

incitation to desire

Tangos For Yvar Mikhashoff



	Bennett	Berkman	Biscardi	
Bright	Cage	Copland	Duckworth	Foss
Hill	Jaggard	Ludova	Nancarrow	Pender
Raschke	Rudhyar	Sahl	Sa'ry	Schimmel

YVAR, FOREVER WITH A CARNATION PINNED TO HIS LAPEL, KNEW EVERYBODY IN NEW MUSIC, IN EUROPE, IN LATIN AMERICA AND IN ASIA. FROM HIS BASE IN BUFFALO WHERE HE TAUGHT AT SUNY FROM 1973 UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1993, HE MANAGED TO ROAM THE GLOBE AS COMPOSER, PERFORMER, COMMISSIONER, ADVISOR AND PRODUCER. AMONG HIS COMPOSER FRIENDS COULD BE FOUND AS MANY PERSUASIONS, STYLISTICALLY, AS EXIST IN THIS PLURALISTIC MUSIC CULTURE WE LIVE IN, AND YVAR DIDN'T PROSELYTIZE FOR ONE OR THE OTHER; HE WAS ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR SOMETHING CHALLENGING AND MUSICALLY ARRESTING. HIS INTEREST RAN THE GAMUT FROM SERIALISM TO CHANCE AND MINIMALISM. YVAR WAS NOT ONE TO PIGEONHOLE MUSIC INTO SUCH CATEGORIES.

AMONG HIS GREAT LOVES WERE POPULAR DANCE FORMS; AS A YOUNG MAN HE HAD WORKED AS A PROFESSIONAL BALLROOM DANCER, AND KNEW THE DANCE PHYSICALLY AS WELL AS MUSICALLY. IN THE SEVENTIES HE RECORDED A TWO VOLUME WALTZ PROJECT, COMMISSIONING NUMEROUS SHORT PIECES IN THE GENRE. IN THE EIGHTIES HE BEGAN ASSEMBLING SHORT TANGOS FOR HIS REPERTORY BY COMMISSIONING COMPOSER FRIENDS; AT THE END, HE HAD A COLLECTION OF OVER A HUNDRED.

THESE WERE NOT TIDBITS TO BE PLACED AS FILLER INTO MORE SERIOUS

REPERTORY. YVAR PERFORMED EIGHT HOUR MARATHON CONCERTS DEVOTED TO THE TANGO. PERHAPS THE CROWNING GLORY OF THIS OBSESSION WAS A THREE DAY FESTIVAL WHICH HE ORGANIZED IN NEW YORK IN 1986, WHICH CENTERED AROUND TANGO AS DANCE, MUSIC AND HISTORY; HE EVEN PRESENTED A SLIDE SHOW OF THE HISTORY OF THE DANCE AND SHOWED OLD FILM CLIPS OF VALENTINO DANCING THE TANGO.

THE TANGO HAS ENJOYED A KIND OF RENAISSANCE SINCE ITS DOG DAYS IN THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES, DUE IN GREAT PART TO ARGENTINEAN MUSICIANS LIKE ASTOR PIAZZOLLA WHO WERE BORN INTO THE TRADITION AND OTHER COMPOSERS WHO STUDIED IT- AS THEY DID RAG TIME WHICH DATES FROM THE SAME ERA- FROM A HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW. (A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, MICHAEL SAHL ORGANIZED A TANGO PROJECT SIMILAR TO YVAR'S WALTZ PROJECT WHICH WAS RECORDED ON NONESUCH)

YVAR'S INTERNATIONAL TANGO COLLECTION HAS BEEN AN ONGOING PROJECT FOR WELL OVER A DECADE AND THESE RECORDINGS WERE AMONG HIS LAST BEFORE HIS UNTIMELY DEATH OF THE AIDS VIRUS AT THE AGE OF FORTY-EIGHT. THE TANGO, DESPITE ITS LUGUBRIOUS OVERTONES, IS BASICALLY A DANCE OF DESIRE AND IS LIFE AFFIRMING; AND AS SUCH IT IS A TELLING MEMORIAL TO THIS EXTRAORDINARY PIANIST.

In this collection there is a preponderance of works which have a bias towards the physical or "lascivious" side of tango; but not all is sensuality- there are several austere works which reflect on the "idea" of tango rather than bathe in its sensuality. One such is the lead piece, Michael Sahl's evocative Exiles' Cafe, which seems to dreamily dwell on some transmogrified memory of tangos past. Yet it also plays with the rhythms and gestures of the physical dance in an almost delirious way.

There are three versions of John Cage's Perpetual Tango. The shortest one is heard here, and the longer, middle version is heard in mirror position as the penultimate track on this recording. Cage created his tango by re-writing Eric Satie's Tango perpetuale, (from his Sports et Divertissements) seventy-five years to the day.

One of the real tangoesque works, and also the oldest, is that of Dane Rudhyar's Tango d'Antan. Rudhyar, who was perhaps better known as an astrologer, told Mikhashoff in 1985 that "he was not interested in writing a tango" (at the age of 90 perhaps he had more serious musical visions to complete), but in any case he did send one which he had found among his early works- it was started in Paris in 1915 (when the tango was in its heyday in Europe) and never finished. The title might translate as "tango from yesteryear".

On the surface, William Duckworth's Tango Voices, with its repetitive effects and modal feeling, sounds like a minimalist toccata. The characteristic tango rhythms are hidden in a multiplicity of simultaneous tangos.

Fromage Dangereux by William Schimel, who worked with Michael Sahl on that composers "tango project" of some years ago (he was the accordianist) brings us back to the surface of tango waters with its pronounced habanera bass line. It is classic in its form, even going into the major mode for the second section.

Lucas Foss' Curriculum Vitae Tango is one of those pieces which tropes the idea of tango; it is based on an autobiographical work of his by the same name. In that work, "this dream-like piece serves as nostalgic link between themes and eras."

Ms Jackson Dances for the World by Scott Pender takes us back to the dance; "this is a candombe, a hard driven dance form halfway between samba and tango, perhaps more African in origin."

Richard Rodney Bennett, the English composer who has written many memorable film scores, has composed a series of pieces based on Debussy's Syrinx for flute; This Tango after Syrinx is among them; in it he employs 12 tone techniques but, as is his style, in an evocative and sensuous way.

"The movements of the dance are less presentable to a polite audience than those of the habanera, and as now performed in the cafes chantants of Madrid and other cities of Spain the Tango has become nothing but an Incitation to Desire—from the article "Tango" in the 1944 edition of Groves Dictionary of Music. Thus the title of Chester Biscardi's tango, which, if lascivious, is floridly and elegantly so. (It might be worth mentioning that the most recent Groves while not condemning the tango on such Victorian moral grounds, does report that the dance itself is very macho, suggestive of a sexual position where the man actively dominates while the woman plays a submissive role.) Even today, the tango has a naughty reputation of sorts.

If Czech composer Ivana Ludova's Tango Music, with its primal, driven pulsations at beginning and end, reminds us of the earth bound urhythms of The Rite Of Spring, there are also the moments of impassioned and ironic playfulness which are emphatically tango.

Tango Dreaming was written while the composer, Colin Bright, was in Buffalo, New York, but Yvar seemed to think it "evokes the vastness of the composer's homeland, Australia," and makes further allusions to the "Australian aboriginal concept of the dream-time—timeless, undulating and spacious."

Laszlo Sa'ry's Tango has a kind of nervous excitement that puts us on edge, but at the same time seems a bit humorous - perhaps a reflection of his Eastern European sensibility. The style, halfway between American minimalism and post Webern pointillism, does not recall the tango rhythms in any obvious way, but they are there beneath the surface.

Conlon Nancarrow is famous for his piano roll studies in which impossible rhythms and speeds come flying out of the piano. His Tango? is "nearly impossible for human hands; it is in three staves throughout and in three interchangeable rhythms: 2/8, 2/4 and 5/8. The rhythms move to another staff every sixteen measures. The composer doubted whether it was either playable, or even a tango!" With Yvar it is not only playable, but quite a tango.

Tango No Tango by Jackson Hill evokes Japan in several ways; the word Tango in Japan refers to a national holiday on May 5th when fathers fly kites with their sons, but the music in its quiet meditative presence and the choice of mode has a distinct Japanese feel; the tango idea in the left hand is always there however.

Tango auf drei Beinern by Raschke has no explanation for its title, the three legged tango, but it evokes an underlying eroticism that is subverted by ironic and humorous statements.

Like Rudhyar, Aaron Copland was well advanced in years when Yvar requested a tango, and again, the composer reached into the past, in this case back to 1935. Tempo di Tango was originally part of a ballet score, Hear Ye, Hear Ye. Originally for two pianos, this solo transcription captures the sinuous, lush atmosphere of the tango-boleros of the thirties.

David Jaggard's Tango "concentrates on the second half of the fourth beat, ever longer and longer, with more events with each occurrence. After some concluding spans and a final splash, there is a quiet return to reality."

With Thorn-tern Lips by Robert Berkman, we arrive back at a more recognizable tango, although one which is "magnificently, hilariously schizophrenic." The composer explained that "during its composition he had often completely lapsed back into his profession as ragtime pianist. The title refers to an impetuous kiss given to an enticing señorita with a rose in her teeth—before she has time to remove the rose."



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Recorded May 22-25, 1992

Slee Hall, Suny,

Buffalo, New York

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1	Michael Sahl: Exiles' Cafe	3:59
2	John Cage: Perpetual Canon (Vers. A)	:44
3	Dane Rudhyar: Tango d'Antan	2:48
4	William Duckworth: Tango Voices	3:06
5	William Schimel: Fromage Dangereux	3:40
6	Lucas Foss: Curriculum Vitae Tango	2:54
7	Scott Pender: Ms Jackson Dances for the World	3:18
8	Richard Rodney Bennett: Tango after Syrinx	3:36
9	Chester Biscardi: Incitation to Desire	3:19
10	Ivana Ludova: Tango Music	3:17
11	Colin Bright: Tango Dreaming	4:08
12	Laszlo Sa'ry: Tango	2:45
13	Conlon Nancarrow: Tango?	3:37
14	Jackson Hill: Tango No Tango	4:25
15	Raschke: Tango auf drei Beinum	2:32
16	Aaron Copland: Tempo di Tango	3:31
17	David Jaggard: Tango	3:37
18	John Cage: Perpetual Tango(II)	3:37
19	Robert Berkman: Thorn-torn Lips	3:38

