

The Beautiful Five

Anibal Troilo (1914-1975)

Bandoneonist, orchestra leader and composer whose "orquesta típica" was among the most popular with social dancers during the 1940's, but he changed to a concert sound by the late 1950's.

Born in Parque Avellaneda, Buenos Aires on 11 July 1914, which has been dedicated to him as the "National Day of the Bandoneon" in Argentina. He was nicknamed "Pichuco" ("Bold") by his father, who died when he was only 8.

He was spellbound by the bandoneon when he heard its sound at cafés in his neighborhood as a child. When he was 10 his mother bought him a bandoneon for 140 pesos, to be paid in 14 installments, but after the fourth payment, the shopkeeper died and he continued playing that instrument almost his entire life.

He started playing in front of audiences at age 11, and when he was 14 he had the idea of forming a quintet.

At age 16 he was a member of the renowned sextet led by the violinist Elvino Vardaro and the pianist Osvaldo Pugliese and he went on to play with famous orchestras like Julio De Caro, Juan D'Arienzo, Angel D'Agostino and Orquesta Típica Victor.

In 1937 he started his first orchestra and he started recording in 1938 with the tangos "Comme il faut" and "Tinta verde". However, due to conflicts with the company he did not record again until 1941 when he teamed up with his emblematic singer, Francisco Fiorentino, popularly known as Fiore. He continued recording until June 24, 1971 when he recorded the last of his 449 renditions.

As bandoneon player, he was neither stylist nor virtuoso - but he had something different: he was a master of personality and feeling in his expression.

He became the most famous of all bandoneonists - the poet Julian Centeya dubbed him "The Mayor of Buenos Aires bandoneon".

As orchestra leader he chose the best players and singers to express his musical ideas.

In the beginning they played in a loose, informal style termed "a la parilla" which contrasted with the sophisticated arrangements of Julio de Caro.

They often improvised without written arrangements and sometimes without having even tried a piece beforehand.

As with most popular music, the result relied on some subtle, unwritten rules of tango music. Troilo had a relatively understated and retrospective style. At one level the music is simplistic and accessible, but it expresses a wide range of nuances in volume and dynamics. He created a sound that was big yet sweet and filled with emotion - with great clarity and purpose that sets it apart from other orchestras.

Paradoxically, his control and fine balance allowed his bandoneon to convey poignancy, subtlety of emotions and richness of texture. In the documentary "Los Capos Del Tango: Anibal Troilo" the bandoneonist and arranger Pascal Mamone says: "There was one thing about Troilo, he would play a note... which will perforate your heart"

The "Troilo Sound" is a distinctive, rich, clean sound that skillfully alternates or juxtaposes staccato and legato figures.

Every musician in his orchestra, by way of impeccable phrasing, "narrates" the melody with his individual instrument.

Troilo's bandoneon solos are usually performed at low volume (even when playing on the whole orchestra, which is amazing) and with extreme delicacy.

He once remarked: "It is said that I am very often moved and that I cry. Yes, it is true. But I never do these things for trivial reasons."

His execution pauses delicately, but not necessarily slow, and rarely has many quick notes, except when running variations.

He also knew how to choose a repertoire without having to accept the conditions suggested by the recording companies.

He allowed lots of freedom and room for individual expression, creating an orchestra by musicians for

musicians, yet producing music that appealed to dancers as well. He delegated some of the arrangement work to other orchestra members, such as the young Astor Piazzolla who was in his orchestra from 1939 to 1944.

As composer, Troilo contributed an extensive number of major works, such as: "Toda mi vida", "Barrio de tango", "Pa' que bailen los muchachos", "Garúa", "María", "Sur", "Romance de barrio", "Che, bandoneón", "Discepolín", "Responso", "Patio mío", "Una canción", "La cantina", "Desencuentro", "Te aconsejo", "En esta tarde gris" and "La última curda".

Later in life he was affectionately known as "El gordo" (the fat one). He had a warm personality that inspired goodwill and loyalty. His best friend was Homero Manzi, who wrote the lyrics for "Romance de barrio". When Homero died in 1951 Troilo went into a deep depression that lasted more than a year, and he also suffered from alcohol and cocaine abuse.

1938 Comme il faut - Plucked strings. Violin solo at 0:55. Bandoneon section at 2:05 with plucked strings in background.

1941 Cachirulo

1941 El tamango - Gentle piano solo at 1:25 followed by lovely short bass rhythm and then violin section.

1941 Guapeando - Lots of syncopation. Lovely violin duet at 1:12. Interesting rhythm at 2:08.

1941 Milongueando en el cuarenta - Pumping, slamming rhythm with lots of syncopation. Lovely, charming violin duet after 1:00. Bandoneon solo at 1:55

1941 Toda mi vida - Own composition and signature tune for melodies. Fiorentino singing.

Synchopation. Solos and voice float over subtle and steady rhythm. Bandoneon solo after vocals.

1942 La tablada - First half has furious rhythm until about 1:40, then second half has beautiful, gentle floating melodies and crescendo's.

1944 Quejas de bandoneón - Starts with full force. Bandoneon solo at 1:45

1947 Romance de barrio - Own composition. Entire orchestra quietens down when singer starts.

1943 Soñar y nada más - Stunning piano-violin conversation after about a minute. Has a smooth, dreamy quality.

1949 A unos ojos

1941 Con toda la voz que tengo - Milonga that works well with full orchestral sound. Fun piano at 1:27 and bandoneon near end - examples of short solos.

Rodolfo Biagi (1906-1969)

Born in San Telmo, he gave up his studies to pursue music (against his parent's wishes).

As a teenager his piano playing impressed Juan Maglio immensely, and he joined his first orchestra shortly thereafter. He did a few recordings with Carlos Gardel in 1930. Instead of following Gardel to Spain he joined Juan Canaro's orchestra, which he left for a quiet period until his friend D'Arienzo asked him to join his orchestra in 1935 (because his pianist was often late).

There he developed an innovative way of playing the piano, but left in 1938 to start his own orchestra. (The story is that D'Arienzo fired him one night out of jealousy after he was applauded louder than D'Arienzo...)

He earned the nickname "Mano brujas" (spellbinding/bewitched hands) from the title of a foxtrot. Even though he usually played the piano himself, he also had a replacement pianist so that he could attend the horse races on Sundays.

His music style has a distinct, precise, short stoccato rhythm with off-beats, "holes" and surges.

1941 Quejas de bandoneón - Off-beat near start already. Bandoneon duet followed by violin duet, and amazing piano near end

1942 Bélgica - lots of "holes"

1940 El yaguarón - sweeping violin on beats 2 and 4 at 1:15.

1939 El rápido - Starts with bursting surges. Change of rhythm at 0:30 and again at 1:37 with syncopation. Suspense in piano arrangement near end. 1940 Por un beso de amor - Vals with piano decorations at 2:00

Edgardo Donato (1897-1963)

Born in Buenos Aires, his family soon moved to Uruguay when he was a child.

He trained as violinist and he later composed the most "covered" tango of all time: "A media luz". Sweet and charming, like a fruit milkshake, without getting too cheesy.

Not afraid to go against convention by making use of accordion and female singer.

1933 El acomodado - plucked strings with violin solo at start. Syncopation after 30 seconds and then interesting rhythm at 1:00. Violin solo again near end.

1937 No te cases - Lighthearted, joking vocals and fun rhythms.

1938 Alas rotas - Accordion at 30 seconds.

1939 Sinsabor - Duet with female singer Lita Morales

1940 La melodía del corazón - Based on Chopin etude 42. Violin solo

1940 Mi serenata - Hauntingly beautiful. Accordion at 28 seconds.

1940 Diabla - Vals with carnival atmosphere featuring accordion at about 1 minute.

1938 La milonga que faltaba - Accordion after 1 minute, plucked strings near end

1934 Ensalada mixta - Example of Ranchera

1941 No se haga mala sangre - Example of Polca

Francisco Lomuto (1893-1950)

Born in the Parque Patricios area of Buenos Aires, one of 10 children, he had the nickname "Pancho Laguna" and learnt piano from his mother.

He had his first orchestra by age 28 already, and recorded about a thousand songs until his death in 1950.

Like Canaro, he worked for musician's rights and became president of SADAIC in 1936.

His music has a steady, consistent, danceable rhythm, but I would not describe it as heavy (like Canaro) nor as insistent as D'Arienzo - it is more "punchy".

Above the rhythm floats some charming melodies, and he (like Canaro) makes use of clarinet and trumpet to add colour to the sound.

1933 Puerto nuevo - Violin and clarinet solos at start.

1936 Nostálgias - Melodic with clarinet.

1941 La gayola - Punchy rhythm with bow-slapping at 1:00.

1941 Copa de ajeno - Lively punchy rhythm.

1940 Quiero verte una vez más - Beautiful violin solo intro, followed by alternating rhythm and melodic phrases.

1936 Damisela encantadora - Vals with lovely clarinet melody and great piano solo at 1:20 followed by trumpet solo at 1:35. Singer comes in well after 2 minutes (Estrillista). Playful bandoneon at end.

1933 Lo que vieron tus ojos - Good example of Lomuto's style. Interesting opening rhythm variation. Clarinet with plucked strings at 0:38. Interplay of voices (question-reply and blend). Playful bandoneon at end.

1938 Qué tiempo aquel - Irresistible milonga.

Angel D'Agostino (1900-1991)

Born into a musical family in Buenos Aires (his father and uncles were all musicians) with a piano in the house that became his "toy".

His childhood neighbour and friend was D'Arienzo.

He quit school because of music and started his own orchestra in 1920 to play tango as well as jazz, and they often played at silent film cinemas.

In 1932 he met Angel Vargas, who was to join his orchestra later in 1940.

He was committed to bachelorhood and sought a bohemian lifestyle and also developed gambling skills. Simplicity and good taste characterize his music style.

Polite, gentlemanly tango - nothing unexpected or challenging - not rushed - calm and relaxed.

Minimalism - musicians give each other enough space - like opening doors - no need to "steal" any space.

Generally melancholic with a few bright moments, but nothing to get the adrenalin pumping - even the syncopation is gentle.

Good to bring order to a chaotic dance floor.

1941 Tres esquinas - signature tune - his own composition. Vocal phrases are followed by short piano and bandoneon solos. Syncopation overlaid with sweet violin melody, followed by lovely piano solo.

1941 Agua florida - slow start with piano and then vocal intro.

1943 Madre hay una sola - Faster start with brightly plucked strings.

1945 La cumparsita - Effortless vocals with spacious piano phrasing.