

From Pacho to Piazzolla

Part XIII

Tales of Tango history

Halfway through the decade of the '20s, the period of renovation headed by Julio De Caro, the veterans of the old school felt the shakedown provoked by what they perceived as the transformation of the Tango into church music. Meanwhile, the youngsters were treasuring the copies of the new arrangements, the solos, the counter melodies that emanated from the creative talents of Pedro Maffia, Julio De Caro and Francisco De Caro.

Francisco Canaro and Roberto Firpo, who were the major exponents of the traditional style 2x4 hot Tango of the **Old Guard** attempted to counteract the popularity of the new generation of trained musicians by opening up their orchestras to young talent like **Cayetano Puglisi**, **Ciriaco Ortiz** and **Oswaldo Pugliese**.

However, around 1924, an entrepreneur with long range vision, began to hire six piece Tango ensembles, the typical orchestras modeled after **Julio De Caro's Sexteto Tipico**, to provide musical background for silent movies. For the next six years, the movie houses became the cathedrals where the Tango ruled. Lacking other sources of affordable entertainment, the working class families of **Buenos Aires** made these movie houses their favorite places to spend their free time. Thus, a large number of the population became exposed to the Tango music of **Pedro Maffia**, **Julio De Caro**, **Francisco Lomuto**, **Cayetano Puglisi**, **Oswaldo Pugliese**, **Elviro Vardaro** and many others.

In one of those movie houses, a chubby fifteen year old kid, heard for the first time the mastery of the bandoneon of **Pedro Maffia**, not imagining then that many years later, he himself, **Anibal Troilo**, would be called the major bandoneon of **Buenos Aires**. **Troilo** would later say, *before Pedro Maffia, there was nobody*.

With a solid reputation as a pianist and a composer, **Oswaldo Pugliese** was only eighteen when he wrote **Recuerdo**, the tango that many experts consider the birth certificate of the instrumental Tango of greater importance in style and renovation that has ever been written. Because he was not yet of a

legal age, the tango was originally registered under his father's name, **Adolfo Pugliese**, who had been a flute player at the turn of the century. When **Oswaldo** reached the age of twenty-one, **Recuerdo** was published once more with his signature.

The tango was bold and advanced for its time. With a rare melody, extremely beautiful in its harmony and counterpoints, **Recuerdo** has a variation for bandoneon that it is very difficult to play as it is written. It requires gifted digitation, sound technique and a sense of virtuosity capable of extracting the best out of the possibilities of the muisic.

The sounds of **Recuerdo** were first heard in a cafe in the neighborhood of **Villa Crespo**, played by a modest quartet that was not equipped with the acceptable suitability of execution to extol its musical values. Its premiere went totally unnoticed and it was even retired from the repertoire for lack of interest by the public that frequented the establishment.

By the winter of 1925, the quartet of the bandoneonist **Enrique Pollet** with **Emilio Marchiano** and **Bernardo Perrone** on violins, and **Oswaldo Pugliese** on the piano, occupied the orchestra pit of cafe **A.B.C.** With the version by that quartet, **Recuerdo** would finally reach its true artistic relevance as the archetype of the instrumental Tango.

By 1926, the quartet of **Pollet** changed venues and format, becoming a typical sextet of two bandoneons, two violins, **Pugliese** on piano and a counterbass. **Recuerdo** was high in the repertoire of the new orchestra and it was wildly acclaimed by both the



public and the Tango musicians who night after night dropped by to listen to the excellent interpretations of the **Pollet** sextet. The public repeatedly demanded the execution of **Recuerdo**, almost in every set played by the orchestra.

Pedro Laurenz was among the selected audience and it was he who one night requested a handwritten copy of **Recuerdo** to bring to **Julio De Caro**, who received it with great enthusiasm. It is widely accepted that **De Caro's** recording on November 9, 1926, is the definitive version of **Recuerdo**, never surpassed, only equaled by **Oswaldo Pugliese** himself, who in 1944 incorporated **Recuerdo** into the repertoire of his legendary orchestra with exactly the same instrumentation that **De Caro** had used eighteen years earlier. Not a single note was changed, and **Pugliese** even kept the temperamental tempo that **De Caro** had immortalized in 1926.

Sixty years later, on the stage of the **Teatro Colon** towards the end of his glorious career, **Oswaldo Pugliese** used a new arrangement of **Recuerdo** when his fabulous orchestra was joined by many musicians that had played for him over a span of forty years. The arrangement and the interpretation recorded in 1986 are a musical tribute to the genius and inspiration of the late **Maestro** who pushed the envelope of modernization of the Argentine Tango without ever severing its roots.