the twentieth century. This newborn popularity of tango in Europe and the USA also had a positive effect on the Argentinean tango scene. The new generation of tango musicians put a new zeal into it. Among them are Mederos and Warschusky (El Arranque).

In the nineties, outside Argentina musicians from other cultures and other musical disciplines also ventured into tango music: Carel Kraayenhof & Sexteto Canyengue, Tango for Three, Tango Real and van Esbroeck & Masondo and Tango al Sur. Also classical musicians had a go at tango, mainly Piazzolla’s tango Nuevo. The well known classical musicians Yo Yo Ma and Gidon Kremer covered Piazzolla’s music.

Neotango: 2000 - ?

The latest musical development in tango is neo tango. After the success of the Gotan Project's 'La revancha del tango' there followed many other modern "digital" remixes of mainly Piazzollismo's: Bajo Fondo Tango Club, Piazzolla Remixed, Narcotango and Tango Crash. The issue is whether neo tango is only a hype or permanent trend in tango music. The future will tell.

Part 3: Classification of music

There is so much tango music and music to dance tango to, that it is easy to loose yourself in it. As a DJ you will need a system to categorize music in. In El Corte we use the following classification criteria:

- Instrumental & vocal
- Rhythmical & lyrical
- Slow & fast
- Energetic & melancholy
- Regular/simple & irregular/complex
- Old & modern

Instrumental & vocal

Some tangos are only music without singing. Other tangos contain also singing, where music accompanies the singing. Tangos without singing are instrumental, tangos with singing are vocal tangos or tango cantando's.

Some dancers flatly refuse to dance to tango cantando's. This depends of course on the way a singer sings. Singing which is integrated into the music will meet less opposition than too demonstrative singing, which only uses music as a background. Too demonstrative singing can be fun for a special occasion, but it soon will irritate the dancers. Whatever you do as a DJ, it is always wise to alternate instrumental tangos with sung tangos.

Rhythmical & lyrical

Nearly all music is rhythmical and tango music certainly is no exception to this rule. Some musical songs however are clearly more rhythmical than others or at least the rhythm is more obvious. Rhythmical music is music in which the musicians clearly accentuate the music. For dancers it is clear when to make the next step. Especially beginning dancers are fond of rhythmical

music.

Lyrical music is music with a less clearly accentuated pattern. The musical theme in lyrical music is more relaxed, more freely interpreted. Lyrical music is harder to dance to, but poses more challenges to some dancers.

Slow & fast

The beats per minute (BPM) determine whether a piece of music is slow or fast. Piece of music with less than a certain BPM can be considered slow, etc. Any division of what is fast, medium or slow is arbitrary. You might use the following limits, but it is only a suggestion.

Type/rhythm	Slow	Medium	Fast
Tango	< 60	60 - 70	> 70
Milonga	< 85	85- 110	> 110
Valse	< 70	70 - 80	> 80
Specials	< 60	60 - 70	> 70

If your laptop does not possess a BPM tapper, you can also use your intuition.

While DJ-ing always realize that too slow or too fast music eventually will result in an empty floor. Too slow means that dancers can not get rid of their energy and become frustrated, too fast means they will use up their energy too soon and are no good for the rest of the salon, which will also leave them frustrated. Most of the music you will play should be a normal rhythm. Occasionally you can play fast or slow songs, depending on what you want.

Slow and fast pieces of music can be used to induce another 'atmosphere'. Sometimes you will have to tamper the enthusiasm of the dancers otherwise it will get hectic on the floor. A tanda of slow music can do the trick. Vice versa is also a possibility. Some times, when it all gets to sleepy, you can spice up

the lot by playing a faster tanda.

Energetic & melancholy

Energetic music is music with a drive in it, it "pushes" you in a direction. Melancholy music lacks this drive completely, so that it "pulls" you in a direction. In the beginning of a salon, at least the first two or three hours, the accent will lie at the energetic tangos. After that melancholy music can be played more often. Too much melancholy music will make people feel depressed. In my opinion at least 70 percent of the music in a salon should be energetic.

Regular & irregular

Regular music is music with a fixed rhythm and a simple theme, which repeats itself. By far the most of tango music you hear in a salon is simple, regular music. Most dancers (but especially beginners) appreciate this simplicity, for most of the dancers don't dance to the music but to the beat. They love it for its predictability.

There are also orchestras, who love to play with the rhythms and use several themes in their music. The result is that their music is irregular and complex, for most dancers it will soon be too complex. Experienced dancers love to play while dancing to this music, but remember that a tanda of 3 complex tangos is already quite tricky. The emphasis in a salon should be placed on simple/regular music.

Old & modern

Since the early fifties tango has lost much of its popularity to the emerging rock and roll, rhythm and blues and pop, which heralded the era of the youth culture.

A lot of tango orchestras folded, were lost in anonymity or continued their activities with a more condensed line up. In the fifties tango went underground, only to reemerge in the eighties.

To draw the line between old and modern tango music is risky, but it is certain that the fifties meant a distinctive trend break. However before the fifties there also were musicians who innovated tango (Gobbi, de Caro & Piazzolla) and in the sixties the retro tango orchestra of Miguel Villasboas produced music, which reminded of the thirties.

Conclusion

So we offered you a system to categorize your music collection with. We hope that it makes your DJ-life easier. But what does the categorization of tango music mean in reality?

We suggest some guidelines to you, but feel free to digress from them:

- Don't play too much sung tangos in a row, and certainly not more than three tandas. Also within a tanda you can mix instrumentals with sung tangos.
- Start a salon with playing a lot of rhythmical and energetic music from the well known orchestra from the eopca de oro. Later you can also play some lyrical and melancholy music. But be careful with melancholy music; too much will depress the audience.
- Do not always play music with the same rhythm or energy. Even in a tanda it is no problem to play music with a rising beat.
- Play mostly simple and regular tango and only incidentally a complex tango as a special.
- Most of the music you will play should be traditional/old music: 10% to 15% modern and special music is already quite a lot. Thematic salons (neo tango, etc) are a different story.

Part 4: Structuring a salon

What a DJ can do is play at random all his/hers favorites with the implicit assumption that they are beautiful and very danceable. It might happen that a DJ who works like this will play a lot of completely incompatible music in a row. The result will be that the dance floor is empty and the dancers are sulking at the bar. Or even worse, they might have gone home and decided never to come back. It does not work this way. A DJ will have to bring some sort of a musical structure in a salon. In this chapter we will hand you the tools for it: tanda and tandacycle(s), musical 'arcs', cortina's and specials.

Tanda & tandacycle(s)

Tanda's are the building blocks of a salon. A tanda is a series of musical pieces that form some sort of a unity. This unity can relate to several aspects:

- Dance form: vales, milongas, tangos, candombes, specials, etc.
- The "color" of an orchestra
- A certain musician or singer
- The use of a specific characteristic; for example a characteristic rhythm or instrument
- A combination of the above mentioned aspects

A generally used tanda structure is: tango - valse - tango - milonga. Sometimes a tanda will be replaced by something special. The art of DJ-ing is in the combination of tandas. Where tandas function as building stones for a salon and a tanda structure as a greater unit of tandas, musical arches structure a salon. A musical arch can consist out of one or more tanda structures, which function as a musical unity and present a musical line in a salon.

Musical arc

The main task of a DJ is work up to a climax. After the climax you can start all over again. A long salon will contain more than 2 musical arcs, where as a short salon or practice night usually has only 1 or 2 musical arches.

After a climax you just can't just go on building up pressure. It is an overkill that leads to nothing. It might even be contra productive. After a climax it is wise to pause a little longer before starting a new tanda or musical arc. In this short break the excitement can fade away. For example, I use breaks between songs in a tanda about 3 seconds, between tanda's 5 seconds and starting a new tandacycle 7 seconds.

A DJ always has a choice after a tanda: will I go on building up energy, will I keep the level of energy constant or will I create a dissonant?

In letting a salon slowly fade away till the end, there lies a danger of dancers getting bored. The end of a salon should be some sort of a climax. Dancers love it to go home with a fine energy or some catchy tune still ringing in their ears. If you hear some people whistling or humming the theme you ended with, this means you did a good job.

And finally, a DJ should announce the end of the salon: "three tangos from Pugliese, La Cumparsita and something special".

Cortina

A cortina (literally a curtain) is a piece of music, which is not meant for dancing. It is used to separate tanda's from another. Its function is for dancers to leave the dance floor so that new combinations can be formed. At least that is the way it is in some milonga's in Argentina. The use of cortina's was introduced from Argentina to Europe some 10 years ago.

Among dancers and DJ-s it is a controversial subject. Either you are in favor or you are against cortina's. We think it is important

for a DJ to know why s/he (doesn't) uses cortina's. To do it because they also do it in Argentina is absurd. Cortina's have a function in a salon: to promote the circulation of dancers and people who at the moment are not dancing. It also functions as an opportunity for people to mix.

The situation of the dance floor is a crucial factor for (not) using cortina's. If the dance floor is surrounded by tables and chairs, then the dancers can't easily get into contact with others at the opposite site of the dancehall, cortina's do have a function. If the dance floor isn't surrounded by tables and chairs, there is no need for cortina's. So in El Corte we do not use cortina's (although some of our guest DJ's do), but what we do sometimes is a slightly longer period of silence between two tanda's. This is what we call a silent cortina, which you can interpret as a compromise between a cortina and a constant flow of music.

Specials

Specials are also subject of some controversy, but not as distinct as cortina's. A special is a piece of music on which you can dance tango, valse, etc, has certain elements of surprise (certainly not mainstream music!) and is meant to tempt dancers to break their dancing habits.

Specials usually are pieces of 'world music' (klezmer, salsa, mambo, rumba, etc.), classical music (opera, etc) or popular forms of music (jazz, blues, pop, etc.). Sometimes there is even tango music which functions as special music. Think about Astor Piazzolla's tango nuevo's or spin offs from well know orchestras like Francisco Canaro and Enrique Rodriguez. Specials function as a breaking of habits, after which you can begin a new musical arc. Sometimes they also function as a sort of cortina while promoting the circulation.

Conclusion

Now it is up to the DJ to build a wonderful salon. You have all

the tools. It should be easy, but it is not. Sometime it is very hard and frustrating work. Even experienced DJ's will have nights it just doesn't work out. Some times feel catastrophic. Help, the DJ is drowning! What to do in a situation like this?

- Play it safe. Play only traditional rhythmical tangos everybody knows. Have some super tanda's in reserve. This gives you time to adjust your strategy.

- Don't experiment with new pieces of music you want to try out. If you don't feel happy as a DJ it is wise to keep a low profile. Don't try to attract attention at all. Some opportunities are not meant for a DJ to give a personal touch to. So be it, accept it and wait for better times.

- Don't panic. Most dancers will give you more credit than you will expect. They will realize that you are trying to please them and still have to learn the trade. And remember, also experienced DJ-s have their off days.

- Get into contact with the dancers and ask if they like it, if they have requests, etc.

Part 5: Do's and don'ts for DJ's

We conclude this reader on tango DJ-ing with some guidelines, we learned by experience:

Don't loose your concentration

Sometimes you will have to work for hours and naturally you will experience lesser periods of DJ-ing. Focus yourself on playing music people want to dance to. A good DJ doesn't dance while DJ-ing and vice versa it is the same. Dancing while playing music shows you that you don't take DJ-ing seriously and furthermore it is not very respectful to your audience. On practice nights and informal salons it is okay for a DJ to dance a little, but only in as far the DJ manages to remain in control of the musical flow.

Try to 'read' your audience

A good DJ respects his audience. S/he is there to see to it that the dancers have a good time dancing. A DJ who is able to read the signals from his audience and is able to translate it in to his musical scenario, shows his respect to his audience. But how do you read your audience?

- How many people are dancing and how many are not? Humans have a tendency to spread out proportionally in a space. If less than proportionally few people are dancing, a DJ should change his strategy.

- Who is leaving the dance floor and who is entering? If beginners leave the floor en masse you are playing too complex music. Vice versa if experienced dancers leave the floor it could be the music is too simple, maybe even boring. Aim at a compromise.

- What are the expressions of the dancers and the people who watch? Do they look happy, concentrated, confused, etc?

Are they enjoying themselves or not? By getting into contact with the dancers in a nonverbal way (a wink, a nod, a smile, etc.) you will often evoke a signal of what they feel. These signals give you a lot of information. I spend more time watching dancers than selecting music to play.

- Is the dancing chaotically or in a disciplined way? Are there (too much) collisions? If so; switch to more simple, rhythmical music most dancers know by heart.

- Is there a lot of talking when a piece of music or a tanda is finished and the other has not begun yet? Maybe you will have to calm your audience a bit or maybe there is not enough energy and excitement.

- Are dancers faithful to their (dance) partners or is there a lot of switching? If so, what do you do with it?

- Are their 'chronic wallflowers', people who don't dance at all? Ask them if they have a request or match them to somebody. Their enthusiasm when they get to dance is very inspiring for a salon.

- What is circulation speed of dancers and loungers? A low circulation speed means that a salon is static. You can try to bring more variation in your music.

Know your audience

If you know what the audience likes and what they don't like you can avoid a lot of trouble. Don't hesitate to ask the dancers. Also the organization can usually provide good info. For example if they recently provided a milonga workshop, you can play some more milonga tandas.

Know yourself

Knowing yourself, your weak points and your strong points is important. Be critical to yourself but not too critical, or otherwise it will spoil your fun in DJ-ing. Being aware of mistakes you made, will teach you important lessons. It is not a problem to

make a mistake, but it is irritating for your audience if you do not learn from it. You might want to keep a DJ-diary in which you write down the things you learned.

Perform in a dynamic way

Always try to aim at a dynamic performance. A DJ who plays the same type music all night long doesn't do the dancers any good. Even if the music is brilliant and very good to dance to, it will become irritating after some time. Variety is the spice of life (and dancing of course).

Look for the 'common denominator'

Most DJ-s I know, happen to be experienced dancers and have also an extensive musical knowledge and experience in tango music and other types of music. This implies a risk in DJ-ing. A DJ might have an unconscious tendency to play difficult and musically interesting or special music. For beginners this is usually too difficult to dance to and they drop out. Believe me, you don't want that to happen because without beginners a tango scene has no future at all.

Play simple music, music used in teaching tango, etc but only incidentally something more complicated.

Don't try to attract (too much) attention

A DJ is there at the service of the dancers and not for some ego boosting. Of course you will show your character in playing music, but be critical to yourself.

This is not an easy thing for beginning DJ's. Sometimes you find fascinating music you fall in love with. A blind spot can give you a bum steer. What you think is fascinating music, is a very personal thing. It is absolutely no guarantee that others will share your enthusiasm. What to do with this special piece of music that is 'haunting' you?

Don't play it for some weeks and check if it still is a darling to

you. Try to dance to it and register how it feels. Try it out in an informal setting (after a class perhaps) and ask what people think of it. Sometimes you will have to kill your 'darling', but you can always listen to it at home. Or you can very carefully try to plug it by playing it over and over again and making it a hit.

Requests

From time to time somebody will file a request. You don't have to respond to it immediately. It might very well take about half an hour to fit the request into your scheme. A request that doesn't fit into the atmosphere at all can be ignored. Always do explain why you can't honor a request and if you can honor about what time they can expect their request.

Exchange experiences with other DJ-s

Apart from exchanging music with other DJ-s it can be helpful to talk with other DJ-s about DJ-ing. Giving and receiving feedback in a respectful way has never harmed anybody yet. And two do know more than one. The advantage of asking another DJ to give feedback is that s/he speaks the lingo.

Appendices

A Suggested reading

I didn't come across books on tango DJ-ing, but there are some books on DJ-ing in general. They mainly deal with modern DJ-ing (house, techno, trance and the like). They are fairly technical and have some but not much relevance for tango DJ-ing. These books are:

- Broughton & Brewster, How to DJ
- Hogarth, How to become a DJ

About tango a social, economical, cultural and musical phenomenon many books have been written, although some of them are completely ridiculous. If you want to form a picture of the how and why of tango (and as a DJ should at least be able to answer some questions) we refer to the books mentioned below.

Aslan, The evolution of tango music, adapted from *Tango stylistic evolution and innovation*, UCLA master thesis, 1990.

Azzi & Collier, Le grand tango, The life and music of Astor Piazzolla, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Benedetti, Victor Victoria, (internet), 2004.

Birkenstock & Rüegg, Tango. De bewogen geschiedenis van een dans. Amsterdam, Arbeiderspers, 2002.

Castro, The Argentine society as social history. The soul of the people. San Francisco, Mellen Research University Press, 1980.

Collier, Cooper, Azzi & Martin, Tango. The dance, the song, the story. London, Thomas & Hudson, 1995.

Doktorski, The classical bandoneon, (internet), 1998.

Ferrer & Brave, Tango. Muziek, dans en lyriek. Amsterdam, Meulenhoff/Landshoff, 1989.

Laird, Sound beginnings. The early record history in Australia,

Sydney, Currency Press 1999.**Ludwig**, Tangolexikon, Der tango Rio Platense, Lexikon, Berlin, 2002.

Nau-Klapwijk, Tango dimensionen, Munchen, Kastell, 2000.

Pellicoro, Passie voor de tango. Utrecht / Antwerpen, Kosmos 2003.

Plisson, Tango, Heidelberg, Palmyra, 2002.**Reinhart**, Tango. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987.

Sebastián & Labraña, De geschiedenis van de tango. Breda, Uitgeverij de Geus, 1988.

Turner, A passion for tango. Dingley, Dingley Press, 2004

Willemze, Muziektermen, Amsterdam, Spectrum, 2000

B Music labels

A tango DJ will have to have an extensive tango music library, which is collected over the years. When you start building yours, you soon will find out that some music labels are very good and others are really bad or have a mediocre sound quality. To help you we will list some good labels and some mediocre labels.

Music labels that distribute good tango music are Tango Argentino (DBN), Reliquias (DBN/EMI), From Argentina to the world and RCA Victor 100 anos (BMG). They all distribute very good quality music, music that has been (digitally) improved very well.

Mediocre music labels are El Bandoneon, Harlequin, Las Grandes Orquestas del Tango, En FM tango, Music Hall, Buenos Aires Tango Club and Danza y Movimiento. Sound quality differs from mediocre at best and to downright catastrophic at worst.

C Sound-engineering for DJ

DJ-ing means you have to be able to operate some technical equipment trying to get music to sound as good as possible. This appendix will give you a fundamental insight in the musical configurations you can come across while DJ-ing. Michiel Lombaers will tell you all about.

Who?

This ‘manual’ is (initially) for the participants of the DJ workshop in “El Corte”, in Nijmegen in the Netherlands, and does assume no prior knowledge of sound engineering.

What?

There are a couple of essential tricks that a DJ should know when working on a PA-system without the aid of a seasoned sound engineer. There are also a couple of small and cheap tools that can save the evening.

Why?

Again, it’s about saving the evening (or at least a part of it). Consider the situation where you’re the DJ on a milonga on location with a rented PA system. When there is also an orchestra involved there is a big chance that the mixing-console will have 10 times too many channels with 5 times too many functions. That’s 50 times too many knobs and switches to confuse you. The sound engineer that is responsible for the PA is off-site, (apply your own favorite horror scenario here) the promoter would like to hear some music and the first milongueros are eager to hit the floor.

So?

There is a specific sequence of working that’ll give the best chance of trouble free sound.

So, do not panic:

- Don't let anybody rush you,
- Work methodical,
- Check (or even double check) every step.

The Essentials

Because this tutorial will introduce a couple of terms and expressions that might be new to you, a couple of those will be explained here.

The audio chain

Source	Pre-amp	Power-amp
Speaker		
CD/MD	or mixing console	

There is a common system of building blocks in (almost) every audio chain. Those include:

- Source: this can be a CD, a mini-disk player, a tape deck, or a microphone.
- Pre-amp: this can be a part of your domestic Hi-Fi, a dedicated one, or a mixing console (which is in fact a whole load of pre-amps bundled together). Here you sort the different sources, apply EQ (tone control) when needed, and adjust the volume of the final output.
- Power amp: this is the unit that boosts the signal up to the level that is required to drive the speakers.
- Speakers: these transform the sound from an electrical signal to an acoustic (audible) one.
- Cabling: apart from your precious ghetto blaster every audio system has an amount of cables to connect the various pieces with each other. Most of the cables and connectors of a professional sound-system are designed for their specific function.

Most important for us is the central control unit in the sound system.

The mixing console

In basic principle the big sound system with mixing console (a.k.a. PA or Public Address system) is not so very different from your home stereo. You can select a (sound) signal, adjust and amplify it until it has enough power to drive the speakers to the desired volume. The biggest differences are in the feature of summing up signals and the possibility to control and adjust almost every stage of the sound amplification.

A mixing console is divided in channels where the individual sounds are adapted and then fine-tuned, and a master section where they are mixed together, with a possibility for sub-mix channels in between. (Hopefully, we won't need to know about sub-mixing.)

This will give at least three stages to adjust the volume.

- **Gain**, situated as the first thing after the input, on top of the channel. Here you can optimize the level, as it comes out of your player, to your channel.
- **Channel fader**, situated on the bottom of the channel. When you need to adjust the levels between songs, it's the best to use this fader.
- **Master fader**. The point where all the active channels are combined and sent to the mixer output connections. The fader(s) at this point regulate the overall output volume and is normally left at a preset value.

Then there are a couple of parts in-between that can be used to fine tune the sound or separate it to different outputs:

- EQ

For DJ-s this is the most important part. This section can be build up in various ways but it will at least have a low and a high filter. Beside that it can have:

- A **low cut switch**. This is a filter that is designed to filter out 'rumble' low frequency noise like the handling noise of a microphone or the resonations of a 78 cpm record played back with a Hi-Fi pick-up.

- One or more **mid-band controls**, very useful on old records. Sometimes with frequency and (more rare) band width control, very useful to confuse the novice operator.

- A **bypass switch**. With this switch you can compare if the settings you choose are actually an improvement.

- **Aux sends**: Extra outputs can be sent individually with these controls. Come in two 'flavors', pre- or post-fader:

- **Pre-fader** means that the channel fader won't influence the signal level.

- **Post-fader** means that the channel fader will influence the signal level. Post-fader it can be used to control the sound level for another room.

- **Pan or balance**: This knob controls the virtual position of the signal in the stereo 'picture' between the left and right speaker set:

- **Pan** (short for panorama) is used on mono channels and balances the output from the channel to hard left to hard right or somewhere in between.

- **Balance** is used on stereo channels and controls the emphasis on the left or right side of the stereo channels but keeps them on their left/right position.

What to bring

The first step is to connect your source (CD, minidisk, MP3 player, etc.) to the mixing console. For this you'll need cables. And as soon as you bring one (or some) of these sources

yourself, consider yourself also responsible for the right type of connecting cables. Of course you can take a gamble and assume that the PA engineer will have all the cables needed at hand, but you can play it safe and bring your own.

Please keep in mind that some of those mixing consoles can be quite big, so a length of three meters for such a cable is useful.

Now if you run your music on domestic equipment most of the time you'll be familiar with the 'RCA' or 'phono' connector. The most mixing consoles however have their line level inputs on 1/4"(6.35mm) TS (tip-sleeve) or TRS (tip-ring-sleeve) connectors. The same type as those used on older headphones (modern ones generally use 3.5mm mini-jacks, especially if they are for Walkmans etc). There are simple & cheap RCA to 1/4" TS converter plugs on the market, and it's worth the money to have a couple of them with you.

Another important tool is a headphone. For this work the best type are the fully closed ones that enable you to isolate sounds from your environment. Leave the little earpluggones at home – or throw them away. Those types of earphones are actually bad for your ears!

Where to connect

The most convenient way is if the console has stereo channels free. Most of the time you can find them near the 'master section' in the center or on the right of the console. How to recognize the master section? First find the input channels. They will all be next to each other and they will be more or less identical. (The master section is the more complicated-looking area...) A stereo input channel may be labeled as 'stereo' and the numbering might be odd & even on the same strip. Sometimes when the labeling is missing you can look at the knob (A.K.A. pan-pot) that adjust the stereo position of

the sound image. It will then be called 'balance' or 'bal'. You can find it normally above the fader.

If there is no stereo channel available you can take two mono channels. When you're not confining yourself to the music of the 'la epoca de oro' (in other words, when your running music in stereo), you'll have to use one channel for the left-hand signal and one for the right. Turn the pan pots all the way to all the way to the left for the former and all the way to the right for the latter. Then all you need to do is connect up your sound source. Look for L and R on the connectors if you're using a stereo channel, or just remember which is left and right if you're using two mono channels.

Please do not disconnect anything that is already plugged in to the console in order to avoid fatal collisions with the responsible sound engineer. (Unless you really **really** know what you're doing, but then, would you need this manual?)

Once you're connected, getting sound

The next step is to adjust the channel to the source that you're using. The first step is to adjust the input gain, but to be able to do that you have to isolate the channel that you're adjusting. For this you'll find a switch named 'solo' or 'PFL' (pre fader listening). It's the same function as the 'cue' switch found on disco mix consoles. When this switch is active, the signal will be on the headphones and visible on the meter in the master section.

There will be some other switches near the gain pot but most of them you can ignore and/or should be in their default (off) position. Those can be (not all the mixing consoles are alike on these items):

- '+48', 'P48' or 'phantom',
- 'phase' or 'ø',

- 'pad' or '-20dB',
- 'B' and 'line'.

Only that last two are important when they're part of the channel strip. 'Line' will deselect the microphone input and activate the line-input for your player. With a lot of smaller modern mixers this happens automatically as soon as a 1/4" jack is plugged into that channel. 'B' will select a second set of line-inputs on the stereo channels of some consoles.

Play some music and adjust the gain until the loudest parts of the recording are showing $\pm 0 \sim +6$ dB on the level-meter. The best is to use a recording that is loud and adjust your gain to this recording. Once set this setting shouldn't be changed anymore. If you can't get any reading at all on the meter, check your connections and then check that the sound source really is generating a signal, e.g. by looking at it, plugging some headphones into it directly etc. It may be on 'pause', not have a disc in etc. You can also plug another sound source into the channel you are trying to use and see if that gets a result. Another approach is to temporarily try another channel. In other words, work methodically to discover whether a signal is being generated and if so, where it is getting blocked on its path to your mixer's master section.

Once you have set the level you can slowly slide the fader up and listen for the signal coming out of the speakers. If not, there will be a couple of things to check.

!Caution!

With the following actions you should keep the channel fader down and after every change you can slide it up for a moment to check if the sound can be heard.

- First of all, deselect the solo/PFL switch so that the meters will show the actual output of the console.

- And then check if the master fader is open.
- If the meter still shows no output and/or you hear no sound, check if the channel is active ('on'), no switch called 'mute' is engaged and, if there are sub-mix channels, that on the channel that you use for play-back the switch 'mix' or 'L/R' is engaged. At that moment you should see level reactions on your main meters.

If at this point there is still no sound coming out of the main speakers the amplifiers are probably muted. This is tricky. It's best if the PA engineer switches these on. There might be a specific sequence required regarding which block of the power-amps is switched on first and which one last.

Fine Adjustments

Once you have the music running, you'll want to fine tune the sound. The tools that are on the console are more extended than those on a standard stereo set. There are various options available. Most of the EQ controls on a mixing console are either three or four band. This means that there are one or two bands in the mid-frequencies. This is very useful with old recordings. There is even the possibility to have 'sweep' EQs, where the frequency of boosting or cutting can be chosen. With some old harsh sounding recordings you can search for the most annoying frequency band and cut only that one down. Those sweep EQ's need a little time to get used to. If you ever have the chance to try the sound in an (almost) empty hall take your discs and practice!

This is a point where headphones are handy. When preparing a new 'tanda' you can listen to the sound quality and make some pre-adjustments with the EQ.

Finally!

Hopefully at this point you've succeeded in getting music on the floor and some dancers too. Now you can start with that game

that is so much more important. Have fun!

D Important orchestras and orchestral types

In this appendix we will list some tango orchestras that are 'inolvidable' and should be in every tango DJ's toolkit. These orchestra's are:

Alfredo de Angelis made energetic and rhythmical music, which will always be appreciated by dancers. His music is multi-layered, which makes it interesting for all levels of dancers.

Recommended CD's: From Argentina to the world and Adios Marinero (EBCD).

Carlos di Sarli started his career with fast, rhythmical music but switched in 1944 to a slower, majestic type of music.

Recommended CD's: Instrumentales volume 1 & 2 (Tango Argentino) and RCA Victor 100 anos (BMG).

Juan d'Arienzo lured dancers back to the dance floor at the end of the thirties, after tango in twenties and thirties had become more and more artistic than danceable (the decarean school of tango).

Recommended CD's: Tango para el mundo & Sus primeros exitos volume 1 & 2 (Tango Argentino) and La Cumparsita (EBCD).

Anibal Troilo made powerful and hard-to-resist-to-dance-to tango music with virtuoso melodies and harmonies. Most of his music is very good to dance to, but in the sixties he also made big bombastic music, which is hard to dance to.

Recommended CD's: El inmortal "Pichuco" (EBCD), Anibal Troilo y sus cantores (RCA Victor 100 anos, BMG) and Instrumental 1941-1944 (Tango Argentino).

Oswaldo Pugliese was a great musical innovator. With Recuerdo (1921) and La Yumba (1943) he surprised his audience and set an example for generations of musicians. His music is big and powerful and invites dancers to dance "big". Sometimes Pugliese's music is too chaotic to dance to.

Recommended CD's: From Argentina to the world, Auscencia (EMI), 15 grandes exitos (Blue Moon) and Recuerdo (EBCD).

Francisco Canaro's career is probably one of the longest from tango's history (from ca 1916 to 1964), although there are more musicians who had very long careers (Pugliese, Piazzolla and Troilo). Canaro and Roberto Firpo were the icons of the guardia vieja.

Canaro's music is very diverse because he was not averse from "eclectic borrowing" of other musicians inside and outside tango's territory.

Recommended CD's: From Argentina to the world, Tangos inolvidables and Bailande tangos, vales y milongas (Reliquias).

Roberto Firpo, the autodidactic piano player, arranger and bandleader often played in smaller ensembles. His style can be described as very rhythmical and energetic. Firpo introduced La Cumparsita to the world. The older Firpo's are in tango-milonga style, music from the thirties. His milongas are excellent for salons.

Recommended CD's: Alma de Bohemio, Milonga Orilero (both EBCD), De la guardia vieja and Tangos y valsecitos volume 2 (both Reliquias).

And there are many more: Quinteto Piricho (Canaro), Enrique Rodriguez, Angel D'Agostino, Lucio Demare, Edgar Donato, Domingo Federico, Miguel Villasboas, Horacio Salgan, Juan Maglio, Pedro Maffia, Francini & Pontier, Alberto Castillo, Francisco Lomuto, Florindo Sassone, Osmar Maderna, Adolfo Carabelli, Orquesta Tipica Victor, Los Tubatango and countless other musicians and orchestra's.

E Musica maestro!

Evolution of tango music from 1890 till 2005

Introduction

Looking back at the history of tango, one cannot help being surprised at the enormous changes it has undergone time and time again. Tango went from conventillo, barrio to brothels and via the cafetins to the big dancehalls of the forties and fifties. Tango as a dance evolved from milonga via tangomilonga to tango. The musical line-ups changed from trio's and quateto's, via orquesta topics to gran orquestas. And there is more that changed dramatically over the years, such as lyrics and the tempo music was played in. So let's focus on the musical evolution of tango.

In the beginning

The origins of tango are shrouded in mystery. Not much of it is known, because apart from some incidental records, the class where tango originated (mostly poor immigrants and gaucho's who came to Buenos Aires) didn't write much about their lives.

I do not know of any sound recordings from the prehistory of tango, although Edison already invented his phonograph around 1889.¹ The music label Victor started to make tango recordings in 1904. At first this happened abroad (England, France and the United States). The first recordings from Alfredo Gobbi senior do date from this period. In December 1907 Victor sent a "traveling machine" to Argentina.² In 1910, 1912 and 1917 Victor's traveling machine revisited Buenos Aires and the Plata region. Several recordings were made of Angel Villoldo, Jose Razzano, Linda Thelma, Ignacio Corsini, Alonso & Minotti, Eduardo Arolas and Juan "Pacho" Maglio. The last one can

¹ Laird, 1999.

² Victor's traveling machine can be seen as mobile phonograph that traveled through the Americas, a predecessor of the mobile recording studio we know today

be considered as the first superstars in tango. His popularity was immense and for some time gramophone records were called pacho's. In 1922 Victor founded its first permanent recording studio in Buenos Aires, where in 1926 the first electrical recordings was made: "La musa msitonga", which was composed by Flores and Polito and sang by Rosita Quiroga.³

The first tango recording that I do know of dates back to 1909: "La bicicleta" from Angel Villoldo.⁴ What is striking in this version is the European sound, especially castanets and an Italian opera voice. Soon after this the distinguished European influencers did fade away. For example, Francisco Canaro recorded in 1916 his first version of "Vibraciones del alma", which sounded as a tango we know and recognize as tango today.⁵ The transition from an outlandish Afro-European influenced sound to tango argentino took place in the period 1880/90 - 1910.

The first tangos we know are simpler in structure than later ones. Tango music has its origins from several musical sources. It is generally agreed upon that these sources are Cuban habanera (which functioned as a catalyzing force), Argentinean milonga and African candombe. There are, however, also several European influences on tango, such as polka, mazurka, flamenco, fandango and many more. It is evident that a music form in its embryonic phase still is filled with the elements of the musical sources it originated from. Therefore it only could be simply structured music. It took many years for those elements to mix in a melting pot to a phenomenon we now know and recognize as tango.

³ Benedetti, 2004. If you want to know more about Víctor consult David Sarnoff's Internet library.

⁴ This version can be found on the bonus CD that belongs to Plisson, 2002.

⁵ This version can be found on El Bandoneon 129. For more examples from this period, I refer to the El Bandoneon series "Homenaje a la guardia vieja del tango".

Furthermore, the first generation of tango musicians existed mostly out of amateurs. They were immigrants with little, if any at all, (musical) education. The children of the immigrants, the second generation, often got more education. This had its effects on the music of the twenties and thirties. In this period music becomes more sophisticated in both the musical structuring and the mastering of the musical instruments. The best example of this sophistication of the tango music is Julio de Caro.

In the beginning the musical line-ups of tango formations were duos, trios and quarteto's. In the eve of the First World War, the *orquesta tipicas* came into existence. They were the musical formation tango artists used till they were replaced by the *gran orquesta* in the late thirties / early forties.

The first tango formations were made up of regularly changing line-ups, who performed all over town. Formations were formed on a very free basis. Ferrer points out that in this period tango music was more improvisation than imitation.⁶ As a result there was a constant cross-cultural and cross regional pollination. Musicians had no choice to be flexible, which naturally implied a lot of improvising as they went along. The interaction between musicians and dancers was evident.⁷ In later times this two-sided interaction disappeared almost completely from tango music.

In the *orquesta tipicas* from the twenties and thirties and certainly the *gran orquestas* of the forties and fifties, there simply was no room for improvisation.

The duos, trios and quarteto's used the following instruments: harp, violin, guitar and flute. Sometimes the harp was replaced by mandolin or accordion. Later they are replaced by guitar, which set the harmonic structure around which violinist and flutist 'improvised'. Musicians in this period didn't confine themselves to a particular kind of

⁶ Ferrer & Brave, 1989.

⁷ Turner, 2004.

music; apart from tango and milonga other kinds of music were part of their repertoire. Think about rancheras, paso dobles, foxtrots, polkas, marchas and so on.⁸

Bandoneon and piano came into tango at a later stadium. They replaced guitar and flute, because of their limited possibility to produce enough sound volume. The exact date of the entrance of bandoneon and piano into tango is not known. Opinions differ about this. Most likely the bandoneon made its appearance around 1890-1910, but this could well have been earlier. Birkenstock & Ruegg state that the bandoneon already came to Buenos Aires in 1870.⁹ A consequence of the integration of bandoneon into tango music was that, due to the technical difficulty of this instrument, the rhythms slowed down a bit.¹⁰ The piano is believed to have made its entrance in tango around 1910.

There are several anecdotes about how the bandoneon, that was originally a German instrument designed for church music, found its way to Argentina, to make the instrumentation for tango complete.¹¹ One of them tells about a German sailor, who was not able to pay his bar bill and was forced to pawn his bandoneon. A compadre, who was fascinated by the bandoneon although he wasn't quite sure what it was, bought the bandoneon from the barkeeper, who might have been relieved to get rid of it, not knowing what to do with any way. After buying the bandoneon he locked himself into his room and taught himself to play the bandoneon.¹² Is it true or fictional? Who can tell?

⁸ Especially Francisco Canaro and Enrique Rodriguez played other contemporary folkloristic music.

⁹ Birkenstock & Ruegg, 1999. Also note that the year the bandoneon arrived in Buenos Aires probably preceded the year in which this instrument first was used in tango.

¹⁰ Aslan, 1990.

¹¹ To what extent Heinrich Band can be called the inventor of the bandoneon is an issue still open for debate. Doktorski (1998) also names a few others, such as C.F. Uhlig, from Chemnitz and C. Zimmerman from Saxon.

¹² Sebastian & Labrana, 1998.

However this autodidact aspect could explain that bandoneon playing in Argentina is so different from the European style.

In the beginning tango music was mainly an instrumental affair. There was some singing but not much. It usually was limited to the singing of refrains and the texts were rather simple and bawdy. The second generation in the twenties, the children of the immigrants, who often had more musical education, paid more attention to texts. The tango poets Enrique Santos Discépolo and Pascal Contursi provided tango with more mature lyrics, which were immortalized by Carlos Gardel and others.

Tango between the World Wars

Just before the First World War the *orquesta típicas* started to replace the trio's and quarteto's, which had musically dominated the first decennia of tango. In the twenties and thirties this type of orchestra was standard in tango music.

In 1911 Vincente Greco formed the first *orquesta típica criolla*, but the *criolla* tag was soon dropped. The *orquesta típica* formation consisted of piano, guitar, two or more violins, bass or cello and of course a pair of bandoneons.

The twenties and thirties showed a waning popularity for tango. This can be attributed to two factors. First of all, tango got more competition from other music or cultural phenomena, such as the talkies (talking movies), other Latin American music genres and jazz.

Another factor is the sophistication of tango music. There evolved a new type of tango, a more musically refined sort of tango that was quite hard to dance to. Aside the traditionalist stream in tango (Canaro, Firpo and de Angelis), there arose an evolutionary stream in tango (de Caro, di Sarli and Troilo).¹³ This 'sophistication' in tango music may well have been caused by the prospering economical period Ar-

¹³ Collier, Cooper, Azzi & Martin, 1995.

gentina experienced in the twenties, which favored a more elite cultural music scene.

The evolutionist school in tango, led by de Caro moved farther and farther away from the traditional dance music. Julio de Caro was a great musical innovator. He introduced in tango some new musical techniques, such as the use of polyrhythm and contrapuntal (the use of more than one rhythm at the same time without a loss of harmony), rubato (playing slightly around the rhythm) and syncope (the suddenly and unexpectedly dropping of an accent).¹⁴

Tango reached an impasse like state. At one side there were the traditionalists and at the other side the evolutionists (also known as the decarean school of tango). This impasse was 'solved' by Juan d'Arienzo. In 1935 he formed an orchestra that became an overnight sensation. His music was to give a new impulse to music as well dance. By playing strong rhythmically arrangements of tangos dating from the early days of tango, he was able to lure the dancers back to the dancehalls again. Right from the start he used faster tempos than was customary. This was a successful move that inspired other orchestra's also to speed it up.

If we take Francisco Canaro as an example, we see that his tangos in the twenties usually have rhythms that are about or just below 60 beats per minute (BPM). In the thirties it climbs to about 65 BPM and in the forties it is around 68 BPM.

La epoca de oro

The *orquesta tipica* the dominant musical line up until the forties. In the eve of the Second World War a new type of tango *orquesta* appeared on stage: the *gran orquesta*. What big bands are to jazz, *gran orquesta* are to tango.

Just like big bands, *gran orquestas* existed out of musical sections, such as a section of violins, a section of bandoneons and so on. The

¹⁴ Ferrer & Brave, 1989 en Willemze, 2000.

gran orquestas owed their existence to the economical boom Argentina and the rest of the continent experienced. Argentina profited in a big way from the (looming) threat of war. The export of meat and grains to Great Brittan made Argentina a very prosperous country. The saying ‘as rich as an Argentine’ dates from this period. The consequences for tango were enormous. Orquestas could employ more musicians, because there was so much money going around. Musical line-ups which more bandoneonists and violinists became a standard. Bigger formations automatically meant more musical possibilities. The music got more and more refined. Think about intertwining melodies. This development had already set in with Julio de Caro.

In the forties the tango cantando (sung tango) became more and more popular. Extremely well talented composers, arrangers and tango poets, aided the new generation of singers, such Roberto Goyeneche, Francisco Fiorentino and Alberto Podesta. The most famous tango poets from this era are Enrique Santos Discepolo, Homero Manzi, Catulo Castillo, Homero Exposito and Enrique Cadicamo. They transformed tango lyrics from the traditional archetypal themes of love and disappointment to more ‘serious’ subjects like life and philosophy.¹⁵

The average tempo of tango music slowed down a bit so that towards the end of the epoca de oro the tempo was a little slower than ten years before.

A side effect of the economic prosperity in Argentina was that in the beginning of the forties the first real dance floors appeared. The “down to earth” milonguero style almost completely disappeared and was replaced by a more artistic way of dancing.

Intermezzo

Musically the epoca de oro may have shown the greatest musical variety ever in tango’s history. Each orquesta had its own characteristic

¹⁵ Aslan, 1990.

sound or ‘color’. This color of an orchestra was unique and clearly discernable from other orchestras. What factors contributed to the color of an orchestra?

Aslan poses that, due to the lacking of a drum section, all the other instruments played a more or less important role in establishing the rhythmical structure. The basic four beat pattern of the tango (marcato) is the underlying theme in tango. Every tango orchestra had its own unique way of interpreting this basic pattern, which caused the different colors in tango music.¹⁶

Tango-nuevo and what came next

In the mid fifties the epoca de oro came to an end. After the tragic death of Eva Peron, Argentina met with both economic and political troubles. The thoughtlessly money spending political system lost its credit. In 1954 this regime was replaced by the military, which disliked anything Peron had been in favor of. Peron’s propagation of nationalistic values (tango), made tango suspicious to them. And also the class tango originated in was suspect. The emergence of a worldwide youth culture (rock and roll and pop music) and idols like Elvis Presley, the Beatles and the Stones also played an important part in tango’s downfall. The consequences for tango were dramatically.

Many orchestras quit or trimmed down the number of musicians. Music lost a lot of its finesse. Tango orchestras lost their place in the spotlights to the emerging youth idols. Tango became more and more a marginal phenomenon.

In this vacuum there was opportunity to modernize tango, a phenomenon usually called tango-nuevo. Astor Piazzolla was the main innovating force of tango. He mixed elements of jazz (he grew up in New York) and classical music (he studied under tutelage of Nadia Boulanger) with tango.

When you compare Piazzolla’s music from the early sixties with music dating from the epoca de oro (and even his own music from this

¹⁶ Aslan,1990.

period!), you cannot help wondering about what a revolutionary break he made with tango as it was. The contrast between the music, that was composed specially for dancing (forties and fifties) and the complex symphonic music to listen to that Piazzolla composed, is striking.¹⁷

Many people were disgusted with the new tango. Piazzolla was called names and threatened regularly and there even have been some fist-fights with members of traditional orchestra's.¹⁸ It is only in the seventies that Piazzolla is generally accepted when he composed "Balada para un loco". He was also invited to play in the Teatro Colon, which is considered one of the greatest honors bestowed to a tango musician.

In the eighties tango experiences a worldwide revival. The dance show "Tango Argentino", musically supported by Sexteto Mayor, made a very successful tour through Europe and the United States of America. Also the tango musicians in Paris, driven from their fatherland by the military junta, gave a new impulse to tango. The music of the young guard of tango (Mosalini, Cedron, etc.) is inspired by tango-nuevo as well as the music from the epoca de oro. They quite often use older compositions and rearrange them in a modern way and in doing so (in my opinion), it sounds more virtuoso but also less emotionally intense. The modernization of tango music caused the more or less 'fixed' tango line-up to disappear.

In modern tango orchestras there is a multitude of line-ups and also the most exotic instrumental combinations do occur. It seemed as if everything was possible and had to be tried at least once; anything goes as they used to say in jazz. Tango didn't differ from other twentieth century's dominant musical forms, such as blues, jazz rhythm and blues, rock and roll and pop music: tango also took part in the

¹⁷ As Piazzolla said himself: "For me, the tango was always for the ear rather than the feet. ... I was taking the old tango away from them. The old tango, the one they loved was dying. And they hated me." ((Dotorski, 1998).

¹⁸ Azzi & Collier, 2001.

sixties and seventies in musical innovation, experiments and musical crossovers.

... And now for something completely different

The beginning of a new millennium, there is sudden, completely new and unexpected 'sound' in tango music. Inspired by tango music (both nuevo and more traditional) and using all kinds of modern digital sound techniques (sampling and editing), neo tango surprises the tango scene with new and rhythmically energetic modern tango crossovers. In 2000 the Gotan Project released "La Revancha Del Tango". Their success inspired a lot of other musicians. Within a few years there were dozens of tango fusion like bands active, such as Narcotango and Bajofondo Tango club.

Whether neo tango or tango fusion will be a permanent phenomenon in tango remains to be seen. However it does have a refreshing effect on tango and might function as an inspiration for future generations of tango musicians.

And this is

the **END**