

PIAZZOLLA: MUCH MORE THAN TANGO

After meeting for the first time at the Festival de Laterrière in 2018 to perform Piazzolla, Nicolas Ellis and Jonathan Goldman reunite with I Musici to celebrate the 100th birthday of the Argentinian composer.



JG - What attracts me to Piazzolla is the fusion of popular, jazz and classical idioms in his music. Piazzolla had been a student of Alberto Ginastera, probably the greatest Argentinian composer of the 20th century, before going on to Paris to complete his studies with Nadia Boulanger, who taught Aaron Copland, among so many others.

NE - Piazzolla had a solid foundation in classical music while being close to Argentinian folk music in the same way that Dvořák was a classical composer who worked with Brahms but always incorporated his own folk music into his work. Piazzolla was also endowed with immense creativity and a great sense of melody and rhythm. This is festive music, and very enjoyable to conduct.

What is on today's program ?

JG - *Five Tango Sensations* is a work that's rarely performed. Originally commissioned by the Kronos Quartet for bandoneon and string quartet, Piazzolla later made a version for bandoneon and string orchestra. It was his last studio recording. The pieces have a cinematic quality. In fact, he drew the pieces from an earlier film score he composed. I'm drawn to the contemplative quality of this music.

NE - The program was essentially conceived by Jonathan, but I suggested the piece by Golijov, *Last Round*, which is a very interesting and quite virtuosic work for the string orchestra. What's special about this work is that Golijov tried to recreate the sound of the bandoneon with a string orchestra. The result is very rhythmic music with a contemporary flavour, but it's also tonal It's really an exciting and imaginative piece.

Do you dance tango ?



JG - No! I've often performed for dancers at milongas, but as is often the case, even in Argentina, the musicians make the music and the dancers dance, each keeping to their own separate domains. That being said, I've learned a lot from accompanying dancers. For example, tango dancers know a piece is coming to an end when the orchestra starts slowing down. If the musicians don't do the *rallentando* and end the piece abruptly, the dancers get upset because the music stops while they're in the middle of a move!

NE - I've never had an opportunity to dance tango. I took a few swing classes a long time ago! But inevitably when you conduct Piazzolla's music, you feel like you're dancing. The music inhabits you and brings out movements that could be construed as dance. You can't help being physically carried away by it. That's the power of Piazzolla's music and tango. I even think that audience members might discover a hidden talent for tango dancing when they watch the concert!

