

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA

Various Contributors

It beggars belief that in the UK, and probably elsewhere, we have concerts of great music such as Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and Piazzolla.

We have concerts advertised and later performed of 'masterpieces' by Mozart, Liszt, Rachmaninov and Piazzolla.

This is nothing new. We have had concerts of 'superior' music by the great composers and Johann Strauss.

The BBC's programme This Weeks Composer claims to represent the greatest composers and yet we have had programmes of Cole Porter, Steve Reich and Gershwin.

The question is asked are Piazzolla, Johann Strauss, Gershwin and Cole Porter great composers and therefore in the same class as Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

Astor Piazzolla was born in Mar del Plata, Argentine in 1921, the only son of Italian parents. He was brought up on records of tango music which is certainly not serious, classical or great music with an occasional dip into Bach. A bandoneon was purchased for him in 1929 and he composed his first tango in 1932. Nonetheless, this type of music had no prestige and he knew this and took lessons from the pianist Bela Wilde who had been a pupil of Rachmaninov but he only played Bach on the bandoneon and tangos.

The bandoneon has an awful sound like an out of tune harmonica. It has no grace, elegance or beauty.

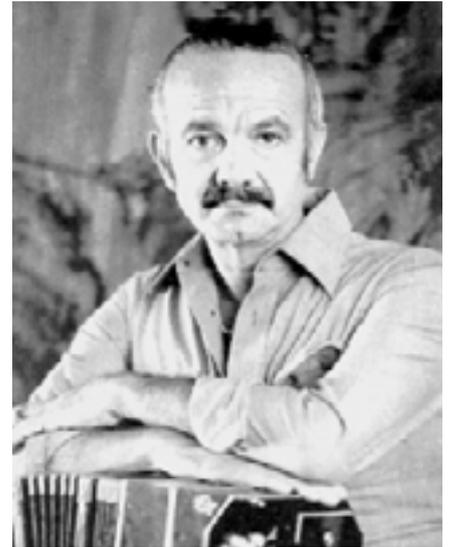
The pianist Arthur Rubinstein urged Piazzolla to take music seriously and to contact Ginastera

The finest Argentinean composer was Alberto Ginastera who urged Piazzolla to study and therefore perform real music and do something worthwhile in music. And so he studied with Nadia Boulanger at Fontainebleau and with the Buenos Aires Symphony Orchestra but he was unequal and grossly incompetent at real music. He composed his Buenos Aires Symphony which was not only a failure but caused riots as a symphony orchestra now contained bandoneons. He had no skill, talent or technique to compose real music. He was drawn to the undisciplined music of jazz and the tango and tried to blend these two styles but with no success. At another time, he abandoned the tango and studied Bartok and Stravinsky

The Argentinean tango is a dance of sex and is regarded by many as crude, vulgar and seductive well known in nightclubs, brothels and other seedy places. All of Piazzolla tangos are much or a muchness and have no originality. He composed film music, usually tango based, and a tango opera Marie du Buenos Aires. He again realized that his music had no class and, in an attempt to acquire some class, he wrote a cello and piano piece for Rostropovich.

Piazzolla's music is vulgar since it shows poor taste and a lack of refinement. It is crude in that it is tasteless and vulgar having no class or greatness.

How then can it be joined in a concert with great composers? It is not serious, classical or accomplished music. How can it be compared with Beethoven?



He had two children by his first wife, Dede. He played in tango orchestras and had his own groups. He was not an accomplished performer since he and other poor musicians tap the floor with their feet when playing. There may be a few concert performers who do this but they are very rare.

He died on 4 July 1992

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