

**Reinventing the Tango:  
A Comparative Analysis of Matos Rodríguez's  
*La Cumparsita* and Piazzolla's *Otoño Porteño***

**Maximiliano Holten-Andersen**

Major Research Paper submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the MA degree in music theory

School of Music  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Ottawa

© Maximiliano Holten-Andersen, Ottawa, Canada, 2012

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
Chapter 1: The Origins and Development of the Tango .....	9
1.1: From the Roots to the Present .....	9
1.2: Piazzola's Life .....	16
1.3: The Culture of the Tango .....	18
1.4: Hybrid Nature of the Traditional Tango and the <i>Nuevo Tango</i> .....	20
Chapter 2: Analysis of <i>La Cumparsita</i> and <i>Otoño Porteño</i> .....	26
2.1: Instrumentation and Form .....	29
2.2: Harmonic Structures .....	36
2.3: Rhythmic Structures .....	39
2.3.1: Introduction .....	39
2.3.2: Rhythmic Analysis of <i>La Cumparsita</i> .....	40
2.3.3: Rhythmic Analysis of <i>Otoño Porteño</i> .....	55
2.3.4: Rhythmic Units .....	79
2.3.5: Synthesis .....	83
Chapter 3: Conclusion .....	85
Bibliography .....	90

## INTRODUCTION

Even as a child, I was intrigued by Piazzolla's music and how the composer fuses tango rhythms, jazz melodies, and classical counterpoint to create fascinating works. Remarkably, Piazzolla preserves the essence of the traditional tango, while modifying elements to make it more current. The purpose of this study is to provide a comparative analysis of *La Cumparsita* by Gerardo Matos Rodríguez and *Otoño Porteño* by Astor Piazzolla to demonstrate how the latter composer varies traditional tango rhythmic units, while including elements from jazz and Western art music in the framework of a traditional tango dance. This results in the creation of a new hybrid genre, *Nuevo Tango*, ultimately allowing Piazzolla to leave a personal imprint on the rich history of the tango. The study will be divided into three chapters. After a brief survey of the literature in the introduction section, the first chapter will provide historical information on the development of the dance. This chapter will also include a short biography on Piazzolla, along with a brief discussion on the hybrid nature of the genre. The second chapter will present the analyses and comparison of both works detailed above. These will be examined in relation to their instrumentation and formal structure, as well as their respective harmonic and rhythmic structures. The last chapter will then serve to summarize the findings and propose further application of the tools employed in the analyses. I begin with a survey of the literature that was useful for my study of the tango.

As Piazzolla's music challenged the conventions of previous generations, it also opened the door for discourse. Unfortunately, scholarly writings on him and his music are rather limited.

For my study, several sources have been reviewed in order to: (1) provide a brief contextual and historical background on the development of the tango, (2) present a short biographical account of Piazzolla's experiences, (3) survey scholarly research on Piazzolla and his music, and (4) to evaluate the tools needed for my analytical discussion of his work.

Since the dance is not the main focus of this project, only two books have been consulted for a review of its historical background. *¡Tango!*,<sup>1</sup> first published in 1995 and edited by Simon Collier, is a compilation of four chapters written by Collier himself, Artemis Cooper, María Susana Azzi, and Richard Martin. Each author addresses a particular topic within the tango realm. Only two of these chapters have been used for this project, as these focus on the tango's historical background. Collier's introductory chapter, "The Tango is Born: 1880s-1920s,"<sup>2</sup> provides a detailed summary of the development of the genre, unearthing the shape the tango took from its roots to its ultimate triumph in Argentine society. The chapter provides a detailed historical account, including the importance of several musicians in the early development of the dance. Collier offers no analysis of musical works, but rather historical facts supported by a vast bibliography. "The Golden Age and After: 1920s-1990s,"<sup>3</sup> the third chapter written by María Susana Azzi, discusses the apex of the tango, its subsequent fall, and its final ascent. Azzi examines the development of the tango orchestra, from its limited instrumentation to the large orchestras from the Golden Era. To conclude the chapter, she briefly discusses the importance of Piazzolla in the rebirth of the tango past its prime time. Similar to Collier's opening chapter, Azzi's lacks any kind of theoretical analysis of the music, and focuses only on the historical aspect of this period.

---

<sup>1</sup> Simon Collier, ed., *¡Tango!* (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Simon Collier, "The Tango is Born: 1880s-1920s," in Collier, *¡Tango!*, 18-64.

<sup>3</sup> María Susana Azzi, "The Golden Age and After: 1920s-1990s," in Collier, *¡Tango!*, 114-60.

Written by Virginia Gift and published in 2008, *Tango: A History of Obsession*<sup>4</sup> discusses two main aspects of the tango. Since the first part of the book focuses on the dance itself, it has not been extensively considered for my research. The second part, in contrast, focuses on the history of the genre tracing its roots from the colonial period to the present. Gift discusses how the dance developed in the slums of Buenos Aires and how the traditional dances at the time shaped the tango. The focus of the second part is set on the development of the dance in Argentina. Although the author does include information on the tango's main iconic figures, she does not include much on tango music, as it is not analysed thoroughly.

Two biographical books on Piazzolla have been used for my study. Natalio Gorin's *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*,<sup>5</sup> originally written in Spanish and published in 1990, presents a series of interviews with Piazzolla, where the composer narrates his experiences in New York, Buenos Aires, Paris, and Rome. The study provides an intimate look at Piazzolla's life, where the composer discusses his compositional processes, his extensive *œuvre*, love interests, music influences, and family relationships, among other topics. The book, however, focuses mostly on the biographical facet of the composer, and despite the fact that several compositions are referenced, these are not discussed in a detailed or analytical manner.

María Susana Azzi's and Simon Collier's *Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla*,<sup>6</sup> endorsed by the Astor Piazzolla Foundation, provides a detailed biographical account of the composer's life. The book's title however, is misleading since the authors do not discuss the music in detail. In spite of this, they do examine performance practices, as well as the use of characteristic rhythms in Piazzolla's music. In contrast with the previous biography, Azzi's and

---

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession* (BookSurge Publishing, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Natalio Gorin, *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, translated, annotated, and expanded by Fernando Gonzalez, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> María Susana Azzi and Simon Collier, *Le Grand Tango: The life and music of Astor Piazzolla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Collier's is not conceived from personal interviews with the composer, but rather from the extensive research by both scholars. The book contains a detailed discography, and also presents a glossary of tango and regional terms.

Omar García Brunelli's *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*<sup>7</sup> presents a collection of essays in which several authors discuss the composer's music from a wide range of topics. These essays explore different facets of the composer's music by examining the tango roots in his music (Mauriño), by providing analyses of selected music, such as *Fuga y Misterio*, *María de Buenos Aires*, *La Camorra*, and *Adiós Nonino* (Pelinski, Atlas, Brunelli, Krämer), by addressing performance practices of the ensembles (Kutnowski, Kuss), and by discussing the essence of the Piazzolla aesthetic (Kuri). These articles comprise the majority of scholarly writings on Piazzolla's music and the intricacies found within his works. However, as not all of these essays pertain to my study, only a few will be examined in detail in the following paragraphs.

In *Raíces tangueras de la obra de Astor Piazzolla*,<sup>8</sup> Gabriela Mauriño examines elements in the composer's music by comparing them with the music of previous tango musicians. Different characteristics are compared with those used by tango musicians in the Golden Era. Although the musical examples are limited, the elements analyzed occur throughout Piazzolla's *œuvre*. ultimately showing that in spite of the Old Guard criticism, Piazzolla's music has its roots in the tango.

Ramón Pelinski's *Astor Piazzolla: entre tango y fuga, en busca de una identidad estilística*<sup>9</sup> outlines a series of ideas and supports them with examples from the composer's

---

<sup>7</sup> Omar García Brunelli, ed., *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla* (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Gabriela Mauriño, "Raíces tangueras de la obra de Astor Piazzolla." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, ed. Omar García Brunelli (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008), 19-34.

<sup>9</sup> Ramón Pielinski, "Astor Piazzolla: entre tango y fuga, en busca de una identidad estilística." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, ed. Omar García Brunelli (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008), 35-56.

works. The author describes compositional and performance practices, compared to the practices of the musical genres that influenced Piazzolla. This leads to a discussion on the nature of hybridity, hybrid elements in Piazzolla's music, as well as its aesthetics and reception. The author supports his arguments by analysing these elements in four of Piazzolla's best-known compositions: *Adiós Nonino*, *Muerte del Ángel*, *Milonga del Ángel*, and *Fuga y Misterio*.

Carlos Kuri's *Agonía del género y potencia del nombre (Constitución de la estética piazzolleana)*<sup>10</sup> focuses on Piazzolla's aesthetic and the elements that create his particular sound. The author explores the elements that have shaped the composer's style, while considering his musical influences, instrumentation changes, and compositional and performance practices. Kuri does not support his arguments with examples from Piazzolla's *œuvre*.

In *Rubato instrumental y estructura de la frase en la música de Astor Piazzolla*,<sup>11</sup> Martín Kutnowski focuses his discussion around two musical characteristics in the composer's music. Firstly, the author addresses Piazzolla's instrumental *rubato*, where he compares the use of this technique by traditional tango singers with that of Piazzolla. Kutnowski identifies syncopation and rhythmic emphasis as two of the main qualities that help create instrumental *rubato*—Piazzolla actually scores *rubato*. Secondly, Kutnowski examines asymmetrical phrases in Piazzolla's music and interprets the role of instrumental *rubato* in the elaboration of these phrases. However, the author only uses one piece to support his second argument, suggesting the need for further research.

---

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Kuri, "Agonía del género y potencia del nombre (*Constitución de la estética piazzolleana*)." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, ed. Omar Garcia Brunelli (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008), 13-18.

<sup>11</sup> Martín Kutnowski, "Rubato instrumental y estructura de la frase en la música de Astor Piazzolla." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, ed. Omar Garcia Brunelli (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008), 99-108.

All of the sources summarized in the previous paragraphs have contributed to my research, which consists primarily of the following two chapters. Chapter 1 surveys the origins of the traditional tango, Piazzolla's biography, the culture of the tango, and the hybrid nature of both the traditional and *Nuevo* tangos. Chapter 2 focuses on the music itself by comparing the formal structure, the instrumentation, the harmonic structure, and the rhythmic structure of a traditional tango (Matos Rodríguez's *La Cumparsita*) and one of Piazzolla's *Nuevo Tangos* (*Otoño Porteño*). The analysis will show that although Piazzolla transformed the tango into a new genre, he preserved many elements of the traditional tango.

## CHAPTER 1: The Origins and Development of the Tango

*“Tango is a whole system of concepts, images, words, and practices, some of them ritual ones. One cannot possibly understand a part of the whole if isolated from the remaining parts of that whole. In the context of tango, dancing makes sense along with music, the bandoneón along with the nostalgia evoked, memories from the past together with a given way of visualizing the world, which is characteristic of the true tango lover. Tango is a complex social phenomenon.”*<sup>12</sup>

*- María Susana Azzi*

The tango includes many aspects, such as specific instrumentation, characteristic rhythmic units, and traditional harmonic structures, which have shaped the dance and its music. The genre has continued to develop for over 150 years and has impacted the way in which a relatively new society emerged and established its cultural identity. The dance has been deeply weaved into the political, economical, and social fabric of the country’s history. I will begin this chapter with the rise of the tango by first tracing the historical roots of the dance and its ascent to the musical elite. Secondly, I will provide a short biography of Piazzolla’s life since he has played a crucial role in promoting the tango. Thirdly, a survey of the culture of the tango will provide insight into the places that have shaped the tango and the dance. Finally, I will examine the hybrid nature of the tango by outlining elements that have shaped it from its traditional origins to *Nuevo Tango*.

### 1.1: From the Roots to the Present

The tango has been an essential part of the Argentine culture. The genre has made such an impact that a national holiday has been set to honour the dance. In addition, it is symbolized in paintings and statues across the streets of Buenos Aires, the capital city, and the University of

---

<sup>12</sup> María Susana Azzi, “Tango as Ritual,” *Buenos Aires Herald*, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1991.

Tango was funded to teach and promote the dance, its music, and *lunfardo*.<sup>13</sup> Even the presidential airplane was named after the dance: *Tango 01*. The genre has continued to develop slowly as it migrated from the slums and brothels of Buenos Aires to the highest level of European aristocracy, from the darkest and most dangerous venues to the most renowned stages in the world. Even though the tango is now common in Argentina's culture, the history and development of the tango is as complex and intricate as the dance itself. The story of the tango begins in a small area in Buenos Aires, close to the city port, and from there it developed throughout Argentina, and subsequently the world, aided by travelling musicians and the creation of new technologies. However, the rise of the genre takes us back in time to the colonial period.

Spanish *conquistadores* first arrived in Argentina in the seventeenth century. Like in most South American countries, the Spanish crown established a viceroyalty in what is now Buenos Aires. Eventually, when the Argentines rebelled against the Spanish crown, leading to the country's independence, local authorities gained power by force. It is during this time that an open war against the natives begins in order to exterminate them.

The aboriginal population in Argentina has been in a constant decline due to totalitarian governments' attempts at annihilating the existence of their communities. However, for those natives who did survive, most men were traded as forced-labour slaves, while women were sold as sex-slaves. Unfortunately, "by 1879 scarcely five percent of the [native] population remained."<sup>14</sup> Musically, the aboriginal communities left no tradition with the exception of simple percussive instruments and flutes used in the early *milonga rural*. Similarly, the black population in Argentina has faced a constant decline. Freed African slaves were inducted into the Argentine

---

<sup>13</sup> *Lunfardo* is the slang language of Buenos Aires. Italian immigrants conceived it as a way to keep their communications private. Eventually, it was used for the lyrics in tango and ultimately adopted by society.

<sup>14</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 172.

army and forced to fight the aboriginals. Although few slaves survived, they left a musical mark on the tango with the *candombe* and the *murga*.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to these declining trends, the *gaucho* population grew in the Argentina farmlands during the 1800s. The *gauchos* lived primarily in the Pampas as independent free spirits, who considered themselves masters of the land. The city population, however, rejected *gauchos*, since they were perceived as lazy brutes and intellectually underdeveloped. Nonetheless, many admired the respect they had for codes of honour. The arrival of immigrants willing to work for low wages slowly displaced the *gauchos* from the farmlands to Buenos Aires, where their toughness was welcomed by *compadres*.<sup>16</sup> The customs and codes of *compadres*, as well as their honesty and loyalty, were highly respected, admired, and ultimately adopted by Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires. The *gaucho* musical heritage leaves behind the early *milonga rural*, the *chacarera*, the *canyengue*, and the *payadas*, all characterized by their simple instrumentation (usually a guitar and a voice).

The end of the nineteenth century was marked by the drastic growth of the immigrant population—newcomers primarily from Spain and Italy. Foreigners, fond of their musical heritage, brought classical music knowledge with them, as well as many of their customs, which were soon after adopted by the Argentine population. Nonetheless, the “cultural life [was] relentlessly tied to Paris.”<sup>17</sup> Upper-class families would normally use French as the first language in their households and in social gatherings, as most of them looked to Paris for cultural

---

<sup>15</sup> *Candombe* and *murga* are two African musical styles. They are both percussive genres with no, or limited, melodic component. They both have syncopated rhythms, which encourage the dancers to dance (or rather jump), as if performing a ritual. Both styles were commonly performed during carnival season in Argentina in the late 1800s.

<sup>16</sup> *Compadres* were the suburb equivalent to mafia family bosses. They were in command of certain suburbs and controlled most illegal activities in the area. They were seen as urban *gauchos* since they were arrogant, proud, and generally respected and feared in their communities. Nonetheless, immigrants praised them, as *compadres* would help them adapt to a new country.

<sup>17</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 199.

inspiration. The music that these different ethnic groups left in Argentina's imprint has greatly contributed to the rise of the tango.

Initially, the dance was identified with lower-class citizens and poor immigrants and was exclusive to the slums of Buenos Aires. It was at first executed by two males, as it was considered "a macho credential"<sup>18</sup> and a type of duel between men; it eventually became a courtship dance between a male and a female. As immigrants from diverse backgrounds did not share a common language, music helped them carry on a "conversation." Performing the tango in patios and by streetlights was the only way most of them could interact with someone. Tango was becoming a genre born on the streets.

Even though the tango was recognized as a separate dance by the end of the nineteenth century, it combined elements from different genres. As this fusion had been developed by the lower classes, the genre struggled for acceptance in Buenos Aires for two main reasons. Firstly, it challenged the codes of social dancing by keeping the bodies together as part of its sensual embrace. Secondly, but most importantly, it was associated with the sinful life of the underworld of crime, drugs, poverty, and brothels. Although the music was accepted by middle and upper classes, it was the questionable environment in which the genre had been conceived that they rejected.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the lack of acceptance of the tango at the turn of the twentieth century, many tango musicians moved to other countries in order to showcase their music,<sup>20</sup> most particularly, France. This proved to be a wise choice, as the tango was an instant success in the European

---

<sup>18</sup> Azzi, "Golden Age and After", 118.

<sup>19</sup> Collier, "Tango is Born", 57.

<sup>20</sup> With the rising interest in the dance close to the turn of the century, other instruments were added to the ensembles, such as the clarinet, the violin, and the bandoneón. Eventually the double bass and piano completed the *orquesta típica*. The final addition to the ensemble was a singer. Following the social conventions of the time, male singers first dominated the scene, while female singers were introduced into the bands years later.

country. Interestingly, and in opposition to the Argentine society, the dance was adopted by the highest levels of Paris's aristocracy due to its sophistication of dance steps, which require countless hours to master. Within a short period of time, other European high societies included the dance in formal balls and private parties.

With its success in Europe, the tango was soon renowned as one of the most famous dances in the world. French aristocracy had set the standard, while French intellectuals lobbied to make the tango more acceptable. Jean Richepin, for example, suggested that "the tango came in a direct line from the Ancient Greeks."<sup>21</sup> Due to this, Argentine aristocracy began accepting the genre as their French counterparts did.

As technologies advanced and the tango's popularity rose in Argentina, radios broadcasted songs, hired tango orchestras to perform live in their studios, and produced and sold records, making the business of tango incredibly profitable. Through improvements in public transportation in the early 1900s, the tango widened its audience as the orchestras could now easily travel to different venues.

With the rising popularity of the tango, different media employed the tango, such as *sainete* theatres,<sup>22</sup> classical theatres, and the film industry. Beginning in the 1920s, Carlos Gardel<sup>23</sup> brought the genre to Hollywood, where he produced and starred in several tango-themed films for Latin communities (all of them with great success), giving rise to the Golden Era of Tango.

Naturally, the tango in Argentina continued to transform itself after its success in Europe and North America during the 1920s and 1930s, resulting in the Golden Era of tango (1920s-

---

<sup>21</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 247.

<sup>22</sup> *Sainete* theatres exclusively showcased short comedic plays, with similar undertones to opera *buffa*.

<sup>23</sup> Carlos Gardel (1890-1935) is considered one of the pioneers in the creation of the tango-song style (a tango with prewritten lyrics, as opposed to the instrumental tango). His distinct vocal timbre has been recognized as sublime, making him the most popular and renowned tango performer of all time.

1950s). It is at this time that the musical genre begins to diverge into two paths. On the one hand, the Old Guard<sup>24</sup> was more concerned with conserving the style and elements used until the end of 1920s, where the main priority was a strict emphasis of the beat, while the melody played a secondary role. On the other hand, the New Guard wanted to experiment with the melodic and harmonic aspects of the music, which led to a more refined musical approach, where the strict rhythm was relegated to the background.<sup>25</sup>

Some tango composers and arrangers<sup>26</sup> experimented mildly with the fusion of genres by incorporating, to a very limited extent, elements from both jazz and classical music, such as more complex rhythmic and harmonic structures, as well as exotic instrumentation, such as harps and vibraphones. With the rise of the tango-song and these stylistic changes, the tango became generally accepted in upper-class circles for private gatherings and dance halls. By the 1920s, the tango “had gained acceptance at almost every level of Argentine society”<sup>27</sup> and it was now seen as an acceptable art form all around.

Due to this, wealthy patrons were now able to host more parties, resulting in more musicians earning a living as *tangueros*,<sup>28</sup> and ultimately encouraging more people to embrace the tango lifestyle. The tango became an essential part of society since it now was prevalent in all parts of Argentina; it was on the radio—performed by musicians, or used to advertise different kinds of products—in Argentine films, in dance halls open every night of the week, as well as in

---

<sup>24</sup> The Old Guard is the term used to refer to the group of traditionalist *tangueros* who insisted that the tango was to be danced, played, and composed following certain older ideals, not allowing for any real change in the conventions of the genre. The New Guard, in contrast, was interested in pushing the boundaries of the dance by adding elements from other genres.

<sup>25</sup> Azzi, “Golden Age and After”, 119.

<sup>26</sup> *The New Grove: Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “De Caro, Julio.” For instance, Julio de Caro (1899-1980) introduced some jazz elements while keeping the essence of the tango, adding a distinct sound quality to the traditional tango.

<sup>27</sup> Azzi, “Golden Age and After”, 115.

<sup>28</sup> *Tanguero* refers to a person of the tango realm, such as a musician, a dancer, or an amateur that identifies with the tango culture.

cafés, bars, theatres, and brothels. Nonetheless, in the late 1940s, with the arrival of the latest international genres emerging in the United States and Great Britain, the new generation chose to listen to these genres over the tango. As a result, the dance started to lose its popularity.

After political unrest, including an overthrown government and a military dictatorship, democracy returned to Argentina in 1946 with President Juan Domingo Perón. One of his first orders of business was to reinstate the importance of the tango in the Argentine community. The presidential couple saw the dance as a tool for unity and used it as such in order to unite people from different ethnic backgrounds, as well as newly arrived immigrants, under the Argentine flag, establishing a strong sense of national pride inexistent until then.<sup>29</sup>

The tango unified people from different heritages living in Argentina; however, when Perón's government was overthrown by yet another military dictatorship, the prominence of the tango was weakened. The more right-winged the dictatorship became, the deeper the tango sank into the underground scene. The military had imposed restrictions to avoid mass gatherings in venues; people could not assemble in groups larger than three for fear of being arrested, or worse, "disappear."<sup>30</sup> Many musicians went into exile, and those who stayed, played in small ensembles, rather than the large orchestras from the Golden Era. Ironically, even though the military dictatorship attempted to erase the tango, they declared December 11 as the National Day of the Tango, established on the birthday of both Carlos Gardel and Julio de Caro, two icons in the tango history.

Even though some musicians were still producing tango music, either in Argentina or elsewhere in the world, the output was limited. "The evolutionists, with Piazzolla in the

---

<sup>29</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 306.

<sup>30</sup> During the military dictatorship, political dissidents were kidnapped, tortured, killed, and thrown into the Rio de la Plata by officials. The government would not admit to these crimes, making it appear that the victim simply disappeared.

foreground, formed classical quintets whose evolutionary style became more and more avant-garde.”<sup>31</sup> Their music, however, was regaining popularity in the world, particularly in Europe, the United States, and Japan. Traditionalists, nevertheless, attacked the new genre at every opportunity. Despite the criticism, the tango was revived through the non-traditionalists in the early 1980s and the genre regained its identity in Argentina’s culture. As democracy was re-established in Argentina in 1983, many exiles returned, including Piazzolla.<sup>32</sup>

## 1.2: Piazzola’s Life

Astor Piazzolla was born in 1921 in Mar del Plata, Argentina, a seaside city located close to Buenos Aires, and relocated to New York City with his family while he was still a toddler. Although Piazzolla was not a tango enthusiast, he received his first bandoneón as a gift for his eighth birthday during their stay in New York City. Soon after, he began taking music lessons, in which he would adapt Bach’s organ preludes for the bandoneón. He developed a passion for Bach’s music, and gained an understanding for this music. He was also exposed to jazz music since it was played frequently in nightclubs, bars, on the radio, and the streets of New York City, Piazzolla’s second home.

After his family returned to Argentina (1937), Piazzolla moved to Buenos Aires in hopes of earning a living as a musician. There he became the youngest member of Aníbal Troilo’s orchestra, as the main bandoneón player. Soon after, he also deepened his understanding of classical music<sup>33</sup> by taking lessons with Alberto Ginastera. Meanwhile, he began arranging music for the ensemble and started pushing the boundaries of the tango by employing his newly

---

<sup>31</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 349.

<sup>32</sup> Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) is considered the creator of the subgenre *Nuevo Tango*. He pushed the traditional style to a new level by employing elements from both the jazz and classical music idioms.

<sup>33</sup> This refers to classical music in the general sense, rather than the classical era.

acquired expertise. In 1953, Piazzolla received the Fabien Sevitzy Award in a composition competition, which he entered following Ginastera's advice. The prize entitled him to a scholarship, which gave him the means to study music theory with Nadia Boulanger in France in 1954.

In Paris, the French theorist quickly recognized that, even though Piazzolla's classical music *œuvre* to date was brilliantly written, it lacked Piazzolla's spirit as it echoed the neoclassical styles of Stravinsky and Bartók, among other composers. However, after listening to Piazzolla improvising a tango on the bandoneón, Boulanger insisted that the true Piazzolla lay in the tango music he performed and not in the classical music he had previously composed. This marked an important shift in Piazzolla's compositional career, as he discovered his true self. Since then, he has written an extensive collection of tango music, including individual works, collaborative works, and several film scores. He remained an active musician who toured the world, until he suffered a stroke in 1990 that led to his death in 1992.<sup>34</sup>

Piazzolla's *œuvre* was heavily influenced by classical music while experimenting with exotic instrumentation. Unfortunately, his evolutionary ideas encouraged heated discussions between 'Piazzollistas' and 'Anti-Piazzollistas.' As Piazzolla explains: "In Argentina you can change hundreds of Presidents; you can change religions, but don't try to change the tango."<sup>35</sup> His innovative approach was perceived by some as the death of the tango. He laments:

I still can't believe that some pseudocritics continue to accuse me of having murdered tango. They have it backward. They should look at me as the saviour of tango. I performed plastic surgery on it.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Gorin, *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, 13-22.

<sup>35</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 358-359.

<sup>36</sup> Gorin, *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, 44.

Younger audiences more readily identified with Piazzolla's music than that of the Golden Era, or before. The two opposing views—traditional tango and *Nuevo Tango*—created great conflict in the tango culture. Piazzolla wrote tangos meant to be listened to, rather than danced to. This approach contradicted a convention that had been established for over half a century, as it had opened the possibility for new techniques and different experimentations with the genre.

Even though the tango is considered an important national art form due to its history and heritage, most of the current Argentine population does not listen nor dance to the music. Nevertheless, the tango has survived as a dance for approximately 150 years, and continues to adapt to the demands of a new generation in order to ensure its survival. For this reason, new subgenres have appeared, such as the current tango-jazz, tango-rock, and techno-tango fusions. Naturally, with the evolution of the genre though, many conventions have been developed and modified to what can be identified as subgenres within the culture of the tango.

### **1.3: The Culture of the Tango**

The conventions of the tango have been nested in the many places where the genre emerged. Newly arrived immigrants would first settle in *conventillos*,<sup>37</sup> which hosted mainly Spanish and Italian immigrants, as well as freed African slaves and displaced *gauchos* from the Pampas. These housing units were usually located in the *arrabales*, the outskirts of the city, where poverty and a feeling of alienation reigned. In addition to being the place of the tango, the *arrabales* also housed many criminals, pimps, prostitutes, and several brothels. From here on, the tango slowly began making its way into the city's capital in the last decade of the nineteenth century as new dancing venues were opening due to an ever-growing lower class. As the tango

---

<sup>37</sup> *Conventillos* were residence-like buildings with many small rooms, shared bathrooms and kitchens, and big patios where tango was danced.

became popular on the streets, café and bar owners began hiring musicians to perform the tango in their establishments, making business more profitable. Brothel owners soon adopted the same idea and brought the tango into their venues, stigmatizing the genre forever, as it then became almost exclusively associated with those types of places.

The dance itself can be described as an obsession. Once you try it, a passion begins to burn inside the body, and once it has been ignited, it never dies. Nonetheless, the culture of the tango is remarkably strict and has codes that must be respected and followed. For example, the sole purpose of the music is to be danced.<sup>38</sup> In other words, activities, such as socializing and flirting, are not allowed in tango halls, identified as *milongas*.<sup>39</sup> In these venues, communication during the dance is done with the eyes, the body, and ultimately the soul. While *lunfardo*, the language associated with the tango, is used for lyrics, the “silent language”<sup>40</sup> is the only one allowed on the dance floor, where steps and *figuras*<sup>41</sup> are used as words and phrases, respectively. These in turn present “a rich fountain of possibilities, a complex palette of colours, a sophisticated language of expression.”<sup>42</sup>

The Argentine Tango dance style<sup>43</sup> encourages dancers to create their own style, thus making each dance distinct and unique. One of Argentina’s most renowned tango dancer, Juan Carlos Copes affirms that:

---

<sup>38</sup> This applies strictly to music from and before the Golden Era. In contrast, Piazzolla’s *Nuevo Tango* is intended for listening purposes only.

<sup>39</sup> The word *milonga* is tricky as it has two meanings: (1) tango dance halls are referred to as *milongas*, and (2) a *milonga* is a musical subgenre of the tango. The appropriate definition will be clarified within the context of the prose.

<sup>40</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> *Figuras* are patterns of steps.

<sup>42</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> In Britain, however, the dance steps were simplified, reducing the sensuality of the dance and thus creating a different tango dancing style: Ballroom Tango style (BTS), consisting of only eight possible steps. This style differs greatly from the Argentine Tango style (ATS), where there is an infinite combination of possible steps. ATS dancers strive to achieve a purely aesthetic goal: to master the finesse of the dance itself and turn it into an art form. Since BTS is easier to learn than its Argentine counterpart, as there are only a few steps to memorize, BTS is now considered the international dancing standard in competitions around the world, as it is easier to judge.

We changed and revolutionized tango and gave it respectability, and young people must do the same. We invented a lot of our own steps. They must invent theirs. We found our own personality and style and the young have the responsibility to do the same. Tango music changes or it will die.<sup>44</sup>

It is interesting that Copes's views on tango dancing overlap with those of Piazzolla. As the genre was slowly fading, Piazzolla revitalised it by adding new elements, and so have new generations.

Even though the genre had gained some recognition throughout its history, the Broadway-like play *Tango Argentino* in 1983, staged by Claudio Segovia and Hector Orezza, re-popularized the dance. The obsession for the music and the dance led to scholarly research and publications on the matter. Remarkably, within the tango culture, different groups advocated for specific aspects of the genre. For instance, tango musicians usually do not interact with tango dancers, and vice versa. Musicians are concerned with the music, while dancers focus on the dance. It is ironic that there would be no dance without music, and there would have been no music without people to dance to it. However, the culture of the tango would not have become what it is without the music to guide *tangueros* through the developmental process.

#### **1.4: Hybrid Nature of the Traditional Tango and the *Nuevo Tango***

The traditional tango is a hybrid of several musical genres and elements accumulated from different cultures, and as such, it is difficult to describe. Nonetheless, several elements have contributed to its instrumental textures, rhythmic complexity, dancing techniques, and lyrical content to shape the tango. The *milonga rural* and *chacarera*, for instance, were simple, yet repetitive genres performed by *payadores* who improvised lyrics about the countryside life of the aboriginals, the peasants, and the *gauchos*, while accompanying themselves on guitar. The

---

<sup>44</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 71.

*canyengue*, another musical genre from the farmlands, included a close embrace adopted by tango dancers. The *candombe* and *murga*, both percussive musical genres, are characterized by complex syncopated rhythms, with little or no melodic component. The European waltz and polka, even though not originally from Spanish descent, were brought by the Spaniards during the colonizing years. These two dances have shaped the emergence of the *milonga rural* dance, and have contributed to the creation of the tango dancing style.<sup>45</sup> Italian immigrants also began incorporating traditional operatic themes in tango lyrics, as the Argentine genre gained popularity. Themes such as lost love, treachery, and death, among others, contributed to more sorrowful music, which contrasted with the tango's earlier, light-hearted model. Many of these Italian immigrants were also classically trained and brought musical literacy with them. They employed this formal knowledge when composing and arranging tangos, giving the Argentine dance a more refined and complex quality, when compared with its predecessors. Last but not least, the bandoneón (an accordion-like instrument) was invented in Germany as a cheap alternative to the church organ. Ironically, its religious purpose was lost as it gained most importance as an instrument in the brothels of Argentina. The amalgamation of these elements, and ultimately the rise of the traditional tango, is summarised in Figure 1.1.

Although the tango is the sum of its diverse influences, the Old Guard never seemed to accept the genre for what it was: a hybrid musical genre, which continued to change with the inclusion of foreign elements. Before the inclusion of the bandoneón, the tango was light-hearted like the *habanera*; the instrument turned the dance into something slower, intimate, and meditative. Since then, the bandoneón has been associated with the tango.<sup>46</sup>

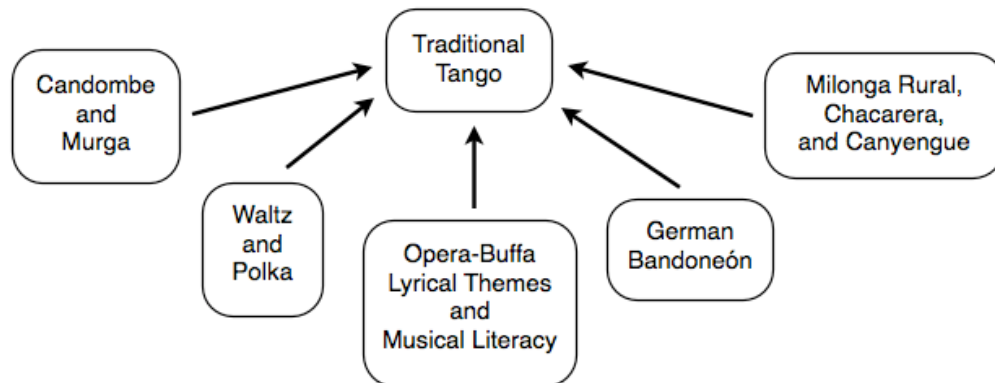
With the increasing Italian immigrant population, the tango became culturally richer; instead of

---

<sup>45</sup> Collier, "Tango is Born", 40.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

**Figure 1.1: The Rise of the Traditional Tango**



improvising music, musicians began to arrange older tangos and write new ones. This resulted in the tango moving from the streets into cafés and bars; the change to actual venues had a crucial impact on the formation of tango orchestras, which could now include the double bass and piano. By the first decade of the twentieth century, tango orchestras did not frequently include singers until prewritten lyrics became a standard practice. As a result, the traditional tango may be divided into subgenres.

The traditional tango consists of three different subgenres, which may be categorized by types of rhythms and musical idioms: (1) Classical tango, (2) *milonga*,<sup>47</sup> and (3) tango waltz. The Classical tango has a strong and steady beat, usually in 2/4 time and tends to be slower than both the *milonga* and the tango waltz. The *milonga* tango is derived from the *milonga rural*, in which the rhythmical aspect is heavily influenced by the syncopated rhythmic units of the African *candombe* and *murga*. The tango waltz is similar to the classical tango, as it has a strong and steady beat; however, it is always in 3/4 time and is usually faster than the conventional Viennese dance.

<sup>47</sup> Throughout this paragraph, *milonga* refers to the musical subgenre within the tango rather than the dancing venue.

The tango-song developed as a further subgenre of the classical tango. At first, singers used improvised lyrics, which were usually humorous and full of innuendos, highlighted in the performance of the songs. In the early 1920s a conscious attempt to tell a story became part of the writing process. The nature of the lyrics, written in *lunfardo*, changed “[w]ith the influx of Italian men with musical experience and Italian opera in their veins [as] tangos became overwhelmingly sad, melancholic and riddled with self-pity.”<sup>48</sup> The use of lyrics, however, did not impact significantly the musical changes that followed during the prime of the tango.

It is during the Golden Era that the traditional tango sees some musical changes. For instance, composers began dropping the traditional 2/4 time signature and favoured 4/4 time, as it slowed down the dance and allowed for more expression. Rhythms and accents gained importance, since these elements were now perceived as key components of the tango. In addition, new lyrical themes were introduced, as singers became an essential part of the orchestras.

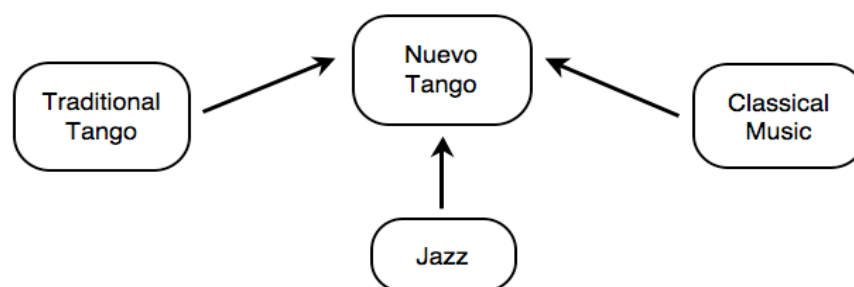
Following the decline of the tango’s popularity after the Golden Era due to restrictions imposed by the military dictatorship, *Nuevo Tango* was conceived as a way to carry on the legacy of the music. The subgenre, much like traditional tango, was a hybrid of genres; Piazzolla fused jazz and classical music elements with those of the traditional tango (see Figure 1.2). The subgenre was not considered tango music by traditionalists, but this genre now occupies a place within classical music and is often performed by classical music orchestras, jazz ensembles, and soloists around the world. Even though *Nuevo Tango* is not meant to be danceable, but rather a

---

<sup>48</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 267.

feast for the ears, the music is now occasionally played in *milongas*.<sup>49</sup> As Alberto Munarriz argues, “hybridization produced a new style, tradition or subgenre in its own right.”<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 1.2: The Rise of *Nuevo Tango***



Piazzolla combined elements from different cultures with the traditional tango, pushing the music to a new level. He expanded the formal structure of the traditional tango by including fugato sections and traditional classical musical forms, in order to accommodate the music’s a higher level of sophistication through complex rhythms, harmonies, and counterpoint. In addition, he experimented with different instrumental textures, including electric guitars, vibraphones, saxophones, harps, and drums, to expand the already rich texture of the Argentinian dance. In doing so, he experimented even more so with rhythmic layers and improvisation techniques, as if returning somehow to the roots of tango, yet imitating jazz techniques. In addition, he incorporated the swing of jazz into the music, differentiating his music from the strict-beat tradition of the Old Guard. Even though some tango musicians from the New Guard had experimented with fusions prior to Piazzolla, it is the latter who manages to actually establish a subgenre within the tango culture. He was criticized heavily for including all of these

<sup>49</sup> In this context, *milonga* refers to the dance hall.

<sup>50</sup> Alberto Munarriz, “Hybridization and the Creation of “ThirdSpaces”: An Analysis of Two Works by Tomás Gubitsch” *Intersections* 30/2 (2010), 79.

changes to the traditional tango, but his music overcame the criticism and was ultimately recognized and respected throughout the world.

Even though the history of the tango highlights a dramatic progression of events—origins, near extinction, and revival—its survival, through primarily its hybrid nature, may be traced by examining both the traditional music from earlier times and the music that caused a revolution and a revival. In the following chapter, I will turn to the music and analyze some of these hybrid elements by comparing a traditional tango song and one by Piazzolla.

## CHAPTER 2: Analysis of *La Cumparsita* and *Otoño Porteño*

*“Tango is the most hybrid musical product in existence; the elements of the tango are of such depth and complexity that it resembles classical music. A tango is like a Beethoven sonata... It can be understood as a symphony... in that it is not developed in forty minutes, but in three. But it contains the same elements. It is a music with an endless development capacity.”*<sup>51</sup>  
 - Rodolfo Mederos (bandoneonist)

Like most musical genres, the tango has continued to change throughout its history. Technological advancements, as well as the drive to fuse different genres, have expanded the limits of the dance, taking it to new arenas where the tango did not originally belong. In this chapter, I will compare a traditional tango written by Mateo Rodríguez with one composed by Piazzolla to show how the latter composer transformed the genre into something new, yet deeply rooted in the tango tradition. I will begin with an introduction of both songs, followed by a comparison of the two songs in terms of instrumentation, form, harmonic structures, and rhythmic structures.

*La Cumparsita* is perhaps the most renowned tango ever written. Gerardo Matos Rodríguez (1897-1948) composed the work “in 1916 as a marching song for the Federation of Students in Uruguay, of which he was a member.”<sup>52</sup> After writing it, he felt that the marching song could easily be arranged as a tango due to its heavily accented rhythms. For this arrangement, he approached Roberto Firpo,<sup>53</sup> who was currently touring in Uruguay. Firpo enjoyed the piece as soon as he heard it, and after some subtle changes, *La Cumparsita*, the

---

<sup>51</sup> Gift, *Tango: A History of Obsession*, 253.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Elements of Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 452. Straus claims that *La Cumparsita* was written in 1916, while Béhague argues that the piece was written in 1917. Gerard Béhague, *The New Grove: Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Tango.”

<sup>53</sup> Roberto Firpo (1884-1969) was one of Argentine tango’s most acclaimed pianist, composer, and bandleader. He had a prolific career that includes over 1500 recordings. He is considered to be one of the leading artists of the traditional tango school.

tango, was created. Since then, several artists, including Carlos Gardel, have written different lyrics fitting the characteristic melody. Most of these, however, reflect on the obscene and shady origins of the genre.<sup>54</sup> Even though countless tango performers have included this song in their regular repertoire, as it is considered a tango standard, artists such as Francisco Canaro, the Panamerican Orchestra, and Steve Rudolph have arranged this piece in new settings, including ones for *orquesta típica*, symphonic orchestras, and even jazz groups. I have chosen *La Cumparsita* for the purpose of comparison since it represents well the traditional tango culture. Its formal, harmonic, and rhythmic structures, as well as the instrumentation, follow the genre's initial conventions. In addition, Piazzolla's opinion of this song works as a catalyst, as it proposes a challenge to this comparison. While touring in Uruguay, Piazzolla proclaimed that *La Cumparsita* was "the worst tango of all."<sup>55</sup>

Piazzolla's *Otoño Porteño*, in contrast, was written in 1969 and first released on the album *Adiós Nonino*.<sup>56</sup> Since then, the work has been recorded live at least three different times: *Piazzolla en el Regina*, *Concierto para Quinteto*, and *Piazzolla en Suite*.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, few details exist about the events surrounding this piece. What is known is that in the year preceding its creation, Piazzolla had been occupied with writing and presenting one of his most acclaimed works, the *tango-operita* *María de Buenos Aires*. This work had been a financial burden on the composer, who provided the funds to showcase it. In addition, his personal life was in turmoil, as he was in the process of divorcing his first wife, Dedé, while having an affair with Amelita Baltar, who played the role María in the *operita*. Baltar had been an important source of inspiration for Piazzolla in the previous years, including 1969. According to the composer, this

---

<sup>54</sup> Collier, "Tango is Born", 64.

<sup>55</sup> Azzi and Collier, *Le Grand Tango*, 117.

<sup>56</sup> Gorin, *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, 229.

<sup>57</sup> The recording used for this paper comes from the latter album, *Piazzolla en Suite*.

year had been “the most important year of my life. I have composed more than ever. I realized just how fundamental it was to reach the big public.”<sup>58</sup> I have chosen this piece for my study because it finds Piazzolla in the year he considers the most important in regards to his creative output. The work presents Piazzolla as he reaches compositional maturity. *Otoño Porteño* offers a balance between his tango past and his *Nuevo Tango* future by including what could be considered a significant expansion of the traditional tango formal structure. In order to achieve this, he includes elements foreign to the tango realm, such as specific instruments and musical idioms both from jazz and classical music. These are weaved with some traditional tango elements into one piece that reproduces the origins of the dance, while pushing the music to a more elaborate level. Even though the song was written as a stand-alone piece, it was eventually included in “Las Estaciones Porteñas” (The Buenos Aires Seasons), a *suite* comprised of four movements (one per season) in 1970.<sup>59</sup> “One of his best-known works, it is a respectful nod to Vivaldi.”<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, although chronologically separated by approximately fifty years, both *La Cumparsita* and *Otoño Porteño* share certain qualities, yet it is the differences that highlight the progressive ideas Piazzolla developed with his newly formed genre. Comparing and contrasting elements present in the two works in regards to their respective instrumentation and form, harmonic structures, and rhythmic organization will unearth these similarities and differences.

---

<sup>58</sup> Azzi and Collier, *Le Grand Tango*, 116.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.1: Instrumentation and Form

Throughout this section, the instrumentation and form of the two selected works will be analyzed. I will begin with the instrumentation for both pieces, followed by a structural analysis with keys and modulations. Different interpretations with respect to traditional forms will then be presented.

*La Cumparsita*'s instrumentation is sparse and consists only of a piano and a violin. In the song, the piano takes on several roles as it accompanies the violin, but also plays the melody in sections B and C, while providing the typical syncopated rhythms, characteristic of the dance. *Otoño Porteño*, in contrast, has a denser texture, as it is not only scored for piano and violin, but also includes the bandoneón and double bass, as well as an electric guitar, a clear addition from the popular realm. Modifications to the traditional tango can also be traced when comparing the form of both pieces. However, these are not the only elements in common, as the actual harmonic progressions throughout the sections of both pieces are, for the most part, similar.

As Gerard Béhague argues, “from a structural viewpoint the first tangos tended to have a tripartite form, but after about 1915 the two-part form began to predominate.”<sup>61</sup> Surprisingly, as Figure 2.1 shows, *La Cumparsita* does not adhere to the typical tripartite model characteristic of early tangos, as it presents a rondo form, A-B-A-C-A with an introduction and a brief bridge before the last occurrence of the A section (see Figure 2.1).<sup>62</sup> Such a formal arrangement, however, is

---

<sup>61</sup> Béhague, *The New Grove*, “Tango.” Following classical music definitions, a tripartite piece would follow the conventional ABA, while the two-part form would be AB, where both A and B are long and present more subsections.

<sup>62</sup> Certain limitations must be recognized. Firstly, the recorded version used for this analysis differs slightly from the printed version, as the score analyzed does not include the introduction passage present in the recording, nor its recurrence before the final A section. Subsequently, the bar numbers indicated in the chart reflect the bar numbers on the score. To conform with the score, I purposely omitted the B section repeat, as well as the bar numbers for the second and third occurrences of the A section. Lastly, while the original piece is only scored for two instruments, the

**Figure 2.1: Formal Structure for *La Cumparsita***<sup>63</sup>

<b>Time &amp; Key</b>	2/4 : g-											
<b>Section</b>	Intro	A		B		A		C		Intro	A	
<b>Measures</b>	4 mm.	1-16		17-32 (1:07 rep.)				33-48		4 mm.	1-16	
<b>Timing</b>	0:00	0:07	0:22	0:37	0:52	1:36	1:51	2:06	2:20	2:35	2:42	2:57
<b>Subsection</b>		A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	C1	C2		A1	A2
		1	9	17	25	1	9	33	41		1	9
<b>Chords</b>	V	i	iv-V-i	i	iv-V-i	i	iv-V-i	i-iv	V-i	V	i	iv-V-i

not structurally problematic. Even though a third section is present, the musical material within the different sections does not vary extensively, providing the work with an overall sense of coherence. In addition, *La Cumparsita* is widely considered to be the most renowned tango due to the particular melody that popularized the song.<sup>64</sup> The piece could be interpreted as a tripartite form, as in the recording, where the return of the introduction near the end represents the return to the initial section. This would also imply the pairing of certain sections as if these were locally intended to be two-part. For example, the initial AB, could be considered A. The subsequent AC, would stand for the B section, and the final A would represent the A' section. Regardless, each section is presented as a self-contained unit that always ends with a perfect cadence, properly prepared with subdominant harmonies. Each section is also divided strictly into a period with two 8-measure subsections, where the harmonic rhythm is similarly arranged between respective

---

recording presents an *orquesta típica*, including bandoneón and strings. These details will not be included in the structural analysis, as the focus will be placed on the score.

<sup>63</sup> This specific version includes a repetition of the introduction before the final A section. It would be difficult to discuss the effect of this inclusion without addressing the actual performance. Other recordings omit the introduction and the reoccurrence, and these are not scored on the sheet music. Strictly speaking, this is an addition characteristic of this specific recording. The effect, however, works as a preparation to the last section A repeat. Since this was used at the beginning to set up the song, it is used again to set up the end, as if completing the circle. Even though most tangos had a reference (such as sheet music or a first recording), all tango orchestras lived to perform and performed to live. For this reason, they had to have an arranger in the ensemble, who would write different arrangements for the respective ensemble, and who would change what was necessary for that ensemble. In other words, it would be unlikely to hear the same arrangement twice. Due to this, I would argue that the “unexpected” is what is “expected” in the tango. As long as you can dance to it, then it is a tango.

<sup>64</sup> Straus, *Elements of Music*, 452.

antecedent and consequent phrases. This discrepancy in the large-scale structure could be attributed to the fact the song was originally conceived as a marching song, rather than a tango.

The key structure also does not conform with later tangos. Matos Rodríguez's song is in the key of G minor, and although one could expect key contrasts, each section remains in the tonic key area; this differs from future tangos, in which modulations to the dominant or relative major/minor key areas accompany sectional changes. Regardless, each reoccurrence of the A section does not include variations or new material. On the contrary, it presents a reiteration of the same musical passage. This allows for musical coherence between the sections, as the harmonies and progressions employed are limited, and the focus seems to be placed on the rhythmic aspect of the dance rather than the melodic component. Considering that Matos Rodríguez wrote this song as a march for the Federation of Students in Uruguay, one could assume that the primary objective of the work is to establish a strong sense of beat, like any marching piece. This characteristic beat provides a consistent unit that carries the song forward from section to section in a repetitive manner. The strong beat, the simple harmonic progressions, and the repetition of musical materials create a simple piece that is limited in terms of development or variation. Matos Rodríguez, however, is able to create different melodies that work well with the highly repetitive structure, as if deriving new material from very little. The form of Piazzolla's *Otoño Porteño* (see Figure 2.2) resembles the one in *La Cumparsita*. However, certain points of divergence require further discussion on this matter.

Figure 2.2 may seem to imply the occurrence of three distinct sections, similar to *La Cumparsita*. However, when examining the work more in-depth, some differences become apparent. Piazzolla's work unfolds an A-B-A'-B'-C-A" form with an introduction and a coda,

Figure 2.2: Formal Structure for *Otoño Porteño*<sup>65</sup> 66

Time & Key		4/4 : a-																				
<b>Section</b>	Intro	A						B				A'				B'		C		A''		Coda
<b>Measures</b>	1-8	9-29						30-44				45-62				63-78		79-90		91-99		100-110
<b>Timing</b>	0:00	0:09	0:17	0:26	0:34	0:42	1:08	1:23	1:39	2:08	2:15	2:25	2:34	2:57	3:12	3:29	3:57	4:06	4:14	4:24	4:32	4:40
<b>Subsection</b>	I1	I2	A1	A2	A3	CLM	B1	B2	CLM	A1	A'2	A'3	CLM	B'1	B'2	CLM	C1	C2	C3	A''1	A''2	Co
	1	5	9	13	17	21	30	34	38	45	49	54	58	63	67	71	79	83	87	92	96	100
<b>Tonality</b>	a-																					
<b>Chords</b>	i	iv-III	i	iv-III	i	V	i	iv	i-V	i	iv-III	i	V/iv	iv	$\flat$ vii	iv-V/iv	iv	V	$\sharp$ vi	i	iv-III	i
<b>Pivot</b>																						

<sup>65</sup> Piazzolla does not reproduce the introduction in the same way, but the coda repeats the first four measures of the song two times. Although some elements are changed to slightly vary the texture, he concludes the piece with the introduction. For this reason, I would argue that the work is also sectional.

<sup>66</sup> The abbreviation CLM (“closing material”) will be discussed in section 2.3.2.

which allows for different interpretations in regards to its form.<sup>67</sup> Each section is characterized by different elements. For instance, section A along with its recurrences, always presents heavily textured musical passages, where all the instruments play. Melodically speaking, there are some repetitions, however, the composer does score different percussive effects, as well as different harmonic supports, in the other instruments. This recreates sections that are almost identical, yet different. Section B and B', in contrast, tend to be simpler in texture, as well as more static in regards to rhythmic movement. Section C, although heavily textured, introduces modulatory passages that resemble the development section of a classical sonata or rondo-sonata movement.

Since the form of this piece is more complex than that of *La Cumparsita* due to the reiteration of sections A' and B', along with modulations, a more thorough discussion of harmonic structures is necessary. Although the sections themselves will not be grouped differently, these sections could be interpreted as a type of fusion between an early traditional tango, such as *La Cumparsita*, and conventional classical forms. In other words, Piazzolla superimposes classical forms onto the Argentine tango. Figure 2.3 provides an outline of the two different formal structures—the traditional rondo and the double-concerto form—that I will consider for *Otoño Porteño*.<sup>68</sup>

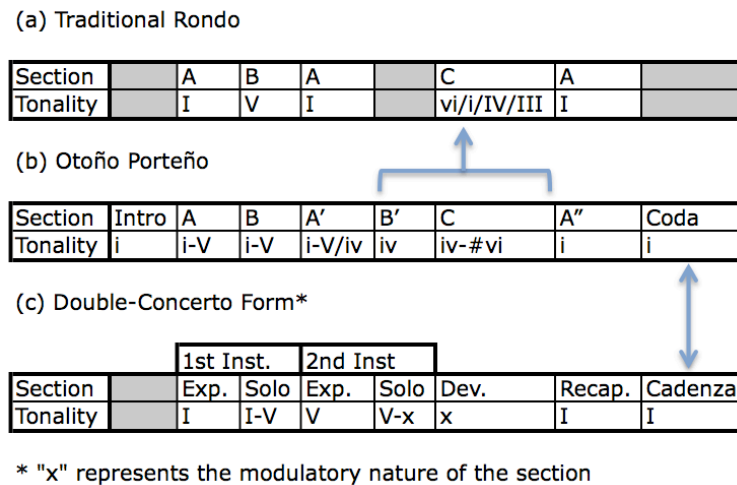
I have extracted a sectional analysis of the work from Figure 2.2 to serve as a reference point in Figure 2.3. With the first reading (Figure 2.3a), the piece may be analysed as a modified rondo form, where an unusual reiteration of the B section precedes section C. Certain aspects of the traditional rondo design are altered by the composer. For instance, the first B section is in the

---

<sup>67</sup> Like in *La Cumparsita*, there are certain discrepancies between the recorded version in *Piazzolla en Suite* and the actual score. Since it is a live recording, some melodic notes are slightly different than what is reflected on the sheet music. In addition, the A' section is shortened in the recording as Piazzolla and the ensemble omit the subsection repeat. Instead they move directly to the song's coda. For this reason, and in order to present the appropriate track timings in the form chart, the subsection repeat (mm. 100-07 of the score) is not included in the analysis.

<sup>68</sup> *The New Grove: Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Rondo," *The Oxford Companion to Music*, s.v. "Concerto Form," by Tymothy R. Jones, accessed on January 12, 2012.

**Figure 2.3: *Otoño Porteño*, Comparison of Large-Scale Structures**



tonic key, rather than the expected major relative or dominant key areas. In addition, the A' section presents a modulation to the subdominant in m. 54; this key is used throughout the B' section and during the first measures of section C. The key change within the A' section is unusual in the traditional form since the contrasting sections generally modulate, while the refrain reaffirms the home key. This shows, up to a certain extent, the experimental freedom that Piazzolla employed. He chooses to follow the tango's convention to explore the subdominant harmonic area. However, in doing so, he also chooses to dedicate a whole section to this tonal region, as if replacing the traditional tango's norm with a classical one. Regardless, the subdominant key is used throughout the B' section, while further modulations occur in section C, in what seems to be a quasi development, mirroring more so the sonata-rondo model. In a way, section B' and C could be grouped into one developmental section, since the modulation begins there.

The second reading draws on the double-concerto form, where the initial A and B sections combine as the exposition of the first solo instrument (in this case the bandoneón), while

A' and B' could be interpreted as the second solo instrument's exposition (i.e. the violin). This reading is supported by the inclusion of *cadenzas* in m. 21 and m. 58, respectively. With this interpretation, section C can be understood as a brief developmental passage before the recapitulation. However, the development section seems rather short as it only consists of eleven measures, but it does explore other tonal areas. These seem to stem from the previous tonal areas as D minor (m. 79) prevails from the previous section. In m. 83, the piece modulates an ascending whole step to E minor. This is then mirrored in m. 87 when the piece modulates once again an ascending whole step to F# minor. Piazzolla achieves these modulations through an *ostinato* unit played by the bass that is repeated in each of the new keys. The final key in this developmental passage is used to return to the tonic, as F# minor is the relative minor key of A major. However, instead of resolving to A major, Piazzolla returns to the home key of A minor. The single development and recapitulation adhere to the double-concerto model proposed, but the absence of a concluding *cadenza*, deviates from the classical form, as this is substituted by a *tutti* coda instead. To summarize, the piece could be interpreted as a modified rondo since the A section works as a refrain. This section is altered between the different sections; however, the inclusion of section B' prior to the section C, deviates from the expected rondo order. The piece could also be interpreted as a double-concerto form. This reading is supported by the similarity with the classical double exposition, since both the bandoneón and the violin present the main theme along with a subsequent solo section. However, the short development section and the lack of a concluding *cadenza* contradict this second reading. Piazzolla borrows elements from the traditional rondo and the double concerto, and amalgamates them in the context of the traditional tango form. The commonalities between *La Cumparsita* and *Otoño Porteño* in their formal design include the presentation of three distinct sections, which are highlighted by

different instrumental textures. Piazzolla masterfully preserves the essence of the traditional tango, while adding complexity to its formal structure, in the creation of the *Nuevo Tango*.

## 2.2: Harmonic Structures

The harmonic progressions throughout *La Cumparsita* are rather simple, as shown in Figure 2.1. The structure relies exclusively on tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords, with perfect cadences concluding each of the sections with what has been identified as the traditional tango *chan-chan* cadence.<sup>69</sup> This particular resolution consists of a perfect cadence distinguished by its suddenness, almost in a staccato fashion. Typically, the V chord would fall on the strong beat, while the resolution would arrive on the weak beat, and this would normally be coordinated with the opening and closing of the bandoneón to emphasize that effect. *La Cumparsita* does not present a V-i resolution as the typical *chan-chan* does; instead, it unfolds a progression of i-i: the first i chord in m. 16 is represented only by two G's, one octave apart, while the second one, presents a heavily textured tonic chord composed of eleven tones (four of these doubling the root note). The simple harmonic structures used throughout mirror those of the tango's predecessors, described in the previous chapter, specifically those from the *gaucho* tradition, such as the *milonga rural* and *chacarera*.

*Otoño Porteño*'s harmonic structure relies heavily on most of the same chords. For instance, in the A section (Figure 2.2), the tonic (I), subdominant (IV), and dominant (V) are present, much like in *La Cumparsita*, with the main difference being the inclusion of a mediant (III) chord as a dominant substitute before the A3 subsection. Measure 16, however, presents an interpretative challenge (see Example 2.1). Although the bass begins on a C, it climbs to an E by

---

<sup>69</sup> Gorin, *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, 40.

beat 3, in other words reaching a III6 chord. In addition, the violin emphasizes E and G, while the guitar plays both B and D during this measure, as if supporting a minor dominant chord. During the last beats of the measure, only the bandoneón plays a C, making this chord unstable—a strange cross between a minor dominant chord and a III7 chord. Piazzolla could have purposely placed this chord to avoid the strong V-I cadence, leaving this particular cadential texture for the actual section ending, such as the strong V7 before the *cadenza* and subsequent section B, as well as other reiterations of this characteristic texture. In *Otoño Porteño*, the strong V harmony is played on beat 1 of m.109, while the resolution arrives on beat 4 of m. 110. This seems like an expanded *chan-chan* cadence that actually defies the traditional conclusion, as the characteristic V-i progression is replaced by a i<sup>o</sup>-i without a third. Piazzolla could have done this to create a contrast with the strongly established tonality throughout the song; changing it to sound more transparent may be interpreted as if the season ended in a mist—neither major, nor minor, simply stagnant confusion before a new season begins.

The effect of instability is supported by the bass note resolving from E to A, like a perfect cadence, in what is a relative major harmony. Although the III chord is weakened due to the lack of root notes, the V chord is not strong enough either, as: (1) there is no G#, making the chord a minor dominant (if that is the interpretation chosen), and (2) the C played by the bandoneón modifies the audible harmony throughout the measure. The end of the A' section prepares the modulation to the subdominant key via V/iv prior to the B' section, mirroring the ending of section A while arriving on major dominant harmony. This technique, even though still congruent with the traditional tango harmonic structures, resembles more the modulatory

**Example 2.1: *Otoño Porteño*, m. 16**

The musical score for Example 2.1, *Otoño Porteño*, m. 16, consists of three staves: Bdn. (Bandoneón), Gtr. Vln. (Guitar/Violin), and DB (Double Bass). The Bdn. staff is in treble clef, the Gtr. Vln. staff is in treble clef, and the DB staff is in bass clef. A red box highlights the final two measures of the piece, showing a modulation to a subdominant key area.

approach characteristic of classical music, where a pivot chord is used to modulate to a new key. Nonetheless, the modulation to the subdominant key area remains true to the conventional tonal areas used in traditional tangos. It is section C that proposes a challenge to the analyst, as it is difficult to situate this part within the context of the tango. On the one hand, this short developmental section seems to mirror its classical counterpart with its sudden and unexpected modulations. On the other hand, the section could be perceived as an improvisatory passage similar to one in jazz. The final A section and coda are, harmonically speaking, identical to the initial A section. However, the *glissando* in m. 109 brings the piece to an end as if mimicking the fall of the last autumn leaf, illustrating the end of the season.

Both *La Cumparsita* and *Otoño Porteño* present similar harmonic structures that rely on three chords: I, IV and V. These chords seem to set the boundaries of specific subsections for the most part, as seen in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. While the first song does not deviate from these three chords, Piazzolla's work includes a III chord within the main section, and few modulations throughout the work. Regardless, with the exception of the developmental section C, the composer still employs these three main chords while exploring other tonal regions, such as section B'. Even though Piazzolla includes a developmental passage along with modulations, the

essence of the piece is preserved through the use of the three chords and the chan-chan cadence, two primary elements that seem to encapsulate the dance itself.

## 2.3: Rhythmic Structures

### 2.3.1: Introduction

The following section will focus on the analysis of the different rhythmic layers present in both *La Cumparsita* and *Otoño Porteño* in order to show that Piazzolla preserved and expanded rhythmic structures in his work. My analysis has been strongly influenced by Harold Krebs's writings, in particular *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (1999).<sup>70</sup> In his study, Krebs argues that the interaction between the different layers of motion determines the meter of a musical work. In order to explain this, he defines three types of layers—pulse, micropulse, macropulse—that contribute to establish the meter:

The pulse layer is the most quickly moving *pervasive* series of pulses, generally arising from a more or less constant series of attacks on the musical surface. [...] More quickly moving layers, or “micropulses,” may intermittently be woven into the metrical tapestry of a work as coloristic embellishments. [...] [S]eries of regularly recurring pulses that move more slowly than the pulse layer [...] allow the listener to “interpret” the raw data of the pulse layer by organizing into larger units. The pulses of each “interpretative layer” subsume a constant number of pulse-layer attacks.<sup>71</sup>

These layers, which are grouped through different types of accents such as register, durations, and articulations, describe the overall sense of meter in a musical excerpt.<sup>72</sup> To further refine his argument, Krebs presents the notion of metrical consonances and dissonances while describing the layers' interactions. When two or more interpretative layers are simultaneously heard, these

---

<sup>70</sup> Harold Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22-61.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff discuss in detail grouping structures and criteria for establishing groupings in *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, 2d ed. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996.

will either align or not, potentially yielding metrical consonances and dissonances. For example, if a musical excerpt contains a 3-layer superimposed over a 2-layer, they will align after six pulses. These two layers are considered consonant since they merge at one point in time, and Krebs labels such grouping as G $3/2$ . However, if a musical excerpt begins with a 3-layer on the first pulse and a second 3-layer on the second pulse, these can never align; Krebs labels this dissonance as D $3+1$ —a primary 3-layer with a dissonant 3-layer offset by one pulse. The author creatively explains his theory in the form of two narratives—a theory manuscript and a dialogue in a coffee shop between different characters, such as Florestan and Eusebius, imagined by Schumann. This allows Krebs to engage with the reader in a way that is untypical for theory manuals, as well as to adapt Lerdahl and Jackendoff's graphic representation of layers (i.e., alignment of dots to represent pulses) as a series of coffee beans. While metrical consonances contribute to the perception of rhythmic expectation, metrical dissonances create tension that is usually resolved by subsequent metrical consonances. Krebs's analytical tool is very useful for my study since both works that I have selected project different rhythmic groupings and metrical layers. I will begin by examining the rhythmic and metrical structures of *La Cumparsita*, followed by the structures in *Otoño Porteño*.

### 2.3.2: Rhythmic Analysis of *La Cumparsita*

#### *2.3.2.1: Section A*

The tango is characterized by several elements that weave together to give rise to the dance. Of these elements, rhythmic structures provide the most characteristic tango features, as superimposed layers. In *La Cumparsita*, Matos Rodríguez presents three rhythmic layers in the A

section (see Figure 2.4), while the following two sections contain only two layers, as will be discussed later.

**Figure 2.4: *La Cumparsita*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section A**

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Subsection	A1							
Violin	12+4		12+4		12+4		12	
Piano RH	2+2+2+2	(1)+3+2+2	2+2+2+2	(1)+3+2+2	2+2+2+2	(1)+3+2+2	2+2+2+2	(1)+3+2+2
Piano LH	4+4	4+2+2	4+4	4+2+2	4+4	4+2+2	4+4	4+2+2

Measure	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Subsection	A2							
Violin	8	(1)+3+2+2	2+6	(1)+3+2+2	2+6	(1)+3+2+2	8	(4)+4
Piano RH	2+2+2+2	(1)+3+2+2	2+2+2+2	(1)+3+2+2	2+2+2+2	(1)+3+2+2	8	(4)+4
Piano LH	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+2+2	4+2+2	4+2+2	3+1+2+2	4+4

The A section presents two 8-measure phrases, with a 2-measure rhythmic unit, repeated throughout the first phrase (mm. 1-8). This unit is created by a 12+4 rhythm presented by the violin,<sup>73</sup> a 2+2+2+2 measure followed by a (1)+3+2+2 measure<sup>74</sup> in the right hand of the piano, and a 4+4 measure followed by a 4+2+2 measure in the left hand. As Example 2.2 shows,<sup>75</sup> the violin's layer is characterized by a half note tied to a quarter note, followed by another quarter note, creating the 12+4 rhythmic unit. The simple rhythm presented by this voice, in addition to its simple harmonic movement from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{3}$ , anticipates the role of the violin throughout the first phrase: an inactive accompaniment role. The layer in the right hand of the piano is represented by four eighth notes, playing an arpeggio of the measure's dominant harmony. The unit's second measure begins with a sixteenth-note rest, followed by what can be considered a scored *rubato* and a turn around D, while supporting the initial dominant harmony, which delays

<sup>73</sup> For an easier comparison, both *La Cumparsita* and *Otoño Porteño* will be analyzed using a quadruple meter. In *La Cumparsita*, 1=sixteenth-note, while in *Otoño Porteño* 1=eighth-note, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>74</sup> Bracketed numbers represent silences, and therefore, potential rhythmic displacements.

<sup>75</sup> The numbers in Example 2.2 are placed above the respective notes to show the duration, while the "+" symbol shows the continuation of each rhythmic unit.

its resolution until the last note of the measure. This layer presents the melody throughout all the sections of the song. The left hand's layer is characterized by a regular rhythm, limited to playing the chords and articulating the tango's driven rhythm. Even though the left hand provides harmonic support for these measures, its rhythmic quality also sets the pace of the song.

**Example 2.2: *La Cumparsita*, Rhythmic Units, mm. 1-2**

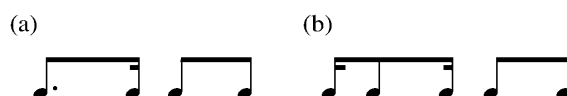
The first metrical dissonance appears within this unit and becomes a constant throughout the piece. The sixteenth-note rest in the second measure of the grouping introduces a syncopation that becomes recurrent throughout the A section. Even though simple, this grouping establishes key tango features during the initial bars. These units resemble the examples provided by Béhague (see Example 2.3).<sup>76</sup> The author presents only two of the many characteristic rhythms, but these two are similar to those used by Matos Rodríguez in the right and left hands of the piano, more precisely those in the lower register. For instance, the syncopated first beat, followed by two eighth notes (Example 2.3b) resembles m. 2 (Example 2.2, piano left hand).<sup>77</sup> Since the

<sup>76</sup> Béhague, *The New Grove*, “Tango.”

<sup>77</sup> The first beat presents variations of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the second beat is limited to two eighth notes.

grouping is played four consecutive times,<sup>78</sup> these recurrences help create a sense of expectation in the listener. In addition, the alternation between dominant and tonic harmonies quickly establishes the piece's key, supporting the sense of expectation.

### Example 2.3: Characteristic Tango Accompaniment Units

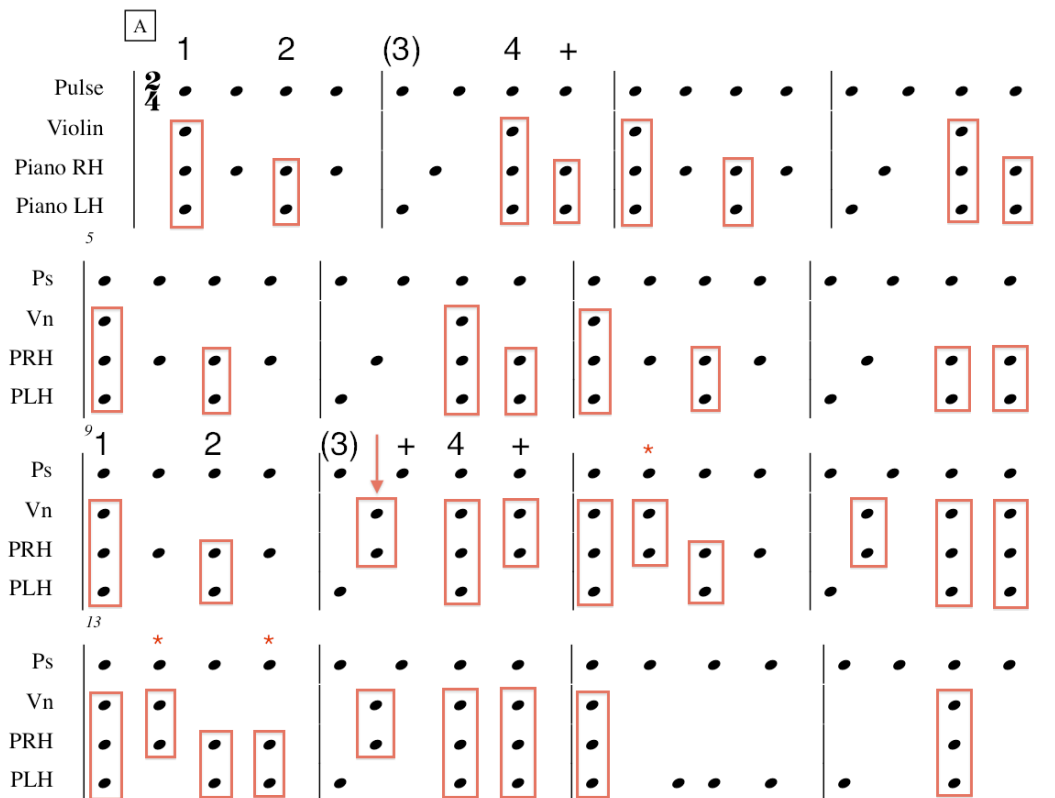


When the layers are aligned following Krebs coffee beans model (see Figure 2.5), metrical consonances may be easily seen in the same places. For instance, the 2-measure grouping presented in mm. 1-2 produces metrical consonances on beats 1 and 3 for the odd measures, and beats 3 and 4 for the even measures. These consonances are repeated throughout the first phrase, creating rhythmic cohesion for the dance. In contrast, the second phrase presents four distinct 2-measure units, which contrast with the previous, and rather static, initial phrase. Even though the consonances between the layers are similar in mm. 9-10, 11-12, and 13-14, subtle differences between the layers provide varying sound colours.<sup>79</sup> For example, the violin's layer differs slightly in mm. 9 and 11, where the 8 rhythm in m. 9 contrasts with the 2+6 rhythm in m. 11. Similarly, the minor change from 4+4 to 4+2+2 in the lowest layer provides a contrast between mm. 9-10 and mm. 13-14. These subtle changes propel the rhythm forward, while creating contrast within the phrase, as well as increasing the tension that reaches its climactic

<sup>78</sup> The last repetition (mm. 7-8) presents a slight change. The violin plays a 12+(4) rather than 12+4, where the brackets represent a rest.

<sup>79</sup> These are marked in Figure 2.5 with red asterisks above the layers.

Figure 2.5: *La Cumparsita*, Metrical Layers, Section A



point at the end of m. 16. The increasing rhythmic tension seems to anticipate the section's end, which is determined by a *tutti* A-minor chord. The last four measures show the completion of the harmonic motion from V7 to I, where two contrasting dynamics (*pianissimo* in m. 13; *fortissimo* in m. 16) are employed to emphasize the end and the climactic moment. The unit Matos Rodríguez employs throughout the section is based on the rhythm used for the first two measures, a rhythm that is elaborated in two measures and eventually varied, while keeping the layers' consonances on the same beats.

The second 8-measure phrase (mm. 9-16) presents similar rhythmic layers; however, small variations contribute to the contrast within the section and ultimately the increased metrical dissonance. Harmonically speaking, the subdominant occurs for the first time, providing a new

harmonic area with rhythmic changes that contrast with the previous material. Matos Rodríguez includes many different rhythmic units to create this dissonance, where the listener's expectations are not met. For instance, the violin plays a whole note (8) in m. 9 and a quarter note and quarter-note rest (4+(4)) in m. 15, reducing the material heard in the previous phrase, while in mm. 1 and 7, the composer includes 12+4 and 12+(4) rhythms. Measures 11 and 13 reproduce a 2+6 rhythm, which in turn represents a diminished and retrograded variation of the 12+4 rhythm previously heard.<sup>80</sup> In addition, mm. 10, 12, and 14 repeat the material played by the right hand of the piano in the even measures of the first phrase, (1)+3+2+2, which is also doubled by the violin. The alignment of rhythmic units in the upper voices contrasts with the material of the respective preceding measures,<sup>81</sup> thus creating subsequent metrical consonance and dissonance. Meanwhile, the left hand of the piano replaces the rhythmic unit previously heard as a simple 4+4 throughout mm. 9-11. This grouping is then substituted by 4+2+2, which repeats for the next three measures, creating a sort of rhythmic call and response within the same hand. The cadential measures of section A (mm. 15-16) include an 8 rhythm in the upper layers,<sup>82</sup> which contrasts with the 3+1+2+2 rhythm in the left hand of the piano in m. 15. The last measure introduces the tonic chord played by the ensemble on the second beat of the bar, hence creating a delayed cadence, chronologically anticipating the tango's *chan-chan* cadence. For this, all layers align with a 4+4 rhythm, with the exception of the upper layers, which have a quarter-note rest on the first beat. The texture becomes extremely dense since the piano plays two 4-note chords, and the violin a three-note double stop with a *fortissimo* dynamic. The delayed cadence contributes to the increased tension as the listener's expectations are deflected, and instead we are surprised by the displaced cadence and its change in dynamics.

---

<sup>80</sup> This is done in a 3:1 ratio.

<sup>81</sup> The material in mm. 10, 12, and 14 contrasts with that in mm. 9, 11, and 13, respectively.

<sup>82</sup> Pitch-wise, the upper layers are considered here to be the violin and the right hand of the piano.

### 2.3.2.2: Section B

The strong dynamics that conclude the A section contrast greatly with the *piano* marking that begins section B. As previously mentioned, the texture is reduced, as there is no violin part throughout this section or the next one, creating contrast between the beginnings of both sections. This contrast is also supported by the use of the tonic area, differing from the dominant harmony in m. 1. However, like section A, sections B and C are each composed of two 8-measure phrases. Both phrases include contrasting rhythms within the individual sections, as well as between the sections themselves. The layers in section B present a series of irregular rhythms, as these are not repeated like they were in the first phrase of the work, but the second phrase of section B is similar to the second phrase in section A. However, the composer cleverly weaves the rhythms together, resulting in more rhythmic dissonances than in the previous section, as shown in Example 2.4. In other words, while mm. 1-4 are constructed of five different rhythmic units, mm. 9-12 present six different units gradually increasing the rhythmic material. Although only five different rhythmic units are used throughout mm. 17-20, including retrograde rhythmic variations, displaced rhythms help create contrast with the previous section while increasing the tension of the piece.

As Figure 2.6 shows, the rhythms played by the right hand of the piano during the first phrase of the B section (mm. 17-24) differ in each measure, yielding different types of dissonances and contrasting rhythms when overlapping both layers. Interestingly, Matos Rodríguez does not include any written accents throughout this section, making the rhythmic layers more subtle and open to interpretation. For instance, the 2+3+3 rhythmic unit in m. 17 seems to be tangible since the B♭ falls on the offbeat (Example 2.4b), and is immediately followed by a rest as if allowing the note to last longer. The three sixteenth notes that follow also

**Example 2.4: *La Cumparsita*, Section B**

(a) mm. 9-12

(b) mm. 17-20

**Figure 2.6: *La Cumparsita*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section B**

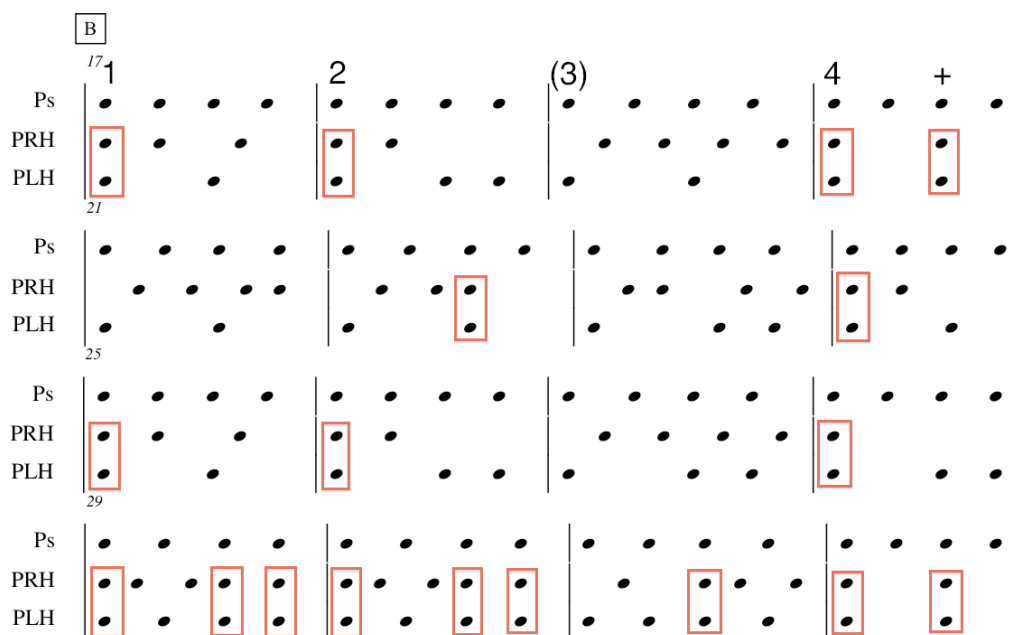
Measure	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
<b>Subsection</b>	<b>B1</b>							
<b>Piano RH</b>	2+3+3	2+6	(1)+2+2+2+1	4+4	(1)+2+2+1+2	(1)+2+1+4	(1)+1+3+2+1	2+6
<b>Piano LH</b>	4+4	4+2+2	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+2+2	4+4

Measure	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
<b>Subsection</b>	<b>B2</b>							
<b>Piano RH</b>	2+3+3	2+6	(1)+2+2+2+1	8	(1+2)+(1+2)+2	(1+2)+(1+2)+2	(1)+3+1+2+1	4+4
<b>Piano LH</b>	4+4	4+2+2	4+2+2	4+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	4+4

seem to be tied to the tonic, especially since the harmonic movement prepares a suspension in m. 18. The left hand of the piano only varies between 4+4 and 4+2+2 rhythms, keeping a strong beat, suitable for the dance. The strong-beat articulation in the left hand contrasts greatly with the right hand's rhythmic groupings, as there are few consonances between both layers, which

ultimately help to increase the tension throughout the section (Figure 2.7). This increase tension is exemplified in mm. 19, 21, 23, and 27, where there are no metrical consonances. In addition,

**Figure 2.7: *La Cumparsita*, Metrical Layers, Section B**



the sudden (and rather drastic) dynamic changes contribute to the increased tension. For instance, the composer includes a *piano* dynamic marking in m. 17, followed by a hairpin crescendo in m. 19, which leads to a *fortissimo* in m. 20 and a *mezzo-forte* in the next measure. Even though it is not duplicated exactly, Matos Rodríguez employs similar dynamic variations to highlight differences within what can be considered the contrasting or slower section of the piece.<sup>83</sup> Likewise, the rhythmic groupings change from phrase to phrase. In the right hand, mm. 25-27 are both rhythmically and harmonically the same as in mm. 17-19. However, as of m. 28, the rhythmic units differ once more, disrupting a sense of expectation and surprising the listener with

<sup>83</sup> Béhague, *The New Grove*, "Tango."

each new measure. The left hand, meanwhile, begins like in m. 17 with a 4+4 rhythm that becomes gradually segmented into a 2+2+2+2 rhythm by m. 29, where the cadential passage that concludes the section begins. Measures 29-32 are harmonically supported by a iv-V7-i progression, which resolves similarly to the concluding measure of the A section. In this final measure, the layers align in a 4+4 rhythm, where the emphasis is placed once again, on the second beat. The *fortissimo* dynamic marking in m. 16 differs greatly from the *piano* that concludes section B.

In contrast to the previous layer alignment, Figure 2.7 shows fewer consonances than before, exemplifying the metrically dissonant nature of this section, and ultimately the build-up of tension. For example, metrical consonances only occur on the first beat of mm. 1, 2, and 4 and the second beat of m. 4. However, it is worth noting that the metrical consonances presented in mm. 17-20 are expanded when compared to those in mm. 1-2. In other words, Matos Rodríguez uses the same rhythmic material to drive the music and create coherence, but in doing so, he allows rhythmic intricacies to rise within the boundaries of that specific rhythmic structure. This leads to the creation of additional sublayers, which, up to certain extent, unfold a developed version of the original rhythm. The cadential passage presents most of the metrical consonances in the section, which concludes with a layer alignment, a driving rhythm settled by the left hand, and softening dynamics.

### 2.3.2.3: Section C

Like in the previous section, section C includes a combination of new and repeated rhythmic units within a two-phrase structure (see Figure 2.8). In contrast, however, this section is distinguished by the use of accents, rather than the lack of them. The right hand of the piano

alternates between two similar rhythmic groupings: (1) the first one being presented in mm. 33-34, and (2) the second one in the following mm. 35-36. The first unit presents a 1+1+1+2+2+1 rhythm followed by a 2+6 rhythm. This combination shows well the fusion of new and previous rhythmic units, where the unit in m. 33 is new, while the one in m. 34 has been previously introduced in m. 11. The first of these rhythms, along with other rhythmic units in the section, is characterized by the (excessive) use of accents in the right and left hands of the piano accentuating almost every note in the measure (see Example 2.5).

Figure 2.8: *La Cumparsita*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section C

Measure	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
Subsection	C1							
Piano RH	1+1+1+2+2+1	2+6	1+1+1+1+4	2+6	1+1+1+2+2+1	2+6	1+1+1+1+4	2+6
Piano LH	1+1+1+1+4	4+4	4+2+2	4+2+2	1+1+1+1+4	4+4	4+2+2	4+4

Measure	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
Subsection	C2							
Piano RH	(2)+2+3+1	3+(1+2)+2	(2)+2+3+1	3+(1+2)+2	(2)+2+3+1	3+(1+2)+2	(2)+2+3+1	4+4
Piano LH	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4

Example 2.5: *La Cumparsita*, mm. 33-34

This grouping begins to lose some of the elements necessary for the articulation of a rhythmic grouping through the inclusion of accents on each sixteenth note during the first beat

and contrasting dynamics between the first and second beats of the measure. The 2+6 grouping mirrors previous occurrences of the rhythmic unit (such as in mm. 17-18), creating an immediate contrast between a more articulated rhythm and a less defined one.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, the second rhythmic grouping (mm. 33-34) presents a 1+1+1+1+4, followed again by a 2+6 rhythm. These two rhythmic groupings are repeated, making the first phrase of the last section a sound distinctive through its continuous change between more and less articulated rhythms, recreating the sense of tension and repose previously heard. Meanwhile, the left hand of the piano also presents two different rhythmic groupings that contrast with those played by the right hand. For instance, mm. 33-34 present a 1+1+1+1+4 grouping followed by the tango's characteristic 4+4.<sup>85</sup> This is then followed by two consecutive measures of 4+2+2, creating brief moments of conflict with the right-hand rhythms. Nonetheless, the tango's 2/4 time signature is still strongly emphasized throughout these measures as the metrical consonances between the layers set this pace (see mm. 35-36 in Figure 2.9). This rhythmic unit is then repeated in mm. 37-40, with the exception of a 4+4 rhythm in m. 40, which is set against the 4+2+2.

The second phrase presents new rhythmic units, once again, but only in the right hand, since the left hand plays consecutive 4+4 groupings. The right hand plays a new two-measure unit that is repeated until the penultimate measure. This unit is comprised of (2)+2+3+1 and 3+[1+2]+2 units, as shown in example 2.6.<sup>86</sup> The last measure of section C concludes in the same

---

<sup>84</sup> In mm. 17-18, the 2+6 grouping follows a 2+3+3 rhythmic unit, while in mm. 33-34, the 2+6 grouping follows a 1+1+1+2+2+1. This particular comparison shows the difference between the 2+3+3 and 1+1+1+2+2+1 units, and ultimately the difference between a more stagnant and a more active rhythmic grouping.

<sup>85</sup> The 4+4 rhythm is dictated by the traditional 2/4 time signature employed in the traditional tango, where both beats 1 and 2 are strong. The 4+4 rhythm represents the non-accented passage in sixteenth notes previously mentioned.

<sup>86</sup> The first bracketed number represents a rest, while the square brackets [1+2] in the second unit represent three sixteenth notes that can be grouped. The reason for such grouping—traditional tango rhythms—will be addressed in the section 2.3.2.4.

way as the two previous sections: 4+4 groupings in both layers and a heavily textured tonic chord on the second beat of the measure.

**Figure 2.9: *La Cumparsita*, Metrical Layers, Section C**

Figure 2.9 illustrates the metrical layers for Section C of *La Cumparsita*. The diagram shows four systems of three layers (Ps, PRH, PLH) each. Red boxes highlight specific notes in the PRH and PLH layers. Above the layers are metrical groupings: (1), (2), 1, 1, 2, 1, (2) for the first system; (1), 2, 1, 2, (1), 2, 1, 2 for the second system. Measure numbers 33, 37, and 45 are indicated.

**Example 2.6: *La Cumparsita*, mm. 41-42**

Example 2.6 shows the musical notation for mm. 41-42 of *La Cumparsita*. The notation includes a treble clef and a bass clef. Above the treble staff are rhythmic groupings: (2) + 2 + 3 + 1, 3 + (1 + 2) + 2. Below the bass staff are rhythmic groupings: 4 + 4, 4 + 4.

The superimposed metrical layers in section C yield more consonances than in the previous sections. Throughout this section, consonances are presented in almost all of the first and second beats of each measure. Even though hidden when looking at the layers individually,

when aligned, these consonances articulate strongly the 2/4 meter throughout the section, where only a few measures do not present them on both beats. Matos Rodríguez is able to conceal, up to an extent, the strong presence of the meter by including more articulated rhythmic units, creating tangible dissonances in every measure. Interestingly, the section itself shifts gradually from a more rhythmically articulated, driven, and heavily marked<sup>87</sup> rhythm, to a more tranquil, concluding phrase, marked with a *piano* dynamic and simpler rhythmic groupings.

#### 2.3.2.4: Rhythmic Units

*La Cumparsita*, along with many of the early tangos, has defined the dance itself through the use of specific rhythmic units that have permeated the fabric of the genre and become a standard in the repertoire. From the initial measures of the work, the 2/4 meter becomes established by the abrupt rhythmic gestures in the left hand of the piano, emphasized by accents and contrasted by the staccato melody in the right hand of the piano. The second measure (Example 2.2) introduces the tango's characteristic scored *rubato*, which in turn seems like a variation on a traditional tango rhythm (compare with Example 2.3b). In other words, Matos Rodríguez relies on two familiar rhythmic units to create the first rhythmic grouping. By doing this, the tango reference is immediately established, and due to the repetition, is fully integrated into the work. In addition, the deconstruction of certain rhythmic units into smaller rhythmic units, such as the overlapped 2+2+2+2 and 4+4 rhythms in m. 1 propel the rhythm forward, providing short moments of repose between the interactions of both piano layers. The composer varies and uses these two rhythmic motives consistently throughout the piece, for instance, the 4+2+2 rhythm in m. 2, or the 3+(1+2)+2 rhythm in m. 15 of section A.

---

<sup>87</sup> This is in terms of dynamic level.

Section B presents more variations of these rhythmic motives, which are layered against each other for the purpose of contrast. This creates syncopations throughout the section, changing the piece's character. For example, the (1)+2+2+2+1 (or 3+2+3) rhythm in m. 19 consists of a variation of the *milonga* traditional unit. This unit is stacked against the tango's traditional 4+4, giving rise to rhythmic dissonances in the measure. By scoring similar units based on these rhythms, Matos Rodríguez is able to build a sense of tension that only dissipates once the final cadence arrives in m. 32. In mm. 21, 23, 27, and 29-31, variations of 3+3+2 are set against variations of 4+4, such as 4+2+2 and 2+2+2+2, consistently creating syncopations measure after measure. The composer then purposely chooses to reduce the amount of syncopations throughout section C to create an immediate contrast between the heavily syncopated section B and the last section. He accomplishes this by emphasizing the 2/4 meter, instead of superimposing different traditional rhythms. In doing so, he manages to create a song that builds up tension throughout the first two sections, while releasing it in the last section, providing the listener with a sense of completion. The last repetition of section A then seems to be purposely placed to bring the familiar melody back to the foreground and conclude the piece with the musical material that acts as a *ritornello*.

Matos Rodríguez is able to use traditional tango rhythmic motives in order to preserve the character of the dance. He then gradually develops these basic rhythmic motives into larger rhythmic units, that when stacked, yield metrical dissonances. The development of these units seems intentional since they gradually become more intricate from section to section. It is in the last phrase of section C where the rhythmic development ceases, as the specific rhythmic unit in Example 2.5 closes the section. We may conclude that this final rhythmic unit represents the culmination of the rhythmic development, where the traditional 4+4 rhythm is stacked against

variations of the *milonga*'s 3+3+2 rhythm. This reaffirms the roots of the dance, while hinting towards its unknown, yet progressive, future.

### 2.3.3: Rhythmic Analysis of *Otoño Porteño*

#### 2.3.3.1: Introduction

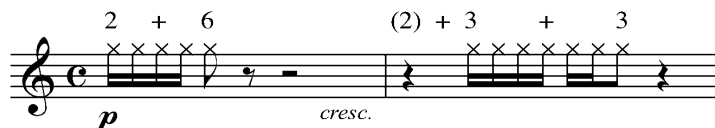
*Otoño Porteño* begins by introducing all of the instruments (and hence) the rhythmic layers of the piece.<sup>88</sup> As presented below in Figure 2.10, the introduction is subdivided into two phrases. The first phrase (mm. 1-4) is characterized by the establishment of tango's traditional 4+4 (or 2/4) rhythm, which is strongly emphasized by every voice with the exception of the violin, who instead plays a two-measure unit similar to the ones discussed in *La Cumparsita*: 2+6 and (2)+3+3 rhythms. The main difference is that, in this case, the violin plays a percussive line rather than a melodic one. The first of these rhythms is articulated by a group of four sixteenth notes, followed by a quarter note as shown in Example 2.7. Similar to the case seen in m. 17 of *La Cumparsita*, the quarter note is followed by rests, providing a longer duration to the percussive effect. This effect is then mirrored in the following measure with the (2)+3+3 rhythm.

**Figure 2.10: *Otoño Porteño*: Rhythmic Groupings, Introduction**

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Subsection	I1				I2			
Piano	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1
Bandoneón	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1
Violin	2+6	(2)+3+3	2+6	(2)+3+3	2+6	(2)+3+3	2+6	(2)+3+3
El. Guitar	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2

<sup>88</sup> The left hand of the piano and the double bass play the same layer (both rhythmically and harmonically/melodically). For this reason, the left hand layer will be omitted, and the double bass layer will be used for this analysis. Other instruments also duplicate the rhythmic layers. As seen in Figure 2.10, the piano, bandoneón, and electric guitar share the same rhythmic layer throughout the introductory passage. To avoid redundancy, the analysis will be limited to the actual layers rather than the instrumentation.

**Example 2.7: *Otoño Porteño*, Percussive Violin, mm. 1-2**

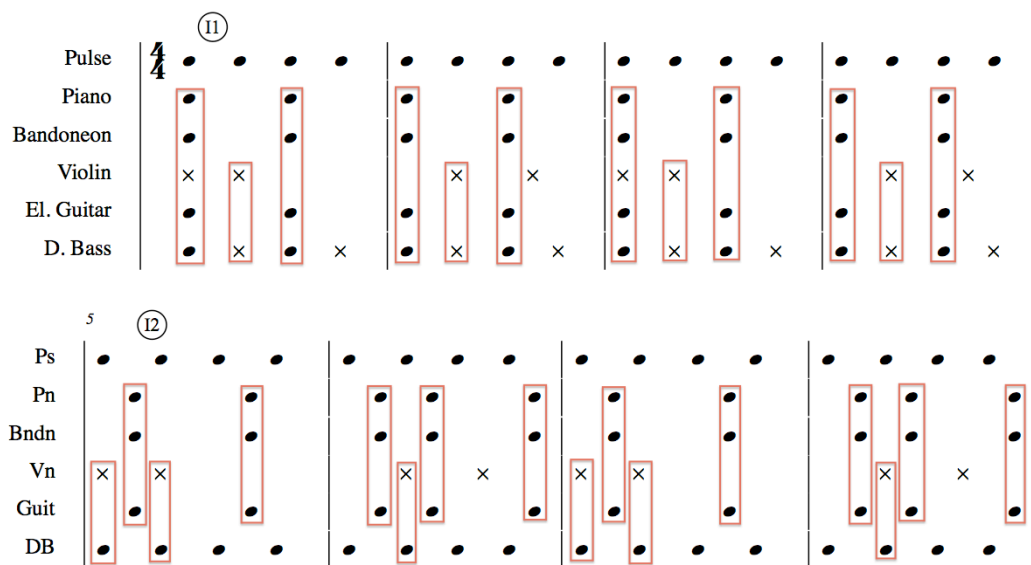


In addition, percussive accents played by the double bass help support the 2/4 time signature, since the contrast between the emphasis on the strong and weak beats may be interpreted as subdivisions of the traditional tango time signature. On the one hand, the second phrase (mm. 5-8) in the introduction shows the continuation of the same rhythmic unit in the violin's layer. The double bass maintains the strong 4/4 beat, but instead of playing the chordal roots on beats 1 and 3, and percussive accents on 2 and 4, these are replaced by a walking bass composed of straight quarter notes in a 2+2+2+2 rhythmic unit. The right hand of the piano, the bandoneón, and the electric guitar, on the other hand, present a two-measure unit made up of a (1)+4+3 rhythm, followed by a (1)+2+4+1<sup>89</sup> rhythm, where the melodic resolution (an F in m. 6 and an E in m. 8) occurs on the last eighth note of the measure. Up to certain extent, this colour change between the first and second phrase highlights a difference between the traditional tango and Piazzolla's *Nuevo Tango*. While the first phrase only plays the strict tango 2/4 rhythm, the second phrase introduces a displaced 4+4 rhythm stacked against a 2+2+2+2 rhythm. The rhythmic dissonances arise, then, from the initial measures of the piece since the violin introduces different percussive rhythmic units that clash against the strong beat set by the rest of the instruments. In addition, the second phrase increases the piece's tension by preserving the dissonant conflict between the violin and the bass, while adding a third discordant layer (see Figure 2.11). Like in *La*

<sup>89</sup> Both rhythmic units could be considered as 4+4 and 2+4+2 rhythms, displaced by one eighth note. This is because these measures, as well as the next ones, begin with an eighth-note rest, as if allowing the previous measure to end there, rather than on the last eighth note of the measure.

*Cumparsita*, the figure below shows the rhythmic alignment of different layers, and therefore, the dissonances that arise. For instance, m. 5 shows alignments on beats 1 and 3 for the violin and double bass, while the piano, bandoneón, and guitar align on beats 2 and 6. In addition, the double bass also plays notes on beats 5 and 7, creating syncopations with the previous rhythmic layer.<sup>90</sup>

**Figure 2.11: *Otoño Porteño*, Metrical Layers, Introduction**



\*The circled I1 and I2 identify the beginning of Introduction 1 and 2.

### 2.3.3.2: Section A

Section A presents four different subsections (or phrases), of which the first three (A1/2/3) resemble harmonically the introduction, while the last one (CML)<sup>91</sup> concludes the section (see Figure 2.12). Throughout the initial three subsections, the right hand of the piano, the violin, and the guitar play the same rhythmic layer. In the A1 subsection, like in the initial

<sup>90</sup> As previously mentioned, the beats through the piece are divided in eighth notes.

<sup>91</sup> CML refers to the “closing material” of a section, such as *codettas* and passages with expanded cadences.

measures and even in *La Cumparsita*, a two-measure unit is established: 2+3+3, followed by (1)+4+3 (mm. 9-10). In this short unit, Piazzolla inverts the *milonga*'s characteristic 3+3+2, followed by a displaced version of the 4+4, as this last unit begins and ends an eighth note late. These rhythms are delineated by the use of accents emphasising these specific beats (see Example 2.8).

Figure 2.12: *Otoño Porteño*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section A

Measure	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Subsection	A1				A2				
Piano	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+2+4+1	2+3+3	(1)+2+4+1	
Bandoneón	(1)+3+3+3+3+3		(1)+3+3+3+3+3		(1)+3+3+3+3+3		(1)+3+3+1	(1)+4+3	
Violin	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+2+4+1	2+3+3	(1)+2+4+1	
El. guitar	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+2+4+1	2+3+3	(1)+2+4+1	
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	

Measure	17	18	19	20
Subsection	A3			
Piano	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3
Bandoneón	(1)+3+3+3+3+3			
Violin	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3
El. guitar	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2

Measure	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
Subsection	CML									
Piano	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	8
Bandoneón	(1)+3+1+3	(1)+3+1+3	(1)+3+1+3	(1)+3+1+3	(1)+2+5	(1)+2+5	(1)+2+5	(1)+2+5	(1)+2+5	8
Violin	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
El. guitar	2+3+3	2+3+3	2+3+3	2+3+3	(1)+7	(1)+7	(1)+7	(1)+7	(1)+7	8
D. Bass	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	8

Example 2.8: *Otoño Porteño*, Right Hand of the Piano, mm. 9-10

This in turn contrasts with the fixed unit carried by the left hand of the piano and the double bass; this layer maintains the steady 2+2+2+2 established during the introduction. In addition,



layers to create these dissonances, resulting in an increased tension throughout the piece. All displacements occur by holding back by one eighth note; this creates interesting syncopated passages, where the strong, regular beats, clash with the displaced layers. These latter layers, nonetheless, are rooted in either traditional tango rhythmic units, or variations of these. It is for this reason that units, such as 2+3+3 (m. 9), (1)+4+3 (m. 10), (1)+2+4+1 (m. 14), (1)+3+1+3 (m. 21), (1)+2+5 (m. 25), and (1)+7 (m. 25) are used for contrast against the more traditional 3+3+2 (m. 21) and 2+2+2+2 (m. 9), as can be seen in Figure 2.13.<sup>93</sup> In m. 9, for example, while all the instruments play rhythmic consonances on beats 1 and 3, the bandoneón plays the expanded 3+3+2 unit, creating dissonances on beats 2 and 8. In addition, the piano, violin, and guitar emphasize beat 6, which in turn is a syncopation between the steady bass on beats 5 and 7. This is achieved by the use of displaced layers. The conflict between the main and the displaced layers create tension that leads to a rhythmically driven closing section, characterized by the strong presence of the 3+3+2 rhythm present in the piano and double-bass layers (mm. 21-28). This rhythmic unit also contrasts with two different variations of this unit. While the bandoneón plays a (1)+3+1+3 rhythm, the electric guitar presents the retrograde 2+3+3 through mm. 21-24. The violin plays a whole note in each measure, proving to be less active than other layers. Then, as the piano and the double bass preserve the 3+3+2 unit through mm. 25-28, the bandoneón changes to a (1)+2+5 and the electric guitar to a (1)+7 rhythmic unit. These displaced units create immediate rhythmic dissonances against the regular 3+3+2, combined with the violin's 8 units. In addition, the drastic change in dynamics contributes to the increased tension culminating in the bandoneón's *cadenza* and its almost baroque sound. The change from a *fortissimo* to a *piano*, along with the *decrescendo* and *rallentando* markings, enhance the dramatic effect that concludes the section.

---

<sup>93</sup> Since subsection A3 is an exact repetition of A1, I will not discuss it separately in the analysis.

**Figure 2.13: *Otoño Porteño*, Metrical Layers, Section A**

Figure 2.13 displays three metrical layers (A, A1, and A3) for Section A of *Otoño Porteño*. Each layer shows the rhythmic patterns for six instruments: Ps (Piano), Pn (Piano), Bndn (Bandoneón), Vn (Violin), Guit (Guitar), and DB (Double Bass). The patterns are represented by black dots on a grid, with red vertical rectangles highlighting specific rhythmic units. The layers are labeled with circled numbers 9, 13, and 17, indicating their starting measure numbers.

### 2.3.3.3: Section B

While the texture in the previous Section A is dense due to its instrumentation and the superimposition of different rhythmic units, the first eight measures of section B contrast significantly by including only the bandoneón, the electric guitar, and the double bass (see Figure 2.14). In subsection B1 (mm. 30-33), the bandoneón plays an 8 rhythmic unit, characterized by the first note of each measure since it alternates between E and C, scale degrees  $\wedge 5$  and  $\wedge 3$ . Even though chromatically ascending or descending motions connect these notes, these longer note

Figure 2.13: Continued

(CLM)

27

Ps  
Pn  
Bndn  
Vn  
Guit  
DB

25

Cadenza

Ps  
Pn  
Bndn  
Vn  
Guit  
DB

Figure 2.14: *Otoño Porteño*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section B

Measure	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37
Subsection	<b>B1</b>				<b>B2</b>			
Piano	No piano							
Bandoneón	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Violin	No violin							
El. guitar	8	8	8	4+4	8	8	8	8
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	8

Measure	38	39	40	41	42	43	44
Subsection	<b>CLM</b>						
Piano	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	
Bandoneón	8	8	8	8	8	8	4+2+(2)
Violin	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	(3)+5	
El. guitar	2+6	2+6	2+6	2+6	2+6	2+6	4+2+(2)
D. Bass	2+6	2+6	2+6	2+6	2+6	2+6	4+2+(2)

durations serve as the reference point for each measure, as seen in Example 2.10. The guitar also plays an 8 rhythmic unit with a new chord played in each bar, but unlike the bandoneón, it plays whole-note chords for the most part. The only exception occurs m. 33, where a 4+4 rhythm begins with the tonic chord and becomes a V7 of the subdominant by the third beat. These

chords are articulated with fixed outer voices (bass on A and soprano on C), and a middle voice (alto) that ascends chromatically from E to G (see Example 2.11).

**Example 2.10: *Otoño Porteño*, Bandoneón, mm. 30-32**



**Example 2.11: *Otoño Porteño*, Electric Guitar, mm. 30-37**

Naturally, the high C becomes C# in m. 33 to prepare for the modulation to D minor. Meanwhile, the double bass maintains the steady 2+2+2+2 rhythmic unit on the chordal root, A. Even though the instruments preserve these rhythmic units through subsection B2 (mm. 34-37), the harmonic change to the subdominant creates tension. The main differences in this subsection, in comparison to the original, includes: (1) the change in the note alternation in the bandoneón from D to F instead of E to C, (2) the new chords played by the guitar with a D (bass) and an F (soprano), while the alto ascends from A to B (see Example 2.11), and (3) the shift from A to D in the double bass. This leads to m. 37 where a B7 chord (V7/E) is used to return to the home key as V/V. The soft dynamics, however, alleviate the previous tension, while preserving a

haunting sound, as if providing the listener with a moment of uneasy repose. Interestingly, neither subsection B1 or B2 present any displaced layers, as previously seen, but rather only consonant layers (see Figure 2.15).

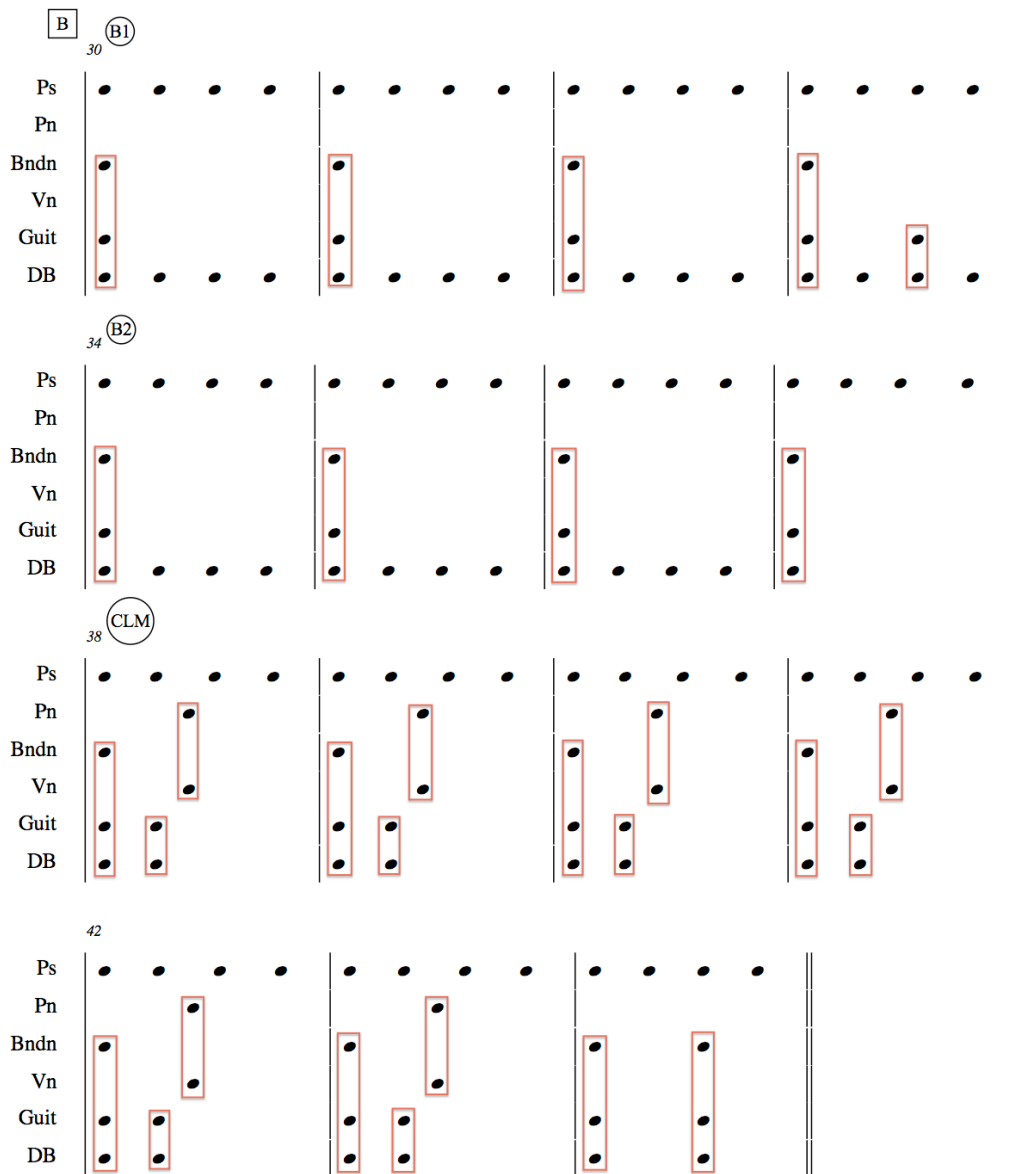
The closing subsection (mm. 38-44) contrasts with the previous two as the texture becomes dense with the return of the piano and the violin. However, the limited activity of these layers supports the notion of a moment of an uneasy repose. While the bandoneón keeps its 8 rhythmic unit, both the electric guitar and double bass change to a 2+6 unit. In addition, the piano and violin play an 8 rhythmic unit displaced by three eighth notes (or (3)+5). With these changes, there are different metrical dissonances in the first half of each measure.

Even though the level of dissonances is increased throughout the section, the lack of a regular unit in the bass brings the section to an even more stationary point that culminates with a 2/4 rhythm, expressed as a 4+4 rhythmic unit played by the bandoneón, electric guitar, and double bass, in what can be considered a scored *rallentando*. The rhythmic convergence between the instruments is similar to that of *La Cumparsita*, where all the instruments align with the same rhythm in the last measure of the section.

#### 2.3.3.4: Section A'

Like the original section A, section A' consists of four subsections, however, it introduces several rhythmic units that contrast with the material heard previously in section A. Even though they harmonically sound similar, different rhythmic units, as well as alterations to the form, change the sound colour of this section when compared to the original material. The only consistent layer between both sections is the double bass since it preserves the steady 2+2+2+2 through mm. 45-57 (see Figure 2.16).

**Figure 2.15: *Otoño Porteño*, Metrical Layers, Section B**



In subsection A'1 (mm. 45-48), for instance, both the piano and electric guitar play consecutive 2+3+3 units, while the bandoneón and violin play the melody following the previous two-measure unit (1)+3+3+3+3+3. As shown in Example 2.12, both units in this subsection are articulated by the use of accents, placing emphasis on these specific beats as seen before in

Figure 2.16: *Otoño Porteño*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section A'

Measure	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53
Subsection	A'1				A'2				
Piano	2+3+3	2+3+3	2+3+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+3+2	6+(2)
Bandoneón	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+3+2	6+(2)
Violín	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+3+2	6+(2)
El. guitar	2+3+3	2+3+3	2+3+3	2+3+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+3+2	6+(2)
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	6+(2)

Measure	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62
Subsection	A'3				CML				
Piano	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(3)+4+1	(3)+4+1	(3)+4+1	(3)+4+1	8
Bandoneón	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(3)+4+1	(3)+4+1	(3)+4+1	(3)+4+1	8
Violín	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+2+3+2	(1)+2+3+2	(1)+2+3+2	(1)+2+3+2	8
El. guitar	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+2+3+2	(1)+2+3+2	(1)+2+3+2	(1)+2+3+2	8
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	3+3+2	8

Example 2.12: *Otoño Porteño*, mm. 45-46

(a) Piano right hand

(b) Bandoneón

Examples 2.8 and 2.9. As in previous cases, both rhythmic layers create metrical dissonances with the regular double-bass layer, as well as between themselves. Subsection A'2 (mm. 49-53), in contrast, only presents two rhythmic layers. However, the lack of alignments between the instruments makes this particular subsection dense in texture. Once again, all of the instruments, with the exception of the double bass, establish a two-measure unit. This unit is composed of (1)+4+3 and (1)+2+4+1, where displaced tango rhythms predominate. Both rhythmic units have been previously seen in mm. 10 and 14, respectively. This shows rhythmic cohesion between sections A and A'. Due to the displacement, however, there are not as many metrical

consonances throughout this subsection, as in the previous cases (see Figure 2.17). Subsection A'2 is modified by the inclusion of a fifth measure, which in turn contrasts with all previous phrases, since these were all four measures in length. Measure 53 adds suspense and tension to the section, as it does not provide closure, but rather hesitation, which is reinforced by the subsequent modulation to the subdominant in m. 54 for subsection A'3 (mm. 54-57). Similarly to A'2, there are only two layers present in A'3: the double bass and the rest of the tango ensemble. In this case, the latter plays the (1)+3+3+3+3+3 unit superimposed above the regular 2+2+2+2 of the double bass, creating few metrical consonances between the layers. The closing section (mm. 58-62) reintroduces a third layer, where all layers play four consecutive measures of a specific rhythmic unit. While the double bass reproduces the *milonga*'s 3+3+2, the piano and bandoneón play (3)+4+1, and the violin and guitar (1)+2+3+2. In m. 62, however, all layers re-align as an 8 rhythmic unit, with the exception of the violin, which plays a *cadenza* similar to the one played by the bandoneón in m. 29.

### 2.3.3.5: Section B'

Mirroring section B, section B' subdivides into three subsections and presents the violin as the main melodic instrument. An important difference with the previous section, however, is the increased number of layers. While in section B there were only three, section B' contains four through the first two subsections (see Figure 2.18).

The first phrase of the section (mm. 63-66) preserves the 2+2+2+2 rhythmic unit played by the double bass (and piano). This unit is articulated in both layers by four eighth notes per measure as seen in Example 2.13. In addition, the bandoneón, violin, and guitar align as an 8 unit with variations in some measures. For instance, the bandoneón plays a (1)+7 in m. 64 and a 5+3

**Figure 2.17: *Otoño Porteño*, Metrical Layers, Section A'**

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for Section A' of *Otoño Porteño*. Each system consists of five staves: Ps, Pn, Bndn, Vn, and DB. The notation uses dots for notes and vertical lines for stems. Red boxes highlight specific rhythmic patterns in the Bndn, Vn, and DB staves.

- System 1 (Measures 45-48):** Labeled **A'1** (45). Shows a complex rhythmic structure with multiple stems and notes in the Bndn, Vn, and DB staves.
- System 2 (Measures 49-53):** Labeled **A'2** (49). Shows a more regular rhythmic pattern with stems and notes in the Bndn, Vn, and DB staves.
- System 3 (Measures 54-57):** Labeled **A'3** (54). Shows a rhythmic pattern similar to A'2, with stems and notes in the Bndn, Vn, and DB staves.
- System 4 (Measures 58-65):** Labeled **CLM** (58) and **Cadenza** (62-65). Shows a rhythmic pattern with stems and notes in the Bndn, Vn, and DB staves, ending with a Cadenza.

in m. 66, while the electric guitar plays a 4+4 in m. 66. This specific unit is repeated in subsection B2 with the exception of m. 70, where almost all of the instruments align with a 4+4 rhythm, once again, similar to what was discussed in *La Cumparsita* (see Figure 2.19). The closing section (mm. 71-78) differs from the closing section of the original section B (mm. 38-

Figure 2.18: *Otoño Porteño*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section B'

Measure	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
Subsection	B1				B2			
Piano	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	4+4
Bandoneón	8	(1)+7	8	5+3	8	(1)+7	8	4+4
Violin	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	4+4
El. guitar	8	8	8	4+4	8	8	8	4+4
Double Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	4+4

Measure	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78
Subsection	CLM							
Piano	No piano							
Bandoneón	No Bandoneón							
Violin	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
El. guitar	8	8	8	8	3+5	3+5	8	8
Double Bass	1+3+2+(2)	1+3+2+(2)	1+3+2+(2)	1+3+2+(2)	8	8	8	2+2+2+2

44). While the texture through mm. 38-44 includes three distinct metrical layers, mm. 71-78 present two distinct layers with fewer metrical dissonances.

Example 2.13: *Otoño Porteño*, 2+2+2+2 Rhythmic Unit, mm. 63-64

(a) Piano

(b) Double bass

In mm. 71-74 the double bass plays four consecutive measures of 1+3+2+(2), which are superimposed below four measures of 8, played by the violin and electric guitar. This becomes even less rhythmically active as the bandoneón preserves the 8 rhythm for mm. 75-78, while the guitar alternates two consecutive measures of 3+5 followed by two measures of yet another 8

rhythm. Finally, the double bass abandons the 2+2+2+2 for the 8 rhythm in mm. 75-77, only to change back to the 2+2+2+2 grouping, which leads into section C. This change in rhythmic groupings gives the impression of acceleration. As seen in Figure 2.19, this section yields few metrical dissonances, and instead is characterized by its abundant consonances, allowing us to perceive it as the calm before the storm.

### 2.3.3.6: Section C

Section C immediately contrasts with the calmness of the previous section. Its prominent *ostinato* unit in the bass (see Example 2.14) drives the section forward through the different modulations, as previously discussed in section 2.1 (“Instrumentation and Form”). As shown in Figure 2.20, section C consists of three subsections. There are four unique metrical layers through subsections C1 and C2, where many dissonances arise as part of the interaction of layers. In C1, the piano plays four consecutive measures of the (2)+2+1+3 rhythmic unit. As Example 2.15 shows, this unit is characterized by the specific use of accents. For instance, in m. 79, the initial sixteenth-note rest and the three subsequent sixteenth notes seem to be placed in order to anticipate the dissonant harmony that is emphasized both by the use of an accent, as well as an extended duration on beat 2. Similarly, the end of beat 2 introduces three sixteenth notes, where the second one is accented. This leads to a quarter note, which creates a comparable durational effect like that in beat 2. The bandoneón repeats the two-measure unit (1)+2+2+3 and 3+5 along with the electric guitar, while the violin maintains the 8 rhythmic unit from the previous section and the double bass returns to the 2+2+2+2 unit. The superimposition of layers through this subsection is then repeated through subsection C2, with one exception: a key change

occurs, increasing the tension through the section until the piece reaches its climax a few measures later.

**Figure 2.19: *Otoño Porteño*, Metrical Layers, Section B'**

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for Section B' of *Otoño Porteño*, showing metrical layers for six instruments: Ps (Piano), Pn (Piano), Bndn (Bandoneon), Vn (Violin), Guit (Guitar), and DB (Double Bass). The notation is organized into four systems, each starting with a measure number and a section label in a circle: 63 (B'), 67 (B'2), 71 (CLM), and 75.

Each system consists of six staves. The notes are represented by black dots. Vertical red rectangles highlight specific rhythmic patterns or groupings of notes across the staves. The notation is divided into four measures per system by vertical bar lines.

- System 1 (Measures 63-66):** Labeled '63' and 'B'1'. Shows complex rhythmic patterns with many notes across all instruments. Red rectangles highlight vertical groupings of notes.
- System 2 (Measures 67-70):** Labeled '67' and 'B'2'. Shows a similar complex rhythmic structure with many notes. Red rectangles highlight vertical groupings.
- System 3 (Measures 71-74):** Labeled '71' and 'CLM'. Shows a simpler rhythmic structure with fewer notes. Red rectangles highlight vertical groupings.
- System 4 (Measures 75-78):** Labeled '75'. Shows a rhythmic structure with fewer notes. Red rectangles highlight vertical groupings.

**Example 2.14: *Otoño Porteño*, Bass *Ostinato* Unit**



**Figure 2.20: *Otoño Porteño*, Rhythmic Groupings, Section C**

Measure	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86
Subsection	C1				C2			
Piano	(2)+2+1+3	(2)+2+1+3	(2)+2+1+3	(2)+2+1+3	(2)+2+1+3	(2)+2+1+3	(2)+2+1+3	(2)+2+1+3
Bandoneón	(1)+2+2+3	3+5	(1)+2+2+3	3+5	(1)+2+2+3	3+5	(1)+2+2+3	3+5
Violín	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
El. guitar	(1)+2+2+3	3+5	(1)+2+2+3	3+5	(1)+2+2+3	3+5	(1)+2+2+3	3+5
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2

Measure	87	88	89	90	91
Subsection	C3				
Piano	(2)+4+2	(2)+4+2	(2)+4+2	(2)+4+(2)	(8)
Bandoneón	(1)+2+2+2+1	(1)+1+3+3	(1)+2+2+2+1	(1)+1+3+3	(8)
Violín	(1)+2+2+2+1	(1)+1+3+3	(1)+2+2+2+1	(1)+1+3+3	(8)
El. guitar	(1)+2+2+2+1	(1)+1+3+3	(1)+2+2+2+1	(1)+1+3+3	(8)
D. Bass	3+1+3+1	3+1+3+1	3+1+3+1	3+1+3+1	(5)+3

**Example 2.15: *Otoño Porteño*, mm. 79-80**



In subsection C3, however, new rhythmic units emerge within the layers, therefore creating new dissonances. Nonetheless, the number of layers is reduced through the subsection from four to three. In mm. 87-90, the bandoneón, violin, and electric guitar play a (1)+2+2+2+1 and (1)+1+3+3 two-measure unit. The piano reproduces a (2)+4+2, while the double bass maintains four consecutive 3+1+3+1 units. In m. 91, all of the instruments become silent, with the exception of the double bass, which plays a short ascending line leading to the piece's tonic, A, and the return to section A (or A'' in this case).

Section C is the most metrically dissonant section of the work, as can be seen in Figure 2.21. Even though there are several alignments between specific layers, these still yield many dissonances with other groups. For instance, in m. 79 as shown in Example 2.16, the violin and double bass line up on b. 1, while the piano, bandoneón, and guitar align on the eighth note between bb. 1 and 2; then, the piano and double bass converge on b. 3, while the bandoneón and guitar do so on the eighth note between bb. 2 and 3. This particular rhythmic unit highlights almost every eighth note, making certain beats particularly stronger than others. For example, in m. 80, the first beat is heavily textured since four layers align, while only two layers converge on the third beat. Even though this does not create metrical conflict *per se*, it does show the lack of congruency between the layers, and therefore highlights the rhythmic conflicts in the section.

The many instances of metrical dissonances through subsections C1 and C2 increases the tension through section C, which reaches its climatic peak through mm. 87-90; here we find the upbeats emphasized, which changes our perception of the tango from a 2/4 to a displaced 2/4. The accents on the upbeats naturally make the strong beats sound weak, which in turn seem to contrast with the introduction, where the 2/4 rhythm is strongly articulated. Piazzolla might have purposely done this in order to re-introduce section A, where the original 2/4 has been re-established in such way that it conflicts with the preceding section, but at the same time resolves the metrical tension created in section C.

### 2.3.3.7: Section A''

Section A'' presents, yet again, certain rhythmic deviances when compared to the previous iterations of the material. This time, however, it is truncated with only two subsections. In A''1 (mm. 92-95), the bandoneón and double bass return with their layers, (1)+3+3+3+3+3

**Figure 2.21: *Otoño Porteño*, Metrical Layers, Section C**

and 2+2+2+2, respectively. The piano employs four consecutive measures of (1)+4+3 rhythm, which were originally used in mm. 10 and 12 in alternation with a 2+3+3 unit. The violin plays a two-measure unit composed of 2+6 and (2)+3+3 rhythmic units, while the guitar, like the piano, presents a two-measure unit with a (1)+4+3 rhythm, followed by a (1)+3+4 (see Figure 2.22). Example 2.17 reproduces this unit.

While the A”2 subsection (mm. 96-99) presents differences in metrical layers when compared with its counterpart in the A section, it maintains the same harmonic structure. In this case, the bandoneón abandons the characteristic (1)+3+3+3+3+3, and instead joins the metrical layer projected by the piano and electric guitar, composed of the units (1)+4+3 and (1)+2+4+1.

**Example 2.16: Otoño Porteño, mm. 79-80**

**Figure 2.22: Otoño Porteño, Rhythmic Groupings, Section A”**

Measure	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99
Subsection	A”1				A”2			
Piano	(1)+4+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1
Bandoneón	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1
Violin	2+6	(2)+3+3	2+6	(2)+3+3	2+6	(2)+3+3	2+6	(2)+3+3
El. guitar	(1)+4+3	(1)+3+4	(1)+4+3	(1)+3+4	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1	(1)+4+3	(1)+2+4+1
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2

**Example 2.17: Otoño Porteño, Guitar, mm. 92-93**

Both the violin and double bass, however, preserve their previous unit(s): 2+6 and (2)+3+3, and 2+2+2+2, respectively. The different rhythmic units create many metrical dissonances (see Figure 2.23). While this section is not as metrically consonant as section A, it still provides the return to stability of the traditional classical *ritornello* after the development due to its harmonic content, as well as the characteristic melody played by the bandoneón. In other words, although the previous tension has dissipated and tonic harmony returns, there is still metrical tension through this section, as if slowly coming down from the climax. In addition, there is a gradual reduction of metrical layers, from four in m. 61 to three in m. 96, supporting the idea of tension release. This is carried on to the coda where the reduction of layers continues.

#### 2.3.3.8: Coda

The coda presents similar material to that of the introduction, closing the piece in a conclusive manner. The layers throughout this section, which subdivides into three subsections, are, for the most part, the same as those used in the introduction (see Figure 2.24). For instance, the piano, bandoneón, and electric guitar all play 4+4 rhythmic units through mm. 100-107. The double bass maintains the regular 2+2+2+2, once again emphasized by percussive sounds on beats 2 and 4. Example 2.18 shows both the 4+4 layer played by the right hand of the piano and the 2+2+2+2 present in the double bass. The violin provides the only rhythmic difference by playing two sets of strictly percussive two-measure rhythmic units. In this case, the instrument consistently alternates between a (2)+3+3 / (1)+1+2+2+2 unit and a 2+6 / (1)+3+3. This specific arrangement creates a strong 2/4 meter, as beats 1 and 3 are strongly emphasized, while including subtle percussive rhythmic dissonances, in a heavily textured coda (see Figure 2.25). This material then leads to subsection Cod3, where all of the instruments align as one metrical

Figure 2.23: *Otoño Porteño*, Metrical Layers, Section A”

Figure 2.24: *Otoño Porteño*, Rhythmic Groupings, Coda

Measure	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107
Subsection	Cod1				Cod2			
Piano	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4
Bandoneón	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4
Violín	(2)+3+3	(1)+1+2+2+2	2+6	(1)+1+3+3	(2)+3+3	(1)+1+2+2+2	2+6	(1)+1+3+3
El. guitar	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4	4+4
D. Bass	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2	2+2+2+2

Measure	108	109	110
Subsection	Cod3		
Piano	(1)+3+3+1	8	(6)+2
Bandoneón	(1)+3+3+1	8	(6)+2
Violín	(1)+3+3+1	8	(6)+2
El. guitar	(1)+3+3+1	8	(6)+2
D. Bass	(1)+3+3+1	8	(6)+2

layer in the concluding cadential gesture of the piece. In m. 108, the instruments play the (1)+3+3+1 rhythmic unit, leading to a scored *fermata* in m. 109. Finally, on the last beat of m. 110, the concluding tonic chord is heavily emphasized by all of the instruments. Interestingly, not only do the instruments align as one layer, but they also play in unison for the first time in the piece, as if representing the end of the season.



### 2.3.4: Rhythmic Units

The rhythmic units employed throughout the work mirror, up to an extent, those seen in *La Cumparsita*. In other words, Piazzolla also borrows from traditional tango rhythms in *Otoño Porteño*. Figure 2.26 provides a comparison of the rhythmic units in both songs and the root of these rhythmic units (or more so, rhythmic heritage). In the lower left corner of the figure, there is a colour-coded list with the “simplified” tango rhythms. These colours are then used to show the rhythmic relation between the simplified version, and those actually employed by both composers.

**Figure 2.26: Comparison of Rhythmic Units**

La Cumparsita		Otoño Porteño	
Section A	12+4	4+4	Intro
	2+2+2+2	(1)+4+3	
	4+4	(1)+2+4+1	
	(1)+3+2+2	2+6	
	4+2+2	(2)+3+3	
	8	2+2+2+2	
	2+6	2+3+3	
Section B	3+1+2+2	(1)+3+3+3+3+3	Section A
	2+3+3	(1)+3+3+1	
	(1)+2+2+2+1	3+3+2	
	(1)+2+2+1+2	8	
	(1)+2+1+4	(1)+3+1+3	
	(1)+1+3+2+1	(1)+2+5	
	(1+2)+(1+2)+2	(1)+7	
(1)+3+1+2+1	(3)+5	Section B	
1+1+1+2+2+1	4+2+(2)		
Section C	1+1+1+1+4	(1)+2+3+2	Section A'
	(2)+2+3+1	6+(2)	
	3+(1+2)+2	(3)+4+1	Section B'
	5+3		
	1+3+2+(2)		
	3+5	Section C	
	(2)+2+1+3		
	(1)+2+2+3		
	(2)+4+2		
	(1)+1+3+3		
	3+1+3+1		
	(5)+3		
	(8)	Section A''	
	(1)+3+4		
	(1)+1+2+2+2	Coda	
	(1)+3+3+1		
	(6)+2		

Rhythm (or var.)
4+4
2+2+2+2
2+4+2
8
2+6
3+3+2

As previously seen in Figure 2.9, Piazzolla uses the 4+4 unit to establish quickly the traditional tango rhythm through the introduction. This unit is superimposed with other tango units, such as the 2+2+2+2 (which recurs throughout the piece), and (2)+3+3 (the retrograde of the *milonga*'s traditional unit). For the second phrase of the section, a displaced 2/4 rhythm ((1)+4+3) is used in order to create dissonances and begin to build tension, while contrasting with the steady bass line and violin's (2)+3+3.

Piazzolla uses two primary rhythmic units for section A: the regular 2+2+2+2 and the 2+3+3. While the bass layer remains constant, the other layers, with the exception of the bandoneón, weave the *milonga*'s rhythm retrograde with the displaced tango rhythm, 2+3+3 and (1)+4+3, creating several dissonances through the initial measures of the section. In addition, the bandoneón plays an extension of *milonga*'s rhythm, (1)+3+3+3+3+3, which is also displaced by one eighth note. Interestingly, through the section, displaced tango rhythms are used to contrast with the regular pulse provided by the double bass, giving rise to several dissonances. While some rhythmic units are preserved, others are altered, such as the two-measure unit in mm. 13-14, where the 2+3+3 unit is followed by (1)+2+4+1, rather than in the case mentioned above. These units, however, only increase the tension through the section, reaching its (local) climax through the section's closing material (mm. 21-29). It is in these last measures where the *milonga*'s traditional 3+3+2 becomes prominent, while creating dissonances with its retrograde, 2+3+3, as well as the displaced (1)+3+1+3 in m. 21 and (1)+2+5 in m. 25. The climatic moment arrives in m. 29 when the bandoneón plays its *cadenza* on the dominant, hinting towards the end of one section and the beginning of the next one.

Like in *La Cumparsita*, a texture change accompanies the beginning of the new section. While section A consists of a dense texture, section B presents a lighter one. Interestingly, the

section's first subsection (mm. 30-37) is characterized by the regular 2+2+2+2, and rhythmically inactive layers. While the bandoneón plays several notes between these measures, it is the first note of every measure that emphasises the motionlessness mentioned earlier in the analysis. The closing material, however, introduces more rhythmic layers, as well as metrical displacements, and therefore, dissonances. For instance through mm. 38-43, the 2+6 is stacked against an 8 rhythmic unit and a (3)+5 (which is an 8 rhythmic unit displaced by three eighth notes).

The following section (A') returns to previously heard material. Different rhythmic arrangements, however, present contrast when compared to the prior section. While most rhythmic units are preserved, certain ones are abandoned, such as (1)+4+3, providing more rhythmic cohesion between the layers. Nonetheless, through mm. 49-52, a new two-measure unit is established between (1)+4+3 and (1)+2+4+1. This unit, however, is played in rhythmic unison by all instruments with the exception of the double bass, which holds to the 2+2+2+2 unit. The closing section reintroduces a third metrical layer, creating tension prior to the end, and, once again, hinting toward the end of one section and the beginning of the next one. For mm. 58-61, the rhythmic unit (3)+4+1 is superimposed with (1)+2+3+2 and 3+2+2 consecutively, creating metrical dissonances prior to the violin's *cadenza*.

In contrast with section B, section B' presents a denser texture; however, its rhythmic layers are equal than those in the previous section. While the regular 2+2+2+2 seems to drive the section, a repetitive 8 rhythmic unit plays above it; a small number of units create rhythmic dissonances, such as 5+3 in m. 66 and (1)+7 in m. 68. The closing material presents new contrasting units, such as 1+3+2+(2) in m. 71 and 3+5 in m. 75. However, these do not create many dissonances considering that the other layer repeats an eighth-note rhythmic unit.

The static nature of the B section changes drastically in section C, where several rhythmic units are employed to create metrical dissonances and increase the tension to its highest point. The rise is cleverly supported by the use of ascending modulations every four measures. Individually, the first two subsections (mm. 79-82 and 83-86) are rhythmically the same. In these, Piazzolla establishes two 2-measure units that contrast with the 2+2+2+2 and the simple 8 played by the double bass and violin, respectively: (2)+2+1+3 and (2)+2+1+3 played by the piano, and (1)+2+2+3 and 3+5 played by the bandoneón and electric guitar. Even though some of these units share certain similarities, it is their subtle differences that increase the tension and create contrast. These units are then replaced in the final subsection of the piece (mm. 87-90) by a consecutive (2)+4+2 unit, followed by another consecutive 3+1+3+1 and a two-measure unit, (1)+2+2+2+1 and (1)+1+3+3. This final subsection represents the climax of the piece where the retrograde of rhythmic units highlights the weak beat, forcing the audience to perceive a displaced 2/4 meter.

The final occurrence of the A section, A'', brings familiar rhythmic units, such as 2+2+2+2, (1)+3+3+3+3+3, (1)+4+3, and (2)+3+3, as if returning to the roots of the piece and of the tango. This section, similarly to *La Cumparsita*, acts as a *ritornello* and prepares the listener for the song's coda.

The concluding section is scored similarly to the introduction, where 4+4 units strongly emphasize the 2/4 meter. The regular 2+2+2+2 still persists in driving the music forward, while interacting with the *milonga's* (2)+3+3. Subtle rhythmic differences occur when compared with the initial section and create metrical dissonances through the section, for instance, (1)+1+2+2+2 in m. 101 and (1)+1+3+3 in m. 103. It is in the final three measures where all the instruments play the same metrical layer, (1)+3+3+1, followed by an 8 unit and a (6)+2 unit. These final

measures provide the alignment of all the instruments, as they not only play in rhythmic unison, but also the same pitch class; in other words, the instruments converge on one melodic line doubled at the octave. The textural cohesion provides a place of repose for the listener, as the ending is emphasized by a strong accent on the last note of the piece, the tonic.

### 2.3.5: Synthesis

“The worst tango of all,” replied Piazzolla after being asked for his opinion on *La Cumparsita*, while touring in Uruguay.<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, however, my analysis has shown that Piazzolla borrows many of the same musical elements as Matos Rodríguez does in *La Cumparsita*. Even though *Otoño Porteño* proves to be more complex than *La Cumparsita*, both harmonically and rhythmically, similarities exist between them: (1) both pieces present three distinct sections; (2) although Piazzolla incorporates modulations throughout certain passages, both works rely, for the most part, on the same basic harmonic structure, i-iv-V; (3) the basic instrumentation used by Matos Rodríguez is present in Piazzolla’s work, showing the transformation from the simple traditional instrumentation to the denser *Nuevo Tango* orchestration; and, most importantly, (4) the rhythmic units used by both composers are mostly derived from traditional tango rhythms, as seen in Figure 2.26. In addition, in *Otoño Porteño*, Piazzolla relies on the use of traditional tango rhythms that, when superimposed, yield metrical dissonances that characterize the dance. The recurrence of a two-measure unit supports this idea, since a similar compositional approach is seen in the first song analyzed. The main difference between both pieces, however, is the displacement of rhythmic units. While in *La Cumparsita* metrical layers strictly follow the beat for the most part, in *Otoño Porteño*, several layers are

---

<sup>94</sup> Azzi and Collier, *Le Grand Tango*, 117.

consistently displaced, beginning one eighth note later, and therefore, finishing one eighth note late, in most cases.

My study has examined Piazzolla's contribution to the tango genre through his expansion of different musical conventions. For instance, instead of employing the traditional i-iv-V unit, the composer includes modulations to different keys in specific sections of the song. This shows, to a certain extent, the influence of different genres on his compositional approach. Although Piazzolla's exposure to classical and jazz idioms has allowed him to expand on the traditional conventions of the tango, he still preserved some traditional elements of the genre. He modified the formal structure and used displaced traditional tango rhythms as a way to preserve the overall rhythmic dissonant nature of the song, where syncopations and metrical dissonances play an important role. This presents a more rhythmically complex piece when compared with the traditional tango, but elements of the old and new blend well. The transformation of the tango orchestra is also present in Piazzolla's work, where an electric guitar weaves with the traditional instrumentation, providing new colours. Despite the fusion between old and new traditions, Piazzolla preserves specific tango rhythmic motives, harmonic progressions, instrumentation, and most importantly, the melancholic feeling associated with the genre. The incorporation of these elements allowed the composer to keep the soul of the tango, while modifying it to create a new genre, the *Nuevo Tango*.

### CHAPTER 3: Conclusion

*“Piazzolla’s tango has the eyes, the nose, and the mouth of its grandfather, the tango. The rest is Piazzolla.”<sup>95</sup>*  
 - Ernesto Sábato

The tango has continued to be transformed since its emergence in Argentine society. The dance resulted from and continues to combine several cross-cultural elements, such as the African *candombe* and *murga*, the Western European waltz and polka, operatic lyrical themes, and the German bandoneón. These elements allow artists to preserve the essence of the traditional tango, while expanding on its structural, harmonic, and rhythmic complexity. In addition, the cross-cultural elements have allowed artists to challenge the social conventions of the traditional tango in the streets of Buenos Aires. The rise of the genre to different social classes came with the French aristocracy’s acceptance of the dance in the early 1900s, which then allowed the dance to become part of Argentine society as a whole. Its survival, however, rests on the potential for artists to preserve the essence of the traditional dance, while introducing other more current elements.

Astor Piazzolla is recognised as one of the leading figures in the development of the traditional tango to the *Nuevo Tango*. The composer, who had been exposed to jazz music and the classical music repertoire, expanded the tango by including elements from both of these, allowing the dance to detach itself from its sinful past and gain a place in the Western art tradition. Similarly to J.S. Bach, who wrote dances for solo instruments that aurally represented the essence of the dance gestures, Piazzolla preserves the essence of the tango dance, while developing more complex structural, harmonic, and rhythmic structures. The Argentinian

---

<sup>95</sup> Gorin, *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, 49.

composer expanded on the formal structure by combining elements of the traditional tango form with Western art musical structures. He also challenged the instrumentation of the traditional tango ensemble by incorporating instruments foreign to the genre, such as drum sets, electric guitars, vibraphones, saxophones, and harps. In addition, he included more complex harmonic material such as dissonant chords, modulations, and counterpoint. He also used traditional tango rhythmic units, which he then intertwined with rhythmic variations and displaced rhythmic layers, creating heavily syncopated rhythmic textures.

My analysis has shown similarities and differences between two works from different eras in the history of the tango: *La Cumparsita* and *Otoño Porteño*. The first of these is recognised as the best known tango of all time. Matos Rodríguez set his work as a rondo design, in which the refrain showcases the renowned melody that popularized the song in the first place. Both the harmonic structure, which repeats i-iv-V progressions throughout each section, along with the simple instrumentation (piano and violin)—the instrumentation is reduced to the piano in sections B and C—represent well the simplicity of traditional tango songs. Syncopations occur throughout the piece, as different metrical layers interact, yielding characteristic traditional tango rhythmic units. These layer interactions, however, are minimal and only occur between two metrical layers, for the most part. These details differentiate the complexity of both pieces, where the first one was originally written as a marching song, while the latter as a sophisticated art music work.

*Otoño Porteño* represents well Piazzolla's mature tango style, as he described it himself.<sup>96</sup> Since the formal structure is ambiguous in this work, several interpretations are possible. For instance, as explained in the previous chapter, the work could be considered as a rondo or double concerto form due to the inclusion of characteristic features of each formal

---

<sup>96</sup> See note 58 above.

design within the piece. Regardless, the formal structure of Piazzolla's work may also be interpreted as ternary, like that of the traditional tango. The composer also expands on the instrumentation by including the bandoneón, double bass, and electric guitar into the ensemble. While *La Cumparsita* preserves a simple harmonic structure based on the i-iv-V progression, Piazzolla expands this structure to allow for more harmonic intricacies. For instance, he uses III as a V substitute, only employing dominant chords when closing sections. In addition, he uses section C in a similar way as the development section of a classical sonata movement, where several modulations are introduced. He then challenges the traditional tango chan-chan cadence by substituting the V-i motion for i<sup>o</sup>-i without a third, dramatically changing the expected cadential texture of the traditional tango. In addition to expanding the formal, instrumental, and harmonic structures, Piazzolla also expands the rhythmic structure of the traditional tango. The composer presents several variations of traditional tango rhythms, that, when superimposed, provide continuous syncopations and metrical dissonances. The heavily syncopated piece also includes the occasional use of instruments in percussive ways. While in the previous song there were only two metrical layers, Piazzolla superimposes four simultaneous layers, generating the overall tension of the piece.

The analysis presented in this project refutes the *Old Guard* statement that Piazzolla's music is not tango. Through the analysis and comparison of both pieces, the formal, instrumental, harmonic, and rhythmic similarities have been discussed. Although these pieces are separated by approximately fifty years, they both rely on the development of the same musical elements to convey the essence of the dance. The same analytical approach could be applied to other works by Piazzolla, where the reliance on the i-iv-V progression and the juxtaposition of metrical layers derived through traditional rhythmic units would yield similar results. The

analytical approach discussed in this study could also be applied to other tango subgenres in order to easily draw connections between their rhythmic structures and the more traditional repertoire. For instance, the more current *Techno Tango* may be rhythmically linked to both the traditional and the *Nuevo Tango* by focusing on the rhythmic units used and their respective accentuations. Furthermore, the tools employed in this study could be used in other genres in order to highlight their rhythmic similarities.<sup>97</sup>

Following Nadia Boulanger's advice, Piazzolla changed his focus to composing tangos and, subsequently, wrote hundreds of tango pieces. He had to persevere in an environment, where his music was being criticized by tango traditionalists, who resisted the creation of a new subgenre within the tango culture. However, his music has survived despite the constant attacks and has gained a place in the Argentine society, along with its predecessors. As Piazzolla once asserted:

I made a revolution in tango. I broke the old molds: that's why they attacked me and why I had to defend myself. That curse made me feel bad because if there is something no one could deny, it is my roots: I have tango stamped around my edges.<sup>98</sup>

Piazzolla once claimed that he “performed plastic surgery”<sup>99</sup> on the tango when he began experimenting with it, allowing the genre to develop. This re-conception or reinvention of the tango led to a re-popularization of the genre, not only in Argentina, but also internationally. The new possibility of hybridization has not driven the tango to extinction, as some traditional tango enthusiasts have claimed; on the contrary, it has led to continuous changes in the genre ensuring its survival. *Nuevo Tango* laid the foundations that allowed the development of other subgenres,

---

<sup>97</sup> Rhythmic units used in an atonal dance, which borrows elements from the Baroque period, could be traced by comparing them with the traditional baroque dance. For example, rhythmic units in a gigue by Schoenberg could be compared with one by J.S. Bach.

<sup>98</sup> Gorin, *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, 39.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

such as *Jazz Tango*, *Rock Tango*, and the more current, *Techno Tango*. This development of new subgenres will continue to adapt to the conventions of the time by using new tools, ensuring its growth and, most importantly, the tango's survival as an Argentine artefact that reflects that nation's cultural identity.

## Bibliography

### Books and Articles:

Azzi, María Susana and Simon Collier. *Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Azzi, María Susana. "Tango as Ritual." *Buenos Aires Herald*, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1991.

———. "The Golden Age and After: 1920s-1990s." In *¡Tango!*, edited by Simon Collier, 114-60. New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1995.

Brunelli, Omar García, ed. *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*. Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008.

Collier, Simon, ed. *¡Tango!* New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1995.

———. "The Tango is Born: 1880s-1920s." In *¡Tango!*, edited by Simon Collier, 18-64. New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1995.

Gift, Virginia. *Tango: A History of Obsession*. BookSurge Publishing, 2009.

Gorin, Natalio. *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*. 2nd ed. Translated, annotated, and expanded by Fernando Gonzalez. 1990. Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2001.

Krebs, Harold. "Metrical Consonance and Dissonance: Definitions and Taxonomy." In *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*, 22-61. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Kuri, Carlos. "Agonía del género y potencia del nombre (Constitución de la estética piazzolleana)." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, edited by Omar García Brunelli, 13-18. Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008.

Kutnowski, Martín. "Rubato instrumental y estructura de la frase en la música de Astor Piazzolla." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, edited by Omar García Brunelli, 99-108. Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008.

Matos Rodríguez, Gerardo. "La Cumparsita." In *Elements of Music*, edited by Joseph N. Straus, 452-54. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

Mauriño, Gabriela. "Raíces tangeras de la obra de Astor Piazzolla." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, edited by Omar García Brunelli, 19-34. Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008.

Munarriz, Alberto. "Hybridization and the Creation of "ThirdSpaces": An Analysis of Two Works by Tomás Gubitsch." *Intersections* 30/2 (2010): 75-133.

Piazzolla, Astor. *Otoño Porteño*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editorial Lagos, 1969.

Pielinski, Ramón. "Astor Piazzolla: entre tango y fuga, en busca de una identidad estilística." In *Estudios sobre la obra de Astor Piazzolla*, edited by Omar García Brunelli, 35-56. Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2008.

Straus, Joseph N. *Elements of Music*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

Recordings:

Palm Court Society Orchestra. "La Cumparsita." In *CD for Audio Examples in Elements of Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Newton Musical, 2002.

Piazzolla, Astor. "Otoño Porteño." In *Piazzolla en Suite*. Astor Piazzolla Coll., APC 3701, 2006.