

### **Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)**

Astor Piazzolla (born March 11 1921, Mar del Plata, Argentina) was an Argentine musician and composer. A virtuoso on the bandoneon, Piazzolla left traditional Latin American tango bands in 1955 to create a new tango that blended elements of jazz and classical music. He was a major Latin American composer of the 20th century.

He received his first bandoneón at age eight and learned to play both that instrument and the piano as a child. In Mar del Plata in 1936, Piazzolla began playing with a variety of tango orchestras. At age 17 he moved to Buenos Aires. He formed his own orchestra in 1946, composing new works and experimenting with the sound and structure of the tango. About the same time, he began to write film music. In 1949 he disbanded the orchestra, unsatisfied with his own efforts and still interested in classical composition. Having won a composing contest with his symphonic piece Buenos Aires (1951), he went to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. She urged him to remain true to himself and to continue his experiments with the tango. Henceforth he combined his two musical passions, despite much criticism from tango traditionalists.

He returned to Argentina in 1955 but moved once again to the United States, where he lived from 1958 to 1960. When he returned again to Argentina, he formed the influential Quinteto Nuevo Tango (1960), featuring a violin, electric guitar, piano, double bass, and bandoneón. Though many of his 750 compositions were written for that quintet, he also composed pieces for orchestra, big band, bandoneón, and cello. His innovations, including counterpoint and new rhythms and harmonies, were initially not well received in his country, but they were greatly admired in the United States and Europe. In Argentina Piazzolla's new tango gradually gained acceptance, and his music influenced a new generation of tango composers and was featured during the 1970s and 1980s in film scores, television programs, and commercials. His later compositions included a concerto for bandoneón and orchestra (1979) and, commissioned by Kronos Quartet, Five Tango Sensations for bandoneón and string quartet (1989).

Astor Piazzolla died in Buenos Aires on July 4, 1992.