

INSIGHTS INTO THE MUSICAL DRAMATURGY OF ASTOR PIAZZOLLA'S *OPERITA MARIA DE BUENOS AIRES*

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SUMMARY. Numerous pages have already been filled out about Astor Piazzolla's *operita Maria de Buenos Aires*. What I aim to bring anew through this work is the delineation of the musical dramaturgy within this work, with an emphasis on the orchestral ensemble, instrumental architecture, general developmental principles, organization of musical material, created effects, and how they assist in constructing each section. Additionally, I aspire to bring this Piazzollian masterpiece closer to the public. Despite premiering in May 1968, it remains relatively unknown and rarely staged. Librettist Horacio Ferrer employs a "coded," enigmatic language that is challenging to understand even for Spanish speakers. But the musicality and rhythm provided by his text contribute masterfully to the construction of the work's dramaturgy, with the *operita's* libretto perfectly fitting Piazzolla's language. *Maria de Buenos Aires* is an important lesson in composition and orchestration, as well as a model of musical dramaturgy construction. It is also a truly source of inspiration for instrumentalists, singers, composers, orchestrators, or musicologists, as well as for actors, directors, choreographers, and poets.

Keywords: Astor Piazzolla, *Maria de Buenos Aires*, musical dramaturgy, orchestration, *nuevo tango*, counterpoint.

Introduction

Numerous pages have already been filled out about Astor Piazzolla's *operita "Maria de Buenos Aires"*. Extensive research has been conducted on the poetic and linguistic elements of librettist Horacio Ferrer as well. What I aim to bring anew through this work is the delineation of the musical dramaturgy within "*Maria de Buenos Aires*," with an emphasis on the orchestral ensemble,

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instrumental architecture, general developmental principles, organization of musical material, created effects, and how they assist in constructing each section. Additionally, I aspire to bring this Piazzollian masterpiece closer to the public. Despite premiering in May 1968, it remains relatively unknown and rarely staged.

One of the most pertinent musical inquiries into this masterpiece was undertaken by Ulrich Krämer. Therefore, I have chosen to quote a fragment that succinctly and profoundly presents the subject matter of the libretto²:

“Ferrer’s *operita* tells the story of tango: its birth, childhood, multicultural adolescence in the port suburbs and brothels of Buenos Aires, adulthood in the glow of the city’s nightclubs and cabarets, its humiliation, decay, and death as an outcast, and eventually its glory and rebirth, ensuring its immortality as *Nuevo Tango*. In the *operita*, María is the embodiment of tango. Her story is narrated by a narrator - *El Duende* - who is so in love with her that he actively engages in her own story [...]. Of all the characters, most of whom seem to emerge from a dreamlike, hallucinatory world, the *Duende* is the most solid. Indeed, it is difficult not to perceive a relationship between him and Piazzolla himself, who, as the protagonist of *Nuevo Tango*, was mainly responsible for the genre’s revival in the years preceding Ferrer and Piazzolla’s collaboration in María.”

Librettist Horacio Ferrer employs a “coded,” enigmatic language that is challenging to understand even for Spanish speakers. For this reason, it can pose a trial for directors. Ferrer blends *Lunfardo*³ and *Neolunfardo* (invented by himself) with biblical elements, surprising his audience. However, there is a pulsation in his verses, and for this reason, I believe that a staging based on a translated text⁴ loses much of Ferrer’s poetic essence. The musicality and rhythm provided by his text contribute masterfully to the construction of the work’s dramaturgy, with the *operita*’s libretto perfectly fitting Piazzolla’s musical language. As noted by Maria Susana Azzi and Simon Collier in Astor Piazzolla’s famous biography⁵, upon completing the text, Ferrer allegedly suggested to the composer, “*here I would like an atmosphere like Milonga del ángel, like Verano porteño.*”

² Original in Spanish. Krämer, Ulrich. “Armonía y forma en María de Buenos Aires de Astor Piazzolla.” (Harmony and form in María de Buenos Aires by Astor Piazzolla.) *Revista del Instituto Superior De Música, Universidad Nacional Del Litoral (Argentina)* no. 9 (2002), p. 41

³ *Lunfardo* is an argot that emerged towards the end of the 19th century among the lower classes in Buenos Aires (according to Wikipedia).

⁴ Even in Romania, a production was staged at *Teatrelli* - Theater company (a commendable action indeed), in which the text was translated into Romanian, most likely to ensure that the surrealist message could reach the audience.

⁵ Azzi, Maria Susana & Collier, Simon - *Le grand tango –The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla* (Oxford University Press, p. 104)

Materials and Methods

Although I have not yet had the opportunity to attend a live performance of the *operita* “*Maria de Buenos Aires*”, thanks to YouTube, I have been able to watch and listen to many valuable versions over time. Among these, I must first mention the 1968 recording where the protagonists are Astor Piazzolla himself on the bandoneon and Horacio Ferrer as the reciter, alongside Amelita Baltar, Héctor De Rosas, and Piazzolla’s instrumental quintet. This document-recording⁶ served as the basis for my study. I must also mention the versions by *Kremerata Musica* with Gidon Kremer and Julia Zenko⁷, as well as the very recent staging at the *Grand Théâtre de Genève*, Switzerland⁸, featuring Marcelo Nisinman on the bandoneon. These were the main musical sources for this analysis.

Additionally, I had access to a piano reduction of the *operita* published by *Melos Ediciones Musicale* (Buenos Aires), which served as the basis for the following analyses.

In the following paragraphs, I will try to emphasize, scene by scene, the construction of the sections, the timbral combinations used by Piazzolla to create certain moods and emotions, and the musical dramaturgy that emerges from them.

Results

The chamber orchestra initially envisioned by Piazzolla for his new creation consisted of ten instrumentalists, to which the bandoneon, mastered by the composer himself, was added. In addition to the famous Piazzollian quintet (bandoneon, violin, guitar, piano, and double bass), the composer also added another violin, a viola, a cello, a flute, percussion, and vibraphone/xylophone⁹. In the following, I will not dwell on the structural form and harmonic progression as these have already been addressed by Ulrich Krämer mentioned earlier.

The construction of the *operita* is balanced, comprising two parts, each with eight “*cuadros*” and containing two instrumental sections in each act:

⁶ Îi datorăm accesul la acest “document” lui Gian Luigi Zampieri:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBm2waSqTHA>

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWscfiPSbmA&list=OLAK5uy_mpcMaYDL0n2T5deWb3o1IYuqW59h-rOx0&ab_channel=GidonKremer-Topic

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qtFS5Baz0A&ab_channel=ARTEConcert

⁹ The lineup of the entire ensemble of instrumentalists, singers, and narrator at the premiere can be reviewed in the biography of Maria Susana Azzi and Simon Collier, page 105, or on the YouTube link provided: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBm2waSqTHA>

1° Parte – First part

1 *Alevare*, 2 *Tema de Maria* (instrumental), 3 *Balada para un organito loco*, 3b *Yo soy Maria*, 4 *Milonga carriequera por Maria la Niña*, 5 *Fuga y misterio* (instrumental), 6 *Poema valseado*, 7 *Tocata rea*, 8 *Miserere canyenu de los ladrones antiguos en las alcantarillas*.

2° Parte – Second part

9 *Contramilonga a la funerala por la primera muerte de Maria*, 10 *Tangata del alba* (instrumental), 11 *Carta a los árboles y a las chimeneas*, 12 *Aria de los analistas*, 13 *Romanza del Duende poeta y curda*, 14 *Allegro Tangabile* (instrumental), 15 *Milonga de la Anunciación*, 16 *Tangus Dei*.

Initially resembling an overture, the first tableau – “*Alevare*”¹⁰ - introduces us to the midnight Buenos Aires, where later, *El Duende* will evoke the voice of Maria de Buenos Aires (“*Medianoche porteña. El duende evoca la imagen y conjura la voz de María de Buenos Aires*”). In a mystical atmosphere, *Lento y Místico*, in the key of A minor – “*en Ay minor*”¹¹ - and with a delicate nuance (*p*), the orchestral ensemble leads us through the city streets. The bass line follows a descending tetrachord (A-G-F-E), the same one that cyclically concludes the work, also present in the last measures of “*Tangus Dei*”. Specific instrumental techniques of Piazzolla’s music are present from the beginning: *arrastre*¹², *chicharra/lija* effects (“sandpaper”), *látigo-glissando*, *tambor* (“drum”), and *golpe de caja* (“hit on the box”)¹³, as well as clusters on the piano, etc. Gradually accumulating tension, the musical development reaches a climax in measure 25 (*ff*) where the flute takes over the melodic line, percussion - including the xylophone - providing further support to the discourse’s tension. Subsequently, after the dialogue between the flute and the bandoneon that calms the atmosphere, in measure 49, we are exposed for the first time to the theme of the well-known aria of Maria de Buenos Aires (from tableau 3b), in the delicate sound of the violin. The cello, with its warm timbre, brings a wonderful countermelody, creating an extremely suggestive and melancholic dialogue. The interpretative technique of the melodies is *fraseo*, a specific *rubato* of tango music that I will mention further in the following lines.

¹⁰ *Alevare* - *The beginning of a tango*

¹¹ From the fifth stanza of *El Duende*’s text in *Alevare*.

¹² *Arrastre* is that effect (mostly rhythmic) which anticipates the first beat with varied chromaticism - two, four, or five semiquavers, chords, *glissandos* or *cluster*.

¹³ In the article dated August 15, 2016, in *The Strad*, violinist Caroline Pearsall discusses various violinistic techniques for reproducing the effects in tango music. Additionally, Fernando Suarez Paz, the violinist from Piazzolla’s second quintet, mentions these in the film “*Astor Piazzolla in Portrait*”, directed by Mike Dibb. (See References).

Thus, the intervention of the reciter - *El Duende*¹⁴ - is prepared, calling Maria: "...yo habré de conjurar tu voz...Ahora que es la hora."¹⁵ In the violin discourse, the *chicharra* and *tambor* effects appear for the first time. Until the second return of Maria's aria theme (between measures 63-131), the discourse follows a pattern of 8 measures in which the reciter is accompanied by the orchestra, followed by another 4 purely instrumental measures. The dialogue between the reciter and the small orchestra has a sinuous contour, with ups and downs following the meaning of the text. In general, the reciter's interventions have an elegiac, melancholic tone, yet vibrant, while the instrumental replies are more vigorous. Towards the end of the first tableau, the theme of Maria's aria is reprised first in the flute discourse followed by the cello, and then the motif is taken over by the bandoneon, which will be complemented by the violin's countermelody. The discourse fades - *morendo*, *rallentando*, *ppp* - to make way for the central character: "*Ahora que es tu hora: Maria de Buenos Aires*"¹⁶.

In the second tableau - "Tema de Maria"¹⁷ - the main character makes her appearance at the call of *El Duende*. The fragment is instrumental, even though Maria intervenes with small wordless musical motifs accompanied by the guitar, everything having an improvisational aspect - *Trist y lento*, *rubato* (measures 1- 42). In the middle section, a very energetic tango representing Maria herself is brought forth - *Tempo di tango*. The fragment is masterfully adorned with counterpoint, consisting of 4 variations. The soloists are first the guitar, then the flute, the bandoneon, and, in a final firm exposition, in unison by the flute, violin, and bandoneon. Suddenly, the atmosphere calms down, Maria resumes her melancholic slow melody, but the end of the second scene brings a premonitory feeling through dissonances and descending chromatic progression (ultimately ending with a Picardian cadence - A major).

"*Balada para un organito loco*"¹⁸, the third tableau, is a wonderful pendulum between slow waltz and habanera. It is also a dialogue between the voice of *El Duende* - intervening to describe Maria's memory over the unfolding of the waltz, and the voice of a *Payador*¹⁹ followed by *Voces de los hombres que volvieron del misterio*²⁰ - singing to the rhythm of the habanera. The accompaniment of the habanera is also that of the next aria of Maria

¹⁴ In Spanish folklore, "*El Duende*" is a spirit with a humanoid figure, resembling a dwarf or gnome.

¹⁵ *I shall call up your voice...now that the time has come.*

¹⁶ *Now that your time has come: Maria de Buenos Aires.*

¹⁷ *Theme of Maria.*

¹⁸ *Ballad for a crazy barrel organ.*

¹⁹ Gaucho itinerant singer.

²⁰ *Voices of men who returned from mystery.*

(*Yo soy María*), later noted as tableau 3b²¹. With each return of the waltz or habanera, the orchestration is changed. For example, I note the timbral variations of the waltz where the melodies are attributed in turn to the flute, the bandoneon bringing numerous improvisations, the vibraphone, and again, the flute. In the end, *El Duende* and the voice of the Payador overlap on the waltz rhythm, the verse “*de olvido eres entre todas mujeres*”²², allusion to the Virgin Mary, repeated insistently, announcing Maria’s aria, the central moment of the operita.

Maria’s passionate aria - *Yo soy María*, yet another Piazzollian masterpiece, represents the tangos, the city in which it was born as Ferrer underlines (*Yo soy María de Buenos Aires! De Buenos Aires María, yo soy mi ciudad! María tango, María del arrabal! María noche, María pasión fatal! María del amor! De Buenos Aires soy yo!*²³).

E.g. 1



Astor Piazzolla, *María de Buenos Aires*, *Alevare*, ms. 49-56

The ascending modulations from semitone to semitone (A minor, B-flat minor, and B minor) and the increasingly complex orchestration gradually build up the musical dramaturgy of the aria, accumulating energy and reaching a climax towards the end of Maria’s song.

Tableau 4 – “*Milonga carriequera por María la Niña*”²⁴ - evokes the story of Maria’s life through the voice of a “*Porteño gorrión con sueño*”²⁵, the text reminiscent of the Argentine poet Evaristo Carriega. This “*Porteño gorrión*” predicts that Maria will leave for the center of the great city of Buenos Aires. The musical unfolding is slow (*milonga lenta*), in a peaceful atmosphere and again in a minor key (E minor), with continuous guitar accompaniment and melodic insertions of the violin.

²¹ The famous aria of Maria - “*Yo soy María*” (*I am Maria*) - was not originally present at this point in the narrative. However, it appears at the end (Tableau 15) titled “*Milonga de la Anunciacion*”, but with different lyrics.

²² *Forgotten art thou amongs all women.*

²³ *I am María of Buenos Aires! Of Buenos Aires María, I am my city! María tango, slum María, María night, María fatal passion, María of love! Of Buenos Aires, that’s me!*

²⁴ *Milonga for the child Maria (in the style of Evaristo Carriega).*

²⁵ *Sleepy Buenos Aires sparrow.* In *lunfardo* “the sparrow” embodies unfavorable characteristics or intentions.

In the following tableau – “*Fuga y misterio*”²⁶ – the prediction materializes, Maria leaving the places where she grew up, being drawn to the great city she traverses as if hypnotized, at night, in silence (the section is instrumental). I will not dwell on the remarkable construction of the fugue as this has been addressed in other research (see Ulrich Krämer’s extremely pertinent analysis). However, I will once again emphasize Piazzolla’s compositional and orchestrational talent, as well as his imagination as the creator of the *Nuevo Tango* movement. Each of the 4 interventions of the theme within the Exposition gradually introduces ingeniously blended countersubjects into the polyphonic discourse.

E.g. 2



Astor Piazzolla, *Maria de Buenos Aires, Fuga y Misterio*, ms. 1-8

Each new appearance of the theme can be a new character encountered by Maria on the streets of Buenos Aires, everything merging and culminating with a small development - in measure 49 - when percussion intervenes for an enhanced effect. It’s all frenzy, uncontrollable passion, the tumult of the city. In measure 65, the theme is brought forth for the last time in unison, after which everything suddenly calms down, giving way to mystery (*Fuga y misterio - Lento*) and the next tableau – the sixth: “*Poema valseado*”²⁷.

Corrupted by a bandoneon, Maria unfolds her sorrows in a slow waltz where she recites and sings a melody with a simple contour, with small “steps” - from semitone to semitone, bringing a sense of resignation. The instrumental interventions are delicate, with the flute and violins dialoguing with Maria and sharing in her pains.

El Duende, the narrator uninvolved in the unfolding action up to this point, intervenes in the intrigue in the next tableau, the seventh – “*Tocata rea*”²⁸. After an improvisational introduction by the bandoneon, the narrator begins

²⁶ Fuga and mystery.

²⁷ Waltzed Poem.

²⁸ Lowlife toccata.

his accusatory discourse, accumulating more and more fury and despair, especially starting from measure 17 where the toccata makes its presence felt. The instrumental dissonances and syncopated rhythm – reminiscent of Stravinsky - convey the growing anger and desperation of *El Duende*, reaching a climax in measures 49 – 53. For a brief moment, over a bandoneon improvisation, Piazzolla abruptly changes the tone (*Lento y dulce*) when the narrator refers to Maria, accusing “*patota de sardos bandoneones*”²⁹ of her murder. However, the rhythm of the toccata returns in the almost grotesque interpretation of the entire orchestra when *El Duende* seeks revenge and destroys the bandoneon (“*con un verso en punta de hacha..te voy a hacer un tajo triunfal*”³⁰).

The last tableau of the first part, “*Miserere canyenué*”³¹, introduces us to a dark atmosphere – *Lento y misterioso* - through tremolo effects and orchestral dissonances. The Voices of the brothel keepers (*Voces de madamas*) and The old thieves (*Voces de ladrones antiguos*) are accompanied by a constant, repetitive, almost monotonous procession of the instrumentalists. In contrast, the sung interventions of *Ladron antiguo mayor* (The Chief Old Thief) are full of melodiousness and expressiveness. His third intervention is even accompanied by a superb improvisational pianistic fragment, *ad libitum* and *fraseado*. Towards the end, Maria’s theme from the second tableau is reiterated, hummed by the main character and overlaid with the recited text of the choirs. In closing the first part of the *operita*, *Ladron antiguo mayor* resumes his opening melody from the tableau, accompanied discreetly by the guitar, and condemns Maria for her shadow to haunt her other hell (*a su otro infierno*). The choir voices confirm that Maria has died.

The second part of the *operita Maria de Buenos Aires* begins with “*Contramilonga a la funerala*”³² where *El Duende* recounts in detail how Maria’s funeral unfolded. The accompaniment from the habanera of the third tableau – the same one from the aria “*Yo soy Maria*” – opens this section, which throughout carries an elegiac, melancholic atmosphere. Ulrich Krämer even identifies here – as well as in other tableaux – the famous theme from “*Adios Nonino*”³³. A brief moment of hope - or perhaps just the memory of

²⁹ “Gang of rogue bandoneons”.

³⁰ “With a verse on an axe blade...I’ll slash you triumphantly”.

³¹ Canyengue Miserere.

³² *A black-eyed countermilonga for the first death of Maria.*

³³ About this important Piazzollian work, I undertook another extensive research project that has not yet been published (*Astor Piazzolla’s Compositional and Interpretive Styling of His Tango Adiós Nonino across Four Decades of His Career – Insights into the Emergence of Nuevo Tango*). However, even in his article, Krämer makes detailed references to the *Nonino* theme and its presence within the *operita Maria de Buenos Aires*.

the beloved being's image - is brought with the modulation to the homonymous major (A major) in measure 47, yet the tone remains melancholic. In this tableau, we also learn that Maria was pregnant when she died.

"*Tangata del Alba*"³⁴, again an instrumental section, highlights the orchestra through a *Nuevo tango* specific to Piazzolla. At this moment, Maria's shadow wanders lost through the hustle and bustle of the great city, described musically through energetic, even violent rhythms, multiple dissonances, chromatic descending tremolos, the presence of percussion, etc. Amidst all this urban agitation, there are only two brief moments of calm and reflection. First in the measures 26 – 52 where, through another perfectly crafted contrapuntal dressing, the violin and cello render through their expressive timbre two melodic lines that blend organically, and second in measures 105 -116.

Tableau 11 presents us with Maria's shadow's letter to the trees and chimneys in her neighborhood ("*A los arboles y a las chimeneas*"³⁵). Still confused, our heroine sings her pains on another slow waltz that creates a *Musical*-like sound through harmonic combinations and orchestration. As in "*Poema valseado*", Piazzolla invents musical motifs built from small steps, using many semitones ascending and then descending, inducing a state of searching, wandering, uncertainty.

In her wandering, Maria's shadow also encounters the circus of psychoanalysts – "*Aria de los analistas*"³⁶, a moment in which, with the help of the *Analista primero* (First Analyst), she engages in a memory recall exercise of memories she never actually had. It is a very extensive tableau within the *operita*. At its onset, Piazzolla introduces two dances: a *polka* and a *malambo*³⁷, which bring a burlesque tone to the discourse, seemingly ironic towards this chorus of psychoanalysts. It is also among the few brighter moments in the entire work. What is impressive later on is the reiteration of the second theme from "*Adios Nonino*"³⁸, which appears until the end in the duet of the *Analista primero* with Maria, but each time with varied melody and timbre.

³⁴ *Tangata at dawn.*

³⁵ *A letter to the trees and the chimneys.*

³⁶ *Aria of the psychoanalysts.* This is an allusion to the fact that the country has the highest number of psychologists per capita in the world.

³⁷ Argentine folk dance associated with *gauchos*.

³⁸ See note 33.



Astor Piazzolla, Adios Nonino, ms. 21-28

The next tableau – “*Romanza del Duende*”³⁹ – presents the narrator, now fully involved in the events. Together with *Tres marionetas borrachas de cosas* (Three marionettes drunk on things), they decide to help in Maria’s rebirth. The section is almost entirely dedicated to the piano, to which the composer attributes an extremely sensitive, improvisatory discourse with jazz influences and *fraseo/rubato* phrasing. Once again, the second theme from “*Adios Nonino*” is mentioned – measure 111. As mentioned earlier, Ulrich Krämer finds a similarity between *El Duende* and the composer himself: “Could it be that with his famous theme, Piazzolla recalled his own affliction for his lost identity as a tango composer before becoming a student of Nadia Boulanger?”⁴⁰ The last measures of the tableau bring another Piazzollian musical quote, namely the ending from “*Invierno Porteño*” from *Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas*, *El Duende*’s discourse concluding on an optimistic note.

In the final instrumental section, tableau 14 “*Allegro tangabile*”, the three marionettes flee desperately through the streets of Buenos Aires “*looking for the seed of a child for the Shadow of Maria*”. It is another lesson in contrapuntal writing in the *Nuevo tango* style, with effects of *golpe de cajalhit on the box*” (on the bandoneon and piano) and incorporated percussion enlivening the discourse. Built on an ostinato rhythmic-melodic formula, it is also a moment of instrumental virtuosity, overflowing with energy.

“*Milonga de la Anunciacion*”⁴¹ is a musical reiteration of the aria “*Yo soy Maria*”, described earlier⁴². However, the text is different, representing the moment when Maria accepts the miracle of fertility, the verses making clear

³⁹ *Romance of the drunken poet Duende*.

⁴⁰ Krämer, Ulrich, p. 51.

⁴¹ *Milonga of the Annunciation*.

⁴² See Note 21.

allusions to the Virgin Mary: “*de una sola ternura a Dios puedo parir/with only one bit of tenderness I can give birth to God*”. I have discussed the musical dramaturgy of the aria above, in the presentation of tableau 3b.

The last tableau, the largest in the entire work – “*Tangus Dei*”, is an obvious allusion to the *Agnus Dei* prayer in Christian liturgies and to the meaning of the Latin words: *The Lamb of God*. At this point in the action, the dialogue is complex, taking place between several characters: *El Duende*, *Una voz de Ese Domingo/A voice of that Sunday*, *Voces de las amasadoras de talarines/Voices of the spaghetti kneaders*, and *Voces de tres albañiles magos/Voices of the three magi-masons*. We learn that Maria gives birth to a child, but the choirs announce that it is not the child Jesus as suggested earlier, but another Maria. The unanswered question remains: is it the reborn Maria or another Maria?

The tableau opens in a mystical atmosphere – “*Mistico y lento*”, with a piano motif in the low register that seems to mimic someone’s steps. Gradually, the bandoneon, *una voz de Ese Domingo*, and then *El Duende* intervene, delivering their spoken lines in succession. The orchestration is very economical: only the steady, repetitive accompaniment in the low register, over which is superimposed a simple, almost static melody with large note values, played by the bandoneon, then joined in a duet by the flute and later by the cello. The atmosphere is mysterious and premonitory. From measure 57, the rhythm becomes animated, the tension rises following the characters’ narratives, the musical dramaturgy being built from five sections ascending tonally by semitone (E minor, F minor, F# minor, G minor, G# minor, and A minor). Each subsection brings timbral variations (*pizzicato*, *chicharra/lijja* - ‘sandpaper’, *látigo-glissando*), rhythmic variations (syncopations), agogic variations (*mf*, *f*, *ff*, *sf*). In the conclusion of the *operita*, Piazzolla introduces a tango in which he inserts *Tema de Maria* (from the end of the second tableau). The discourse dissolves, the musical writing simplifies, and Maria’s voice intervenes humming, overlapping with the narratives of the other characters. The story concludes with the double bass in the low register playing that descending tetrachord from the beginning of the work (A-G-F-E) to which gong and bell sounds are added.

Conclusion

Therefore, after this research endeavor into Piazzolla’s score, it is evident that *Maria de Buenos Aires* is an important lesson in composition and orchestration, as well as a model of musical dramaturgy construction, which I would even call a masterpiece due to its complexity and originality.

As I have observed, in addition to the diversity of dances used in the architecture of its tableaux - tangos, habanera, milonga, as well as waltzes, polka, or a malambo, Piazzolla also added a fugue, a toccata, and, in general, much counterpoint. Moreover, alongside the typical tango instrumental ensemble - bandoneon, piano, violin, acoustic guitar, or flute, the composer added the electric guitar, percussion, vibraphone, or xylophone to bring a dynamic, agogic, affective contribution to the musical dramaturgy. All these elements related to the musical architecture of the performance merge with the poetic text of Ferrer and give rise to a complex show that invites reflection. Although Piazzolla initially aimed to create a syncretic work (like *West Side Story* perhaps), what resulted is difficult to fit into a single genre. It has specific elements of both oratorio and cantata, as well as musical theater or opera. Piazzolla mentioned it like a little work – *obrita* – *operita*. However, there is no need to pigeonhole it into a certain pattern, if the artistic message reaches the audience and conveys emotions.

Astor Piazzolla's collaboration with Horacio Ferrer was very inspired, long-lasting, and highly productive. Besides dozens of songs created together, I must mention "*Balada para un loco/Ballad for a madman*" or "*Chiquilín de Bachin/Bachin Lad*," true hits of those years. And even though the production of the *operita* nearly bankrupted the composer, as he himself recounted, he preferred "*to be broke with Maria de Buenos Aires than to have done some garbage.*"⁴³

"*María de Buenos Aires*" "assumes a special position within the work of the *Tango Nuevo* creator; it becomes not only his most ambitious composition but also, by virtue of its autobiographical significance, his most personal work."⁴⁴

Personally, I discovered Astor Piazzolla many years ago interpreting his compositions in a quintet. Since then, with each new listening or performance, I have discovered the complexity of his music. In the hope that I have aroused interest in this work and that I have managed to lift the veil of mystery that may surround it, I leave the path open for further research. *Maria de Buenos Aires* is truly a source of inspiration for instrumentalists, singers, composers, orchestrators, or musicologists, as well as for actors, directors, choreographers, and poets.

⁴³ See Azzi&Colier, p. 108.

⁴⁴ Krämer, Ulrich, p. 51.

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