IT TAKES TWO: THE JEWS AND THE ARGENTINIAN TANGO

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Sacred Music

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New York, New York
2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am blessed to have found the guidance of many teachers, and the support of many friends in researching, writing, and completing this thesis. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my academic and thesis advisor Dr. Lillian M. Wohl, whose intelligence, generosity and support helped me along every step of the thesis process. Her knowledge of this topic has been a huge contribution to my own study. I would also like to thank Dr. Mark Kligman for helping me in the initial development stage of my research, and for his overall support of the cantorial students of the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music. Thank you to Joyce Rosenzweig and Ivan Barenboim for their consistent musical inspiration and for their help with the details of this topic. I am also very appreciative to the entire faculty and administrative staff of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion for their support of the students.

I am very grateful to the people I had the chance to interview as part of researching this topic who bring the tango to life through their own work: Marina and Jake Moskowitz, Cantor Ramon Tasat, Cantor Gaston Bogomolni, Cantor Robert Abelson and Zully Goldfarb. I am also indebted to the work of Lloica Czackis who laid the foundation for modern Yiddish tango scholarship.

Thank you to my family, Maya, Yakov and Victoria for their endless support, love and encouragement. Finally, thank you to my wife, Elle Muhlbaum, who is a constant source of love, creativity, humor and inspiration.

ABSTRACT

This thesis chronicles the tango through its poetry, music, history and the dance, seeking to observe not only the role played by the Jewish community in its history but also the role tango itself played in the Jewish diasporic experience. I will observe the participation of Jews in the formation of tango as a musical genre, and I will also review the Jewish klezmer music that I theorize influenced the tango in its development in Argentina, Uruguay and in Europe.

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries saw the mass emigration of East and Central European Jews to the New World as they fled pogroms and later the catastrophe of World War II. We are perhaps familiar with the history of Jewish emigration to New York and other North American cities, but may know little about Jewish emigration during this period to Latin America, most notably, to Argentina. Many prominent Jewish musicians settled in Argentina during these times, some of them finding a place in the brothels of Buenos Aires, others in the film industry and musical theaters and many more finding employment in tango orchestras.

This thesis will focus on some of Argentina's most significant Jewish musicians and it will also address the development of Argentinian tango music in Europe, especially in France, England, Poland and Russia. I will also offer an account of the tangos composed in Europe leading up to and during World War II, where Jewish and Yiddish tangos took on a prominent role as defiant death dances in both ghettos and in the concentration camps.

I will chronicle the use of the tango as a genre in American Musical Theater as created by Jewish-American composers. Additionally, this thesis will review the role that Jews had in the creation of *Nuevo Tango* and chronicle the use of tango in different Jewish communities of the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION – "INTRINSICALLY JEWISH"

Tango del Barrio, a popular Cincinnati dance and social club, touts itself as "Cincinnati's premier Argentine Tango venue,"[1] on its minimalist website. It inhabits a lively block of eclectic Northside, a historic neighborhood of Cincinnati that has recently become known for its diverse restaurant and boutique store options. Since its inception in 2003, Tango del Barrio has grown into a central gathering place for local tango lovers. It's a welcoming community of dancers and friends devoted to sharing the spirit and intrigues of Argentine tango. The owners of this dance studio, Marina and Jake Moskowitz, are not professional dancers – they are, what they lovingly describe themselves as, "lovers of the tango." They discovered the dance twenty years ago, and it "changed their life."[2] After immigrating to the United States from Ukraine, they worked professionally in the information technology sector as an engineer and a computer programmer, respectively. They stumbled onto the tango accidentally, after an unsuccessful salsa experience left them wanting more. "When we took the tango lesson, it touched my soul in a way that nothing else had touched me before," Marina explains. "There was also something intrinsically Jewish about it and it felt right, it felt as if we are connecting to our past, to our present and to our future," adds her husband, Jake.

Intoxicating passion, in step with the unbreakable embrace of a strong partner. Entangled silhouettes gliding in synchronicity across the floor to the unyielding and hypnotic tempo of the bandoneón, a free-reed wind instrument, which has a similar sound to the accordion. Each seductive glance, caress and footstep tells the story of love lost, love found, passion, a bygone time, of melancholy. This is the Argentinian tango. Sensuous and sophisticated, the tango is a

[1] http://tangodelbarrio.com (Accessed 28 July, 2015)
[2] Moskowitz Interview, (29 July, 2015)

feeling that one can only move to, as described by dancers, poets and music-lovers. Tango is a story channeled through the flick of a leg, the tug of a hand, the tap of a foot, and the arch of an eyebrow. It is passionate, yet melancholic. It is music, drama, culture, and a way of life.

From the moment that I first heard the tango as a teenager, I was hooked by its passion, lyricism and beauty. And from that moment to today, I, much like Marina and Jake Moskowitz, have always felt something intrinsically Jewish about the haunting and rhythmic melodies of the tango.

The relationship between tango and Eastern European Jewish music, specifically, klezmer music, may initially seem to be a loose one at best, but my experience and research with both categories has led me to believe otherwise. The two genres are not only similar in their historical development; their musical nuances seem to be undoubtedly linked.

In listening to endless samples of tango music, my Jewish-trained ear as a cantorial student in the American Reform Movement has identified numerous overlaps that signify a clear cultural exchange between Latin American culture and East European Jewish culture. This thesis will explore the fusion of music and culture in the period between 1850 and 2015, in an attempt to explain what I believe to be one of the richest yet most unobserved musical collaborations in history.

The concept of musical amalgamation is certainly not a new concept. In fact, I anticipate the questions: Why is the musical fusion of tango and Jewish culture unique? Why is the musical combination of tango and Jewish music important? What makes this grouping unique is not the blending of rhythms, harmonies, and ornamentations. Rather, it is the idea that Jewish culture influenced tango during the heart of tango's most rapid evolution. The timing is purely coincidental, but the implications are striking. Had Jews and other immigrants arrived in

Argentina at the end of tango's early years, their influence might have been limited to lyric-writing and instrumental performances. But given their arrival at the beginning of this period immigrants influenced more than a few outwardly obvious musical elements—they influenced the tango's soul.

While identifying musical "feeling" is subjective, the emotional link between tango and Eastern European Jewish music is apparent: both genres express plight associated with poverty, politics, and personal relationships. In an absence of Jews, it is entirely possible that tango might still have evolved into the sentimental genre it is today. Argentina's history certainly provides much inspiration for lamenting music. Nonetheless, I believe that immigrant groups with their own painful stories *must* be credited for their contributions to the grief and angst central to tango.

This thesis seeks to observe, chronicle and give voice to the Jewish contributions to the development of Argentinian tango in its music, poetic and dance developments and, equally its effects on Jewish culture and music after it became a popular musical style.

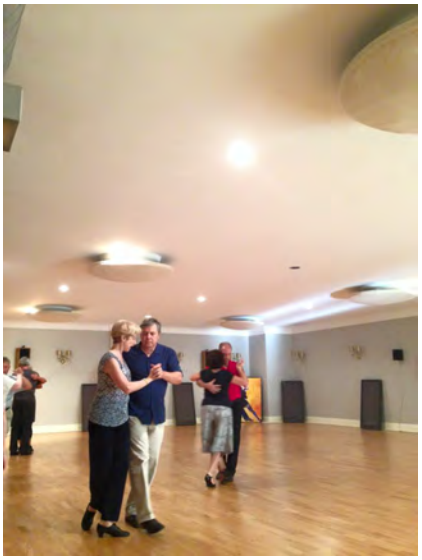

Figure 1: Dancers practicing moves at Cincinnati's Tango del Barrio Dance Club. (Photo credit: Vladimir Lapin).

CHAPTER I (1880–1920)

1. THE NEW WORLD

To fully explore the relationship between tango and Jewish music, it is first necessary to answer four essential questions. What caused the mass emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe in the late 1800s to early 1900s? Why did so many of these Jews gravitate towards settlement in Argentina? How did these Jews fit into the social and political realms of Argentine society? What systems of music and culture were already in place in Argentina that helped in the development of the tango?

While there seems to be limited research regarding the Jewish relationship to tango, cultural history suggests that a cultural fusion between East European Jews and the Argentine population is a feasible possibility. The end of the nineteenth century marks an intensely dark period in East European Jewish history. As poverty soared to all time-highs, lower-class citizens (many of whom were Jews) suffered both economically and emotionally. Emotions, however, were of little concern to Eastern European governments which sought to eliminate "economic upheaval and social and political struggle" (Elkin 1998; 54). Economic healing quickly became synonymous with "ethnic cleansing" as these governments introduced brutal pogroms to eliminate the Jewish population, which was seen as problematic by the officials. These pogroms were perhaps most severe in Russia where the May Laws (instituted in 1882) forced the confinement of Russian Jews to limited villages (Elkin 1998; 59).

Now lacking any semblance of home or belonging, displaced Jews began to flee over the Russian border to Germany where they were protected by Jewish relief organizations and smuggled out of Europe to the New World. Between 1880 and 1900, half a million Jews

immigrated to the United States while thousands of others fled to countries in Latin America (Elkin 1998; 54–55).

In August of 1889, the USS Wesser docked in the port of Buenos Aires. On board the vessel were eight hundred and twenty-four Jews (Judkovski 1998; 15). Jews could have fled to anywhere in Latin America, but Argentina accepted more Jews than any other Latin American country. Argentina was difficult for immigrants to get to, the government did not offer free land, and a tumultuous past of religious intolerance discouraged many potential settlers. So why the influx of Jews?

After gaining independence in 1816, Argentina struggled with population growth and development of trade. In an attempt to energize the Argentine economy, politicians decided to market Argentina to white Europeans whom they thought would make the country more productive and attractive for business and trade. Open immigration laws that stressed the "benefits of citizenship without the obligations" were soon enacted (Weisbrot 1979; 26).

For Jews seeking a safe haven from the pogroms, safety guaranteed by law (not necessarily a community of other Jews), was of the utmost importance. Argentina allowed Jews to immigrate there. Unfortunately, Jews met a difficult transition from life in Eastern Europe to life in Argentina. Upon their arrival in Argentina, the Jews settled on the outskirts of town in the *arrabal* ghettos along with their fellow immigrants. Jews who emigrated from Eastern Europe to escape the pogroms were once again segmented off from the rest of society. In addition, Argentine media and society in general were quite unfavorable to the new wave of immigrants.

La Nacíon, one of Argentina's main newspapers, openly opposed the recruitment of Jews into the country. The anti-Semitic novel, *La Bolsa*, by Julían Martel, similarly lamented the arrival of the new immigrants (Elkin 1998; 57).

By the 1909 census, Argentina was home to just under 50,000 Jews (Elkin 1998; 58). As a contrast, by 1936, the Jewish population of Buenos Aires had skyrocketed to about 73,500. The majority of the Jews first arriving were *ashkenazim* from Russia (referred to as "rusos"), accompanied by *sephardim* from Spain, Portugal, Syria, and Lebanon (Weisbrot 1979; 71). A majority of these Jewish immigrants to Argentina were proletariat workers. And, in contrast to their Italian and Spanish immigrant counterparts, Jewish immigrants as a whole possessed more industrial skills (Elkin 1998; 59). As historian Judith Elkin writes, "the fate of this Jewish proletariat would largely be a function of the capacity of the Argentine economy to absorb them into productive occupations." (ibid.) The business that absorbed them most rapidly was prostitution, and tango was the music that was slowly being formed within the houses of this industry.

Figure 2: European immigrants arriving at the Port of Buenos Aires, 1904 (Bibliotheque National de France)

2. DANCE OF ILL REPUTE

Many historians attribute that the tango originated in Argentine society's underbelly: the brothels and saloons in the slums Buenos Aires. As immigrants from Europe, Africa, and ports unknown streamed into the outskirts of the city many chose to visit or work at the brothels and bordellos or "houses of ill repute" (Thompson 2005; 7). The tango dance originated as an "acting out" of the relationship between the prostitute and her pimp.[3] In fact, the titles of the first tangos referred to characters in the world of prostitution and were considered very obscene by society of the time. Some researchers attribute the dance as something that occurred between two men who were either waiting for a prostitute to arrive or in order to showcase their strength and attractiveness to the female (Davis, Queering Tango 2015; 131).

The proliferation of prostitution in Buenos Aires between 1890 and 1910 is not at all surprising given the gender and socioeconomic composition of the city. As historian Donna Guy explains, "the excess of males in Buenos Aires made it an exceptional city in Argentina and explained its attractiveness to immigrant and creole females. Poor women might find work entertaining immigrant bachelors and native-born males who sought illicit sexual congress" (Guy 1991; 42).

The development of the prostitution business in Buenos Aires was two-fold: Buenos Aires was teeming with young, single male immigrants willing to pay for sexual contact and equally poor women searching for lucrative jobs. The forces of supply and demand rapidly shaped the prostitution market of the city.

The promise of financial gains attracted many marginalized people to prostitution, but

[3] Arthur Murray Mesa Interview transcript, http://www.arthurmurraymesa.com/thetango. (Accessed 11 December, 2015).

Jews, perhaps the poorest of the poor given their outside status, were drawn in most closely.

By 1909, 102 of the 199 licensed brothels in Buenos Aires were run by Jews (Weisbrot 1979; 60). In many cases, it was the Jewish male community that were forcing Jewish women into prostitution as part of the organized crime business. According to Guy, "of all Latin American cities, Buenos Aires was cited as a haven for prostitution because it had a system of municipally regulated prostitution from 1875 until 1936, when a national law, the Law of Social Prophylaxis, outlawed brothels throughout Argentina" (Guy 1991; 163).

Jewish involvement in prostitution business did not go unnoticed. In fact, the phenomenon was so widely recognized that Argentine Jews as a whole gained a negative reputation. As punishment for their behavior, Jewish traffickers and prostitutes were banned from institutions like theaters and denied proper burials (ibid.). Perhaps most interesting is the fact that Jews themselves spearheaded efforts to keep Jews away from prostitution in an attempt to avoid embarrassment. Alas, these efforts actually increased the visibility of Jewish prostitution. (ibid.) As Guy states, prostitution was "viewed as proof of the immorality of all Jews in Buenos Aires." (ibid.)

Argentina's government unofficially condoned prostitution from the 1860s to the 1940s because of the massive profits the state received from the brothels' taxes.[4] According to Argentinian professor Elsa Drucaroff, "[prostitution] was a voluntary policy decision of the Argentine state. It was not just allowed, but encouraged. Argentina was a Catholic state, but it believed that prostitution was a necessary evil that protected good women, families, and the gender order,"[5] Corruption and state profit prevented the closing and regulation of brothels.

[4] Elsa Drucaroff, Swarthmore Presentation, http://daily.swarthmore.edu/2007/11/27/drucaroff-lectures-on-plight-of-jewish-prostitutes-in-argentina/ (Accessed 12 December, 2015).
[5] ibid.

Prostitution was a very important source of money. In fact, brothels paid lots of taxes to the city. Twenty-five percent of the state's money in 1920 came from brothel taxes.[6]

Zwi Migdal, a notorious Jewish-Argentinian association of gangsters and pimps, was especially infamous given its dealings in prostitution and human trafficking in Argentina and Europe. Zwi Migdal lured impoverished Jewish European women to work in Argentina's brothels promising them better living conditions and money. According to Drucaroff, Zwi Migdal paid for travels of its members to Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe to look for disempowered young women living in miserable places, and once lured to Argentina, they were immediately sent to work illegally in the bordellos of Buenos Aires.[7] Zwi Migdal was founded in 1906 and flourished until the early 1940s, when travel to Europe was impossible because of World War II.

As stated in the beginning of this section, many historians agree that the Argentinian tango was born out of the bordellos and brothels of Buenos Aires. One of the most visible proponents of this theory was Jorge Luis Borges (1899 – 1986), a prominent Argentine writer, essayist, historian and poet who lived in Buenos Aires his entire life. In an article on the history of the tango, based around the lascivious nature of the dance and some obscene titles of some tangos, he proposed the chief theory of tango's brothel origins. He maintained emphatically throughout his life—arguably one of the major reasons that this theory is accepted by so many—that tango's origins were in the brothels (Thompson 2005; 39). In Borges' 1930 biography about Argentinian poet Evaristo Carriego, he expands upon the different theories about the origins of the tango but concludes that the tango, did indeed start in the brothels. He writes:

Despite the divergences that I have enumerated and that would be easy to increase by

[6] ibid.
[7] ibid.

> interrogating inhabitants of the cities of La Plata and Rosario, my informants concur on one essential fact: the tango originated in the brothels (Delgado and Munoz 1997; 158).

An additional influential supporter of the theory that the tango originated in the brothels was Horacio Salas, an influential Argentinian literary critic, poet and author. In his book *El Tango* he writes:

> The place where tango was usually danced and developed as a musical form and a dance, was in the brothel. In the large patios or halls of these prostitution houses, as complement to the main activity the women danced with the clients. The tango at first was danced separately like the candombes; later the dancers came together and transformed the dance into one for partners intertwined, preferably men; thus it passed into the brothels (ibid.; 159).

Despite the social anxieties that existed outside the bordellos between Jews, gentiles, and other ethnic communities, the groups quietly worked inside the brothels and prostitution remained an extremely lucrative business. In fact, Argentine gentile elites were among those who spent the most time in the bordellos. For the wealthy Argentine families, the bordellos provided a local colorful escape where religion and social class were forgotten.

The mixture of characters in the brothels sets the stage for an inevitable cultural fusion between Jewish music, culture, tango music and dance. As the tango developed and made its way outside of the brothels, the sound began to change. This was attributed to the export of the tango to more acceptable locations and outside of Argentina. With the arrival of the bandoneón from Germany (more on this instrument in the next chapters), a new sound and new lyrics became in the forefront. The new lyrics began recalling bygone times, often with a sad, melancholia, evoking wasted lives, lost loves, unrequited love, the missing of a mother, the missing of *barrios* (neighborhoods or streets) and most all, the love of the tango itself. And, so the tango began to come out from the underbelly and into the public sphere of Buenos Aires and the world.

3. CULTURAL BLEND

The East European Jewish music that was present throughout this time in Argentina is characterized as klezmer in its style and sound by musicologists and historians. Klezmer music developed in the impoverished Jewish "shtetls," or ghettos, of Eastern Europe during the late 1800s to early 1900s. The music itself is extremely passionate and recognizable in its tonalities, rhythms, and cantorial-sounding cadences as it is meant to express the sorrows and joys of the common man. It is thus fitting that klezmer was played at almost every event in the shtetls from weddings to funerals to the traditional circumcision. In *The Book of Klezmer*, ethnomusicologist Yale Strom writes, "it was said that a wedding without klezmer was worse than a funeral without tears" (Strom 2002; xiv, Intro). Klezmer music, while incredibly popular, was rarely transcribed (Sapoznik 1999; 9). Thus the extensive repertoire of improvised tunes was passed on aurally from generation to generation.

As the etymology of the word "klezmer" would suggest – the word is actually derived from two words, *kley* meaning vessel and *zemer* meaning song. (Sapoznik 1999; x). Klezmer musicians or "klezmorim" were literally "vessels of song," who kept the klezmer tradition alive. Just as klezmer was born in the shtetls of Eastern Europe, tango developed in the streets of the *arrabal* ghettos of Buenos Aires and, as noted in the previous chapter, was advanced in the city's brothels, bordellos and dance halls in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Many historians believe that before klezmer and polka arrived in Latin America, tango's most prominent influence was that of African culture, and undoubtedly, African musical features such as syncopated rhythms are the rhythms that created tango as we know it today.

Argentina was colonized by Spain in 1542, and from the late 1600s to the early 1800s,

tens of thousands of African slaves were transported to Montevideo, mostly from the Bantu area, from Sub-Saharan Africa, before being sold in Buenos Aires, Paraguay and Brazil. (Thompson 2005; 5) Many of these men and women who arrived in poor health and could not be sold were left in quarantined sections on the outskirts of the city. Those who survived formed new communities called *kilombos* and maintained their cultural traditions, particularly in terms of music and dancing.

"Candómbe" is the term used to describe, in turn, the music played with drums, the dance, and the place where the congregations gathered to play, listen and dance to candómbe music. Those slaves used the word "tangó" both for the drum used to perform the candómbe, the place at which they performed the music, and the dances themselves (Manning 2007; 39).

Before the tango became established as its own genre, there was a form called the "milonga," which was a type of song and dance style that had a faster tempo than the tango and was usually in duple meter, but encouraged more relaxation in the bodies of the dancers. They were typically social songs and dances that were performed at community or private gatherings, *pulperias*, and brothels.[8] African influence was also present with its asymmetric beats, syncopations and unusual accents. The rhythm attributed to the milonga is a dotted eighth-sixteenth-note rhythm in duple meter. (See figure on following page.)

[8] *Pulperias* were a type of rural grocery store that also functioned as drinking establishments and social centers for the lower classes.

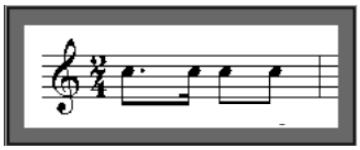

Figure 3: Basic milonga rhythm

While the milonga still exists in certain Latin American countries, it paved the way for its much more popular successor, the tango. This is regarded as one of the most important musical transformations in Argentinian history (Brill 2011; 352).

In Spanish speaking Latin America, the word "tango" slowly came to be applied to black dances in general – and eventually to the modern Argentinian tango (ibid.; 361) The *Real Academia Española* (Royal Spanish Academy), which is the official organization responsible for regulating the Spanish language defined tango in its 1899 edition as a "fiesta and dance of negroes or *gente del pueblo* [those that belong to lower socio-economical class] in America."[9] In 1803, tango was defined as a variant of *tángano*, which meant a bone or rock used to play the game bearing the same name. In the 1925 edition, this definition was changed to "dance of high society, imported from America at the beginning of this century" as well as "music for this dance" and "drum of Honduras" (ibid.). It was not until 1984 that tango was officially defined as an Argentinean dance.

[9] Real Academia Espanola (RAE), http://www.rae.es (Accessed 19 December 2014).

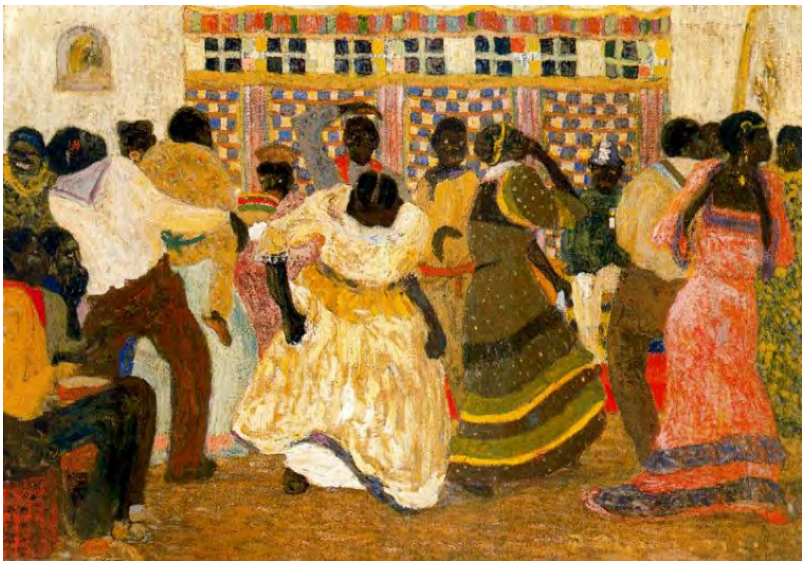

Figure 4: An oil painting of Pedro Figari (1861-1938) depicting African Candombe dancers in Montevideo (Constantini Collection, Buenos Aires)

The tango went through many alterations and can be divided into three distinctive periods:

1. ***Guardia Vieja*** (old guard), which started from tango's origins and lasted until 1920.
2. ***Guardia Nueva*** between 1920-1955 (dominated by singer/actor Carlos Gardel).
3. ***Nuevo Tango***, which began after 1955 and was led by Astor Piazzolla.

Being of the first generation of tango, the Guardia Vieja was associated with the lower classes, gangsters, pimps and prostitutes. For this reason, Argentinians of the middle and upper-classes would not associate with this provocative musical genre that began to surface as early as the 19th century. While the middle class eventually began to accept tango within the generation of the Guardia Vieja, the upper class was not easily swayed. Ultimately, it wasn't until the

popularization of tango in Europe, namely Paris, that all of the Argentine society accepted a cleaner, less controversial form of tango.

Within the Guardia Vieja period, tango music was mostly devoid of lyrics, although some lyrics with sexual overtones did exist. The focus was on instrumentation and musical development, and it is in this period that we see the important arrival of the bandoneón on the tango scene. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the rapid musical evolution visible in the Guardia Vieja can be easily tied to an immigrant influence. In the brothels of Buenos Aires, tango orchestras were comprised of musicians from numerous ethnic backgrounds and faiths. Each musician would have contributed elements of his own culture and traditions.

Jose Judkovski's 1998 book, *Tango, Una Historia Con Judios*, lists numerous Jewish musicians who became prominent instrumental musicians as well as composers – Arturo Bernstein, Luis Bernstein, and Alberto Teodro Weisbach, just to name a few (Judkovski 1998; 52). As composers, these Jewish men were truly capable of leaving their mark on the Argentine tango.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment at which tango transitioned into Guardia Nueva or "the new period," but scholars generally agree that Guardia Nueva began around 1920 and lasted into the 1930s (Judkovski 1998; 41). In this period, tango's lyrics were romanticized and Argentina's most famous tango singer, Carlos Gardel, gained prominence.

Gardel was born in Toulouse, France in 1890 (although speculation surrounds his birth) and emigrated to Buenos Aires in 1893. In 1917, Gardel solidified his fame with a recording of Samuel Castriota's "Mi Noche Triste," a sentimental tango ballad, and he went on to appear in numerous tango films, which solidified his popularity. After his tragic death in a plane crash in

1935, Gardel is remembered as "a product of the *arrabal*...who came to symbolize the fulfillment of the dreams of the Argentine *porteño*" (Eisen, 2013; 2).

Figure 5: Portrait of Carlos Gardel (Archivo Genereal de la Nacion, Jose Maria Silva)

In contrast to the tangos of Guardia Vieja that reflected the somewhat coarse nature of a lower class, the tangos of Guardia Nueva reflected a dream of upward mobility and glamour. Gardel and other tango singers of this period came to symbolize an idealized hope for Argentine society, which now included its Jewish citizens.

At the beginning of the new century, in the very early 1900s, Buenos Aires evolved into a melting pot of cultures, or as the Argentine historian José Luis Romero describes it, Buenos Aires became an "alluvial" society (Romero, 1988; 133). New inhabitants functioned as deposited sediments, which ultimately changed the cultural landscape of Argentina. In effect, the immigrants redefined the identity of a *porteño* (a person living in the capital port city). Luis Alberto Romero, an Argentine historian and son of historian José Luis Romero, states:

"[Immigration] allowed for the spontaneous integration of cultural traditions and the emergence of hybrid cultural expressions of great creativity, such as the tango ... in which creole influences and the diverse contributions of the immigrants came together" (Romero, 2001: 52).

The East European (Jewish), African, creole and European cultural rhythms, harmonies and instruments, helped form the Argentinian tango as a sort of hybrid dance and style, exhibiting elements and influences from all those influences. Most prominent among these influences is the Argentine milonga.[10] The milonga originated as a folk song played in the Rio de la Plata region of Argentina. It was primarily sung and played by cattle herders known for their rough independence and predilection for tradition. These men were called *compadres* or *gauchos*. They lived and represented the *pampas* or the rural areas of Argentina. Historically, milonga texts usually recounted the lives of folk heroes, such as Juan Bautista an Argentine folk hero. The milonga later became a means of expressing concern and remorse over the rapidly changing social climate in Argentina. As the popular *milonga* states:

> There in your incursions
> In you most famous years
> You gave to the needy
> And took from those who had the most.
> And with the great manliness
> You gave the poor sustenance
> Caring for the ill
> And a doctor rode behind you.
> La Pampa owes you,
> Juan Bautista, a monument.[11]

As industrialization spread throughout the country, the Argentinian cattle herder faced many challenges. European immigrants were competing for their resources; and a wave of

[10] The sung *milonga* is also known as the *milonga pampeana*.
[11] "A Jaun Bautista Bairoleto" (From: Schecter 1999; 269).

unemployment was sweeping the region leaving many with feelings of anxiety about an uncertain future. It should be noted that similar conditions existed in Uruguay, which also played a role in the development of the tango and the milonga. As a result, the milonga underwent a transformation. According to ethnomusicologist John Schecter, “the milonga’s primary function is recreational but . . . it [was] transformed into an effective tool in the struggles for reorganization in both [Argentina and Uruguay], with respect to political positions and social demands” (Schecter 1999; 271). Schecter further acknowledges that there are four types of milongas. Aside from the two previously discussed, he mentions an urban milonga, and a milonga bailada, or danced milonga. While all forms probably influenced the tango in some manner, the milonga pampeana, and the milonga bailada were likely the strongest. While there is no detailed proof that Jewish culture influenced the milonga, it was, nevertheless, played by numerous Jewish musicians once they arrived in Uruguay and Argentina.

Historian Simon Collier writes that, “the habanera and polka stimulated the emergence of the milonga” (Azzi and Collier 1995; 40). This refers to the milonga bailada, since the evidence presented by Schecter clearly shows the milonga and the milonga pampaena existing long before either the habanera or the Jewish polka had a strong presence in Buenos Aires.

Carlos Jiménez wrote of the tango, “the dance used the sleepy clasp of the habanera, the crossing of the milonga, the flashy vertigo of the fandango and the double beat reminiscent of the drums of the candombe” (Schecter 1999; 280). The exact sequence of events is not certain, but it is clear that various ethnic dances coexisted, and that all of them played some role in the tango’s creation.

Figure 6: Milonga being danced on the streets of Rio de la Plata in 1915
(Photo courtesy of Biblioteque Toulouse)

4. MUSICAL ANALYSIS

The intermingling of the Jewish European immigrants with the native Argentines– indigenous and Spanish creoles—along with African slaves, resulted in a diversity of cultures. Each culture borrowed dances, music and customs from one another. Waltzes, mazurkas, polkas and horas which were codified forms of European music, mixed with the Cuban habanera that featured lyrics, and the syncopated candombe rhythms from Africa. In essence, the tango is the result of the coming together of rural Latin folk, klezmer, other non-Jewish European forms of music, and the candombe rhythms of the African slaves.

The musical evolution of the tango presents a complex story. The instruments of early tango music were the guitar, the flute, and the violin. Although modern tangos are usually in minor keys and portray a fairly negative affect, some accounts claim that early tangos were optimistic and cheerful sounding (which might not have been influenced by Jewish culture, yet). These early tangos were likely some elaborated version of instrumental milongas. Other reports speak of organ grinders playing the tango in the streets of Buenos Aires. Which came first is not known:

> Creoles and immigrants who, on floors of packed earth or brick, translated into dance the musical structures the instruments were elaborating. Or maybe the musicians were putting music to the choreographic movements the body was already developing: the musicologist Carlos Vega has determined that the choreography of the tango was born before its musical form. Dinzel, a dancer of rare talent, who has for years been painstakingly reconstructing the social history of this art, has found additional proof of this theory. Thus it seems that the residents of Buenos Aires first developed a style of dance to complement musical rhythms that came from all over, and only later conceived a single musical form apt at accompanying this dance (Thompson 2006; 26).

It seems likely that this new music was simply in the air and developing in various parts of the city at the same time. Musicians were probably struggling, experimenting, and searching

for a unique sound, one that would differentiate the tango from the milonga and other forms. That differentiation came through the bandoneón.

Invented in Germany by Heinrich Band, the bandoneón reached Buenos Aires on European ships. Sailors would trade or pawn the accordion-like instrument for money or alcohol. Eventually, a few Argentine musicians began learning how to play the instrument and incorporating its pointed, sorrowful sound into tango music around 1888. This forever changed the future of tango: "With the introduction of the plaintive tones of the bandoneón, the tango [became] sad and lost its earlier joyfulness associated with the flute" (Thompson 2006; 126). It was after the incorporation of the bandoneón that tango music began to flourish. Since that moment when the tango met the bandoneón, or vice versa, the bandoneón has become the music of tango's most distinctive instrument and symbol.

In the following musical exploration of Eastern European Jewish music (klezmer) and tango, I will compare rhythms, harmonies, cadences, and ornamental figures common to the two genres. I will refer to two klezmer music albums, *Klezmer for Everyone* and *Yikhes (Lineage)* (both collections of original source recordings), and various recordings of tango music from the late 1800s and early 1900s.

According to Oxford Music Online, tango music tends to be written in 2/4 or 4/4 time and an extremely common tango rhythm is as follows: dotted eighth note, sixteenth note, followed by two eighth-notes.[12] Another common rhythm is an eighth note, quarter note, followed by another eighth note and two quarter notes, or a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note and two quarter notes. See figure on following page:

[12] Oxford Music Online – On Tango, Gerard Béhague 1978. (Accessed 24 November, 2015)

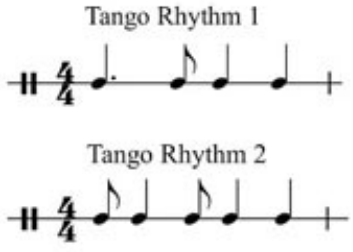

Figure 7: Common tango rhythms

This is the sensual rhythm associated with the habanera and the milonga, two Latin American dances with great influence on tango. But in Jewish musical terms, this rhythm is the backbone of the *terkisher*, or a Romanian style, Turkish-influenced display piece at walking tempo (Strom 2002: 65). I reference "Yidisher Soldat in de Trenshes" and "Der Ziser Bulgar" off of the album *Klezmer for Everyone* as the *terkisher* examples (Klezmer For Everyone). The terkisher rhythm can be heard in Francisco Canaro's 1930 recording of "Milonga Criolla" (Canaro, Milonga Criolla) and in Carlos Gardel's recording of "Mi Noche Triste," a sentimental tango with lyrics written by Pascual Contursi and music by Samuel Castriota (Gardel, "Mi Noche Triste"). The heavy terkisher rhythm combined with emotional lyrics lend Canaro's orchestral arrangement and Gardel's ballad their sensual and frustrated feel; the feelings of immigrants, both in the shtelts of Eastern Europe and in the *arrabals* of Buenos Aires.

The harmonic parallels between klezmer and tango are evident. Oxford Music indicates that tango is commonly divided into three parts of equal length, the second part in the dominant or relative minor key of the first and the third often switching back to the major key of the first.[13] Similar tonal switching is extremely common in East European music.

Klezmer pieces tend to consist of two to four distinct sections (referred to as Section A,

[13] Oxford Music Online, Béhague, 1978.

Section B, and so on) and key changes to relative keys may occur between sections (Sapoznik, 1999: 297). Take for example *Ruminisher Nign* performed by Naftule Brandwein on the *Yikhes-Lineage* album (Yikhes). We can hear a distinct sixteen-bar section of major tonalities followed by a shift to minor harmonies returning to a major cadence. On the same album, Brandwein's recording of "Naftule Shpilt Far Dem Rebn" is divided into distinct tonal units (*Yikhes*). Carlos Gardel's tango "Cuesta Abajo" was recorded around the same time as these two klezmer tunes (early 1900s) and exemplifies segmented tonal switching in Latin American music. The tune begins in a minor key, detours briefly to major, and resolves in minor.

We can also hear distinct tonal switching in the Francisco Canaro Orchestra recording of the popular tango "Adios Muchachos." In fact, the melody of this tune is at one point completely converted to a minor key. Given the number of immigrant musicians in Buenos Aires in the early 1900s (many of whom were Jewish), it is not at all surprising that harmonies from Eastern Europe might have worked their way into Argentinian tango music. And given that klezmer and tango often portray similar emotions, the use of similar harmonies to portray those emotions is entirely understandable.

My musical analysis of klezmer and tango has also led me to identify several common cadences in the two genres. Klezmer music is heavily influenced by the sounds of the human voice, particularly the specific melodies and tonal modes of Jewish cantors (Sapoznik 1999: 9). Thus, it is very easy to identify certain cadences in klezmer akin to those of Jewish prayers or to those of "trope" (melodic markings) used for Torah readings (Strom 2002; 3). Listening to Carlos Gardel's "Volver," recorded in 1933, I recognize the first major harmonic swell following the first vocal line "Yo adivino el parpadeo de las luces que a lo lejos van marcando mi retorno," as a common ascending modulation to a new tonic, used in cantorial Jewish music to establish a

new phrase. In addition, Gardel's phrase "bajo el burlon, mirar de las estrellas que con indiferencia hoy me ven volver" resolves in a descending pattern back to the tonic, as do many of the prayers chanted by cantors in the traditional orthodox synagogue.

Ornamentation in tango music demonstrates similarities to the ornamentation of klezmer music. The most common klezmer ornamentation is the "khrekt," or a cracking, moaning sound meant to mimic the raw intensity of cantorial chanting (Sapoznik 1999; 9). Trills and chromatic scales are also common, especially when instruments and vocalists trade-off verses. Across the board, tangos of the early 1900s are highly ornamented in order to portray intense emotion in already expressive ballads. I attribute these similarities to an inevitable musical exchange between Jewish and non-Jewish musicians in the brothels of Buenos Aires.

CHAPTER II (1920–1930)

1. TANGO AS DANCE

This portion of my thesis will focus on the tango as dance and poetry. Dance, like music, is a form of human expression and it finds its way into nearly every society. When human beings experience music, they experience it physically, psychologically, and physiologically. The sonorities can evoke feelings, perhaps even memories. Dynamic contrasts and tempo fluctuations seemingly lead us through various emotional states. Rhythm impels us to move our bodies. This is as true for the simplistic rhythms of early rock-n-roll as it is for the complex rhythms *(talas)* of Indian music or for the boisterous Jewish hora dance. When music is experienced physically, the result is some type of body movement, or dance. Those movements often reveal something about us as human beings. As dance historian Donald Castro writes, "Dance as a generic form is very much the epitome of the human condition" (Castro,1990: 89). One must assume then, that the tango as dance can reveal something about the human condition of early Argentina and the rest of the world once it reached it.

In 1915, upon first seeing the tango performed in Paris, France, the Comtesse Mélanie de Pourtalès is purported to have leaned over to her companion, murmuring, "is one supposed to dance it standing up?" (Collier, 2000; 76). For decades, observers have encouraged a vision of the tango as erotic, bold, and passionate. However, those who are more familiar with the genre usually reveal a quite different story, attaching to the tango a particular mood or emotion. As the tango composer and musician Enrique Santos Discépolo stated, the tango is "sad thought that can be danced" (Savigliano, 1995; 243).

This discrepancy in interpretation between observers and participants of the tango

indicates that the perceived meaning of tango changes through active engagement in the genre. As in most couple dances, tango partners convey information to one another through the embrace, or physical frame, between couples. Tango dancers often refer to this as the "connection," an important linguistic distinction as they may interpret this connection between dancers on either a physical or emotional level.[14] While the embrace is visually similar to other dances, it differs in that tango dancers lean forward from their hips so that their weight is on the balls of their feet rather than the heels. This creates a mutually inward, leaning, "pushing" frame, rather than the typically outward "pulling" frame that characterizes most other dances, such as swing, salsa, and waltz.[15]

When the inward frame results in both dancers pressing against one another from navel to chest, they tango in a "close-embrace," or "close-frame." If there is space between the chests of the dancers, they dance in an "open-embrace" or "open-frame." This decision is made according to the individual preferences of the dancers, and may depend upon their experience with either style, available space on the dance floor, or degree of comfort with their partner. In either case, the weight of the dancers is slightly forward, ideally with the lower body leaning inwards and the upper body remaining straight. This creates the most space between the dancers legs, and many tango steps manipulate this space in creative ways.

Tango is an improvised dance, in which one person leads, and the other follows. Observers are not aware of the range of unseen communication that occurs between dance partners to transmit messages, which are felt through the upper body, rather than being visually perceptible. Spectators instead witness the result of these communications; the delicate intertwining of legs as each dancer occupies the other's floor space, and upper bodies pressed

[14] Moskowitz interview (29 July, 2015).
[15] ibid.

close together, encourage the perception of the tango's sexual undertones. [16]

Thus, when the dance first entered Europe and North America in the early twentieth century, the erotic connotations of tango became embroiled in social scandal and a pretext for the economic production of passion. As Marta Savigliano argues, the reproduction of the tango as an exotic "other" throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas, required distribution and marketing, becoming "involved in hierarchical exchanges of cultural and emotional capital" (Savigliano, 1995; 11). While West European upper class society cast certain restrictions on propriety, dancing tango allowed participants to assume an alternative identity because of its status as a Latin American dance.

Those who deemed themselves as upholders of moral standards did not let the tango occur unnoticed. In 1913, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany forbade any officer to dance tango while in uniform; likewise, in 1915, Pope Pius X, when alerted to the potential scandal, requested a private audience to determine whether or not a Catholic ban should be placed upon the dance. Despite popular belief, there is no documented evidence for such a ban (Collier 2000; 86, 90-91).

A similar situation occurred when ballroom dancers, Irene and Vernon Castle, introduced the dance to the United States in 1914. Though it was immediately fashionable, it also attracted much negative attention in the newspaper presses concerning its "immorality" and "suggestiveness." In an effort to soften the more risqué aspects of the dance, the Castles devised several versions strictly for American audiences. In their book *Modern Dance*, the Castles distinguish between "lewd" forms of the tango and their versions, stating that: "the Castle tango is courtly and aristocratic" (ibid.; 92). This further separated the newly devised American tango

[16] Moskowitz Interview (29 July, 2015)

from its rougher predecessor, famously reputed as born in the brothels of Buenos Aires. One of these more "refined" versions of the tango, dubbed "the Innovation," was transformed and desensitized so thoroughly that couples did not touch at all, and as a result, the dance became quite popular at parlor parties (Roberts, 1999; 46).

Dance ethnographers generally recognize the influence of fast-paced, partnered, East European dances like the polka and the mazurka (which were often danced by Jews at weddings and other celebratory occasions) on the tango. But scholars often forget the influence of more traditional Jewish dances. Several dance historians have hinted at the relationship between the Jewish hora and the tango. A hora can be visually identified by a sequence of cross-step motions (right foot over left foot, then left over right), first in one direction, followed by a repetition in the other.[17] Likewise, a tango can be characterized by sequences of these same tight crossover motions (Azzi, 2004; 59).

While it is fairly unlikely that customers in the brothels of Argentina would have ever seen a hora in its entirety, it is not impossible that elements of hora footwork worked their way onto the dance floor and into the tango. Of course, any footwork analysis is speculative at best. While I do not believe that tango footwork is necessarily "Jewish" in its essence, it is certainly interesting to note the similarities in choreography. Despite the inconclusive nature of a dance analysis, I still believe that there is a strong audible *musical* connection between East European Jewish music and the Argentinian tango.

[17] ibid.

2. TANGO EXPORTED

This section seeks to observe how the tango became known outside of Latin America in Europe and North America. The first wave of tango export at the turn of the twentieth century established tango as a commodity, thus allowing it to be marketed and sold. Further, the tango, which inside Argentina emerged as an urban phenomenon particular to Buenos Aires, became a symbol of the entire Argentine nation in the eyes of the European and North American communities.

After leaving Argentina, the tango went through three main stages that fundamentally shaped its future development: first, tango reached Paris, the cultural capital of Europe, where the elite class was fascinated by the dance. From there, it spread to the United Kingdom, where the British elite toned down the dance to be acceptable to British dance environments and circles. The resulting dance formed the beginnings of modern ballroom tango. Finally, tango found its way to Hollywood, where motion pictures featuring the tango created an image of the Argentine nation that was marketed to a wider audience, and further solidified the association between tango and Argentine identity (Carlos Gardel played a major role in making this a reality, along with his management team, composed of mainly Jewish men). Throughout these three stages, the messengers at the center of the tango were Jews given the fact that they were the ones playing the tangos, or exporting it through the business side.

The reception of the tango within France and around Europe was varied but it still spread like wildfire within Paris. Its allure is explained by Marta Savigliano, an Argentine tango scholar:

> Tango was scandalous and fascinating, but the differences in opinion did not strictly follow a class division. Tango was resisted by bourgeois moralists and by a sector of

> Parisians, who, far from being scandalized, were opposed to the distinguished, classy tinge of this sultry exotic dance. Perhaps the Parisian lower classes or those who identified with them ignored tango's own lower-class origins, or perhaps they were aware of these origins but resented the tangueros playing up to the European aristocrats and bourgeoisies by practicing a pathetic autoexoticism for the benefit of the decadent market of pleasure (Savligano, 1995; 109).

The tango was marketed by local Parisians as an exotic, scandalous dance from the distant South American country, Argentina. While the Parisians were enthusiastic about the exotic dances; the Argentines who were in Paris were not as enthused by the tango's increasing popularity.[18]

The 1920s and 1930s saw the creation of the beginnings of the modern ballroom in Britain, which included such dances as the foxtrot, the quickstep, the waltz, and the Ballroom tango. Upon hearing of its popularity in Paris, members of British high society organized teas where dance masters from Paris were brought in to teach the young ladies of high society to dance the tango ―with decorum. A series of conferences among the British recreational dance schools in the 1920s defined programs for all dances, in order to create a unified set of steps, so that beginners would learn the same, codified steps. The program that was established in Britain in 1920 for the tango essentially was taken from the pre-war French-tango that had emerged in dance halls and on stages in Paris.

In 1933, German amateur ballroom dancer Freddie Camp moved to London, and experimented with the tango. Under his influence, the tango adopted some characteristics of modern ballroom tango. Camp was responsible for the invention of the sharp, staccato,

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[18] As Paris was the cultural and diplomatic capital of the world at the turn of the twentieth century, it was common for upper class Argentines to travel to Paris as often as time and finances would allow. To be stationed in Paris would have been considered a high honor; and for most young wealthy Argentines, a trip to Paris would be considered part of their education.

exaggerated movements that are still found today in ballroom tango. These modifications were taken into account in the newer tango choreography and became very popular. The consequence of these ongoing changes, however, was that the tango hardly resembled its Argentine predecessor anymore (Savigliano, 1995; 103).

While I will focus on the movement of the tango in a later section, I think its important to observe its choreographic development in European society here. The creation of the tango choreography went a long way toward cleaning up the image of tango for mass use in British ballrooms. It also made it more accessible and easier to learn for the average member of British society. The music became more rhythmically marked, in order to make it easier to lead and follow.

The English dance schools, which today are known as the International Dance Sport Federation, were primarily interested in creating an illusion of uniformity in tango choreography. This broke from the tango created originally in Argentina, which was based on the premise of improvisation (ibid.; 110). The English schools created a rigid system of standardized steps, movements, rules of combination of steps and even costumes to be worn by performers.

The British ballroom tango was further modified by North American dance circles, and created what is now known as the American tango. While this version of the tango is most closely related to the British, international ballroom tango, it was further refined and made more acceptable for the American home audience. In particular, the American version advocates an ever more open hold between the dancers, creating more distance between the dancers, and even less physical contact than in the British version. This also allows the dancers the room necessary to engage in more staccato movements.

While ballroom and American tango have little to do (technically or musically) with the Argentine tango, this development is important to note for two main reasons. First, it demonstrates tango's dynamic character; that is, the tango can be easily changed and modified to adapt to local styles and fashions and still be considered a tango. And second, the codified versions of the ballroom and American tangos provided a constant, subconscious reminder to the world that the tango existed and was an Argentine product, even in times when the Argentine tango experienced low points in its development (Savigliano, 1995; 111).

Although the North American reaction to the tango in the 1910s was mostly negative beyond cosmopolitan New York, the 1920s saw a new attitude emerge in some of the larger metropolitan areas. In particular, Hollywood began to take note of the tango. It was becoming increasingly popular in Paris and London, and could no longer be ignored. Tango's experience in Paris proved that the tango could sell, and Hollywood producers began to capitalize on the tango sensation as a selling-point for their movies as well (ibid.; 114).

3. LOS JUDÍOS

While I have mentioned a number of Jewish tango performers in the previous sections, this part of the thesis will chronicle on the Jewish poets, artists, musicians and performers that were influential in the spread of tango and in its development. Some of the numerous musicians performing tango in pre-war Europe were Jews, either Argentinians who had joined a touring *Orquesta Tipica* or Europeans. Amongst the Argentinians were the conductor Bernardo Alemany (who also performed in the USA) and members of ensembles led by J. B. d'Ambrogio and Eduardo Biancol, such as the ensemble *Bachicha*, including the bandoneónist Jose Schumajer and the singer Juan Carlos Cohan. Their European counterparts included the Italian brothers Ettore and Guiseppe Colombo, who played the bandoneón in the sextet Brodman-Alfaro (Alfaro being the pseudonym of the French-Jewish cellist Jean Levesque), a popular ensemble in the Paris of the 1920s. Another French-Jewish musician was the pianist and composer Marcel Lattes, born in Nice in 1886, and whom Carlos Gardel revered as *el celebrado maestro* (Czackis, 2003; 9).

At the same time European composers, some of whom were also Jews, started to write new tangos. The renowned Rumanian percussionist Joseph Moskowitz (1879-1953), whose repertoire included the: classics, ragtime and worldwide folk dances, recorded his song "Tango Argentino" in 1916, when he had already emigrated to America. A Polish Jewish composer who enjoyed great success in Germany was Paul Godwin (born Pinchas Goldfein). From 1923 to 1933, the Deutsche Grammophon label sold over nine million copies of over 2,500 titles recorded by Godwin. A key to Godwin's success was his ability to please a market that was thirsty for different styles, so it was not surprising that he came up with titles such as "Kitsch-

Tango" and "Der Michel wird nicht kluger durch den Krieg" (The war didn't make Michael more intelligent) (Czackis, 2003; 13).

By the 1930s, the height of tango's popularity, the Jewish community in Buenos Aires enjoyed a buoyant life that included three Yiddish newspapers and numerous cultural centers. It was also a key destination for eminent American and East European touring theatre companies. Jewish violinists arriving from Poland, Russia and Rumania often headed to the tango scene, as their instrument was already emerging as typical of the style. Many families who dreamt of notoriety for their children through their talents as vilonists or pianists were quickly disappointed to them take jobs a tango orchestra or, worse, in cabaret, with all the additional dangers of assimilation (ibid.). The temptation was hard to resist, however, as the young musicians could earn a living that was hardly achievable in the dreary jobs that most immigrants tended to take.

Over the years many of these musicians became prominent figures in the world of tango, some of them still remembered today. In the 1930 and 1940s Jewish musicians were well adapted to Argentinian society, although it is true that they tended to conceal their cultural identity. Jews and gentiles were able to share the same musical space, which gave room for mutual enrichment. This in itself is remarkable, given that these were times of rising fascist ideals in Argentina. Nevertheless, in the world of tango Jews were noteworthy as performers, authors, publishers and lyricists.

Several Jewish writers created tangos with Spanish lyrics, which came to form part of the general repertoire, but it was inevitable that tangos would also emerge in Yiddish. Between the 1930s and the 1960s Buenos Aires was one of the world capitals of Yiddish theatre, attracting the greatest international stars such as Molly Picon and Jacob Kalish, Luba Kadison and Joseph Buloff, Maurice Schwartz, Herman Yabokloff, Dzigan, Ida Kaminska, Jan Peerce and Sara

Gorby. They performed in the provinces as well as the capital, to audiences so hungry for Yiddish theatre that plays would not run for more than a week. Theatre was a crucial part of the immigrants' lives: the Yiddish Society of Amateur Actors was founded in 1902 and the IFT, the *Idisher Folks Teater* (Yiddish Folk Theatre), which still exists today, opened in 1932. In 1939, there were five professional theatres devoted to Yiddish plays, although numbers declined as the years went on (Czackis, 2003; 19).

Jewish singers performed new Yiddish songs with tender or humorous lyrics and music, and often with a burlesque tone as well, the most famous of them being Jevel Katz, Max Perlman and Max Zalkind. Katz was especially famous for his comic tangos. He was a parodist par excellence, and his one published booklet of songs, "Argentiner glikn," includes Yiddish tangos, rancheras, rumbas and foxtrots (without music). He emigrated to Argentina from Russia in 1930 and died of kidney failure ten years later, at the age of only 38. Jevel Katz made only four known recording albums of his songs, however, many Argentinian Jews are still familiar with him today.

In 1942 two immigrants from Bialystok, Abraham Szewach and Jeremia Ciganeri, wrote Yiddish tangos that were performed in revues in theatres such as the Mitre, where Ciganeri was the orchestra conductor. Back in Poland, they had written tango songs such as "Bialystok mayn heym" (Bialystok my home) - which, according to Szewach' s daughter Elisa, became the city's anthem- and "Bialystoker Geselakh" (Little Bialystok streets) (Czackis, 2003; 20).

The Jewish influence on tango was could be strongly felt throughout the golden age of tango (1930-1950). This history is detailed in José Judovski's book *El Tango: Una Historia con Judios*, which was made into a documentary film in 2005 by Gabriel Pomeranc. The book and the movie chronicles Arturo Bernstein, the first and arguably one of the most famous Jewish

bandoneón virtuosos, Luis Rubistein, and his brother Oscar Rubens, who composed dozens of popular tango songs, Alberto (born Abraham) Soifer, a pianist and composer who partnered with famous tango musicians and formed his own orchestras, violinist and composer José Nieso (born Nezow), who played with Roberto Firpo, then founded his own orchestra; and Manuel Sucher, a violinist and pianist who founded several of Buenos Aires's top tango orchestras. The list goes on to include other great performers and promoters, such as Ben Molar, responsible for December 11th's designation as the National Day of Tango, and "Max" Glücksmann, founder of Discos Glücksmann, which cornered the tango recording market in 1914 and held on. Glücksmann also owned movie theaters throughout the Southern Cone that continually showed tangos on the wide screen. (For a more detailed list of Jewish performers and artists, please see appendix A.)

Most tango songs in Argentina, even those composed by Jews, had Spanish texts. By the 1920s, however, tango songs in Yiddish were being published and performed in Yiddish theaters in Buenos Aires and Rosario. Even before World War I, many pre-existing Yiddish songs were delivered in New York Yiddish theaters in "tango style," just as popular songs had been "ragged," that is, sung "ragtime style," in the 1890s, and by the 1920s, many New York Yiddish theater songs were composed as tangos. A perfect example is the song "Mazl," composed for the Yiddish film *Mamele*, with music by Abraham Ellstein and words by Molly Picon, who visited Buenos Aires numerous times.

One of the first Yiddish songs to be converted into a tango was the tragic song "Papirosn," or "Cigarettes" (the cheap, hand-rolled type a street seller would sell individually). Yiddish words by Herman Yablokoff were added to a Bulgarian folk tune in the 1920s for use in

his play *Papirosn*. In Buenos Aires of the song's era, *papirosn* was slang for prostitutes, perhaps explaining its rapid rise to popularity in tango's home city.

CHAPTER III (1940–1950)

1. RETURN TO EASTERN EUROPE

The tango moved quickly throughout Western Europe, where it changed the cultural world of dance and music. It also became quite popular in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland and Russia. Henryk Gold, a Jewish-Polish pioneer in the history of jazz and dance music, and one of the most prolific songwriters in Poland during the inter-war years was especially fond of the tango. Gold was born in 1898 in Warsaw into a very musical family. His brother, Artur Gold (1903-43), was also an orchestra leader and famous composer, writing many of the popular tangos of the 1920s and 30s. Immediately after the First World War, when Poland regained its independence, jazz began to sweep across Europe from west to east. In 1925, Henryk and his brother Artur formed the Gold Orchestra, an 8-piece jazz band, to play at the Cafe Bodega in Warsaw. Their immediate success led to a recording contract with the Syrena company, producing records that included not only jazz tunes but also the tangos and waltzes which were required of any orchestra during the period. In early 1939, Gold and his orchestra were invited to be part of the Polish delegation to the World's Fair in New York, which led to an favorable turn of events, as Gold was forced to stay temporarily in America at the outbreak of World War II. He eventually moved to Paris, but, tragically, his brother Artur perished in Treblinka in 1943 (Czackis, 2009; 25).

In 1926, Artur Gold had founded a new chamber orchestra with Henryk and his friend Jerzy Petersburski (1895-1979), playing in fashionable Warsaw cabarets, which were at the height of their popularity at the time. Petersburski was also a popular composer of operetta music, which he studied at the Warsaw Conservatory, and in Vienna, he later played and

recorded with famous singers and instrumentalists such as Eugeniusz Bodo, Chor Dana, Jerzy Czaplicki, Mieczyslaw Fogg and Ludwok Sempolinski. His large catalogue includes numerous waltzes, tangos, and foxtrots, but none would become as famous as his *Tango Milonga* (1929). Petersburski's band played in Vienna, where *Tango Milonga* was sold to the Wiener Boheme Verlag, and given German lyrics by Fritz Lohner-Beda as "Oh, Donna Clara!," which would eventually give him international fame. A few weeks later, Pierre Meyer and Miss Florence sang "Oh Donna Clara" in the finale of the Paris "Qui Remue" Revue at the Paris Casino. From there the song travelled to America, receiving its premiere by none other than Al Jolson (Roberts 1999; 201).

Meanwhile, Russia, under Soviet rule, fell in love with the tango as well. The Russian soul (*∂yuа*, *dusha*), a concept made famous by the infamous authors Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky describes Russian spirituality as compassionate, strong, and deep-rooted, but also filled with continuous suffering and somehow melancholic and deeply emotional. This view may be a relic from 19th century Romanticism, but it is said that love and devotion are still the heart of the Russian soul (ibid.) This is the perfect foundation for the popularity of tango in Russia, for its ability to express a great range of emotions from its poetic side. Like in other parts of Europe, Jews were at the forefront of composing and performing the tango. It was during this time that Jewish-Soviet composers created their own magnificent works, which became classic examples of the Russian tango, including "Bryzgi Shampanskogo" (Splashes of Champagne) and "Schastye Moyo" ("My Happiness").[19]

One of the most renowned composers of the Russian tango was Oskar Davidovitch Strok (1892-1975). Strok was born in Dvinsk (then Russia, now the Republic of Latvia), on December

[19] I constantly heard these songs sung either on the radio, TV or at my dining room table growing up in Gomel, Belarus in the 1980s.

24, 1892, and is known for composing more than 300 tangos among many other works.[20] His music achieved great popularity in Europe, and could be heard in restaurants, cafes, concert halls, and dance halls in Warsaw, Paris, Moscow, and London. He also was able to use new recording technology to make many recordings of his own tango works. Among his most famous tangos are: "Ochy Cherniye" (Black Eyes), "Kogda Vesna Pridet Opyat" (When Spring Comes Again), "Ne Uhodi" (Do not Leave), "Lunnaya Rapsodiya" (Lunar Rhapsody), "Skajy Pochemu" (Tell me why), and "Poslednoyo Tango" (My last tango). Many of these were eventually translated into Spanish and performed in Argentina. Strock wrote many of his tango songs for the Russian "gypsy" singer Pyotr Leschenko (who wasn't Jewish, although many Russians claimed he was). His two known Yiddish tangos are "Farges mikh nisht" (Do not forget me), with words by Isroel Sabeszhinski and "Vu ahin zol ikh geyn?" (Where shall I go?), with lyrics by the Jewish playwright, Samuel Korntayer. Later, this song was popularized in Europe, Israel, and the United States by Leo Fuld and Menasha Oppenheim.

Figure 8: Oskar Strok

[20] http://tangocity.com (Accessed 11 December, 2015)

At the same time, two leading Russian-Jewish musicians and artists, Leonid Utesov (1895-1982) and Alexander Tsfasman (1906-1971) were bringing tangos to the masses throughout the country. Utesov was born in Odessa in 1895 and began his career playing guitar and violin, performing as a clown and an acrobat in different circus troupes. In the years before World War I, he started singing in bars, theaters and music halls in the south of Russia, and then moved to Petrograd (now St. Petersburg). After a decade of performing there, he had the an opportunity to tour Latvia in 1928, after which he was able to travel and perform in Berlin and Paris, where he first encountered tango (McFayden, 2002; 95).

Considering himself more of an actor than a musician, Utesov was a showman focusing mainly on his impact on the audience much like Jevel Katz in Argentina, though there is no evidence that the two stars had any knowledge of each other. Back in Petrograd, he formed his own orchestra in 1929 hiring top classical and jazz musicians of the time and began to perform Russian theater and tango songs. He immediately became popular and reached the peak of his popularity in 1934 after a role in the first Soviet musical comedy *Jolly Fellows*, in which he portrayed a jazz orchestra conductor. After that, he became one of the most beloved artists in the USSR. A tango song prominently featured in this film became a beloved Russian melody. The song, “Serdtse” (Heart) was originally referred to by its first line as “Kak mnogo devushek khoroshikh” (So many nice girls). The lyrics were written by Vasily Lebedev-Kumach and the music was by Isaak Dunayevsky, another renowned Jewish composer. In 1935, Pyotr Leshchenko re-recorded the song as a tango ballad making it one of the most beloved songs of the 1930s and 40s in Russia.

In modern day Russia, this song is still perceived as a traditional Russian romance, whereas elsewhere in the world, the song is seen exclusively as an Argentine tango song

(McFayden, 2002; 97). The simple lyrics talk about the power of the heart in making love a reality when there are many choices:

> There are so many nice girls
> There are so many endearing names
> But only one of them bothers me,
> Keeping away my calm and sleep – when I am in love.
>
> Love accidentally takes you by the throat
> When you least expect it
> And every evening immediately gets
> Wonderfully nice – and then you sing:
>
> Heart – there is no way to keep you calm
> Heart – how great it is to be alive in this world
> Heart – how great it is that you are like that
> Thank you, heart, for being so good at the art of love! (ibid.).

Figure 9: Leonid Utyosov (left) with Lyubov Orlova in *Jolly Fellows*

2. TANGO DE LA MUERTE

Given that the tango was at the height of its popularity leading up to the time of World War II, it should not be a surprise that this genre was adapted to the grim realities of life in the Nazi-imposed ghettos and ultimately, in the concentration camps. In ghettos and concentration camps, tango was both the enforced repertoire of the Nazi officials and it also served as a means of self- expression by Jewish prisoners and residents of the ghettos (Gilbert 2005; 119).

Concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Terezin, Mauthausen, Dachau and Buchenwald formed orchestras, called *Lagernkapellen*, where amateur players performed with established professionals. The arrival of Jewish instrumentalists led to the formation of ensembles, with guitars, accordions and tambourines. Their repertoire varied from classical and twelve-tone music to jazz and saloon tunes, including tangos (Czaskis 2003; 27).

According to Collier, the Nazis approved tango because it, "engendered no spirit of rebellion, unlike the Afro-American jazz that they so abhorred…the tango was seen to provide an escape, a willing preoccupation with the dance as an oblivion of the self rather than as an incentive to disobedience" (Collier 2004; 119). Not only did the Nazis allow the performance of tango, but they forced the *Lagernkapellen* to play this music, particularly during violent executions. All too often, they were also forced to "welcome" new arrivals with marches and popular songs. Because of this practice, any music played by an inmate orchestra during exterminations acquired the generic name of Death Tango (ibid.).

While tango was tolerated in the concentration camps, it was promoted in the ghettos, especially at Yiddish theaters and restaurants with live music to create a false sense of normalcy. This policy also kept musicians in shape to play in concentration camps once the ghettos were

emptied. Camp orchestras entertained officers and led anthems among slave laborers. More often than not, these processionals were not marches but "Totentanzen," (death dances), specifically tangos.

Thousands of songs were generated by residents of the Nazi-imposed ghettos, some original, some old songs with new words. Forty-eight of them were collected and published in 1948 by survivor Shmerke Kaczerginsky. Others were collected from survivors by Chana Mlotek, writer for the *Forvertz* and folk song curator at YIVO, as well as by ethnomusicologist Gila Flam. Recently, this repertoire has been explored by other performer-scholars, including the late Adrienne Cooper, and Chana Mlotek's son Zalmen, director of New York's Yiddish Folk Theater. Adrienne Cooper and Zalmen Mlotek produced the CD *Ghetto Tango: Wartime Yiddish Theater* in 2000, including original songs based on the poetry written in the ghettos.

It is possible that other Yiddish tangos were created in other detention camps, but no documents are available to prove this. It should be considered that the tango spirit of these songs derived from the character that the tango had developed in Eastern Europe before the war, which differed significantly from Argentine tango.

Some of these compositions were original in music and lyrics, such as Kaczerginski's "Kinder yorn" (Childhood years) and "Makh tsu di eygelekh" (Close your little eyes) written in the Lodz ghetto by composer and orchestra conductor Dovid Beygelman. The song "Tsi darf es azoy zayn?" (Does It Have to be This Way?) is another one of the popular creations of the Vilna ghetto theatre's songwriter Kasriel Broydo. Making reference to how much things have changed during the war, the lyrics question why things have to be this way. The English translations are by Lloica Czackis and Bella Klein:

> The same streets and trolleys,
> Numbers eleven and four,

The same newsboys are rushing, shouting:
'Buy a newspaper, buy from me.'
It is the same blue sky,
But the person under it, is no longer the same;
The sun continues to shine as if not understanding,
I hear a voice within me that asks:

Does it have to be this way?
Must it be this way?

That happiness is destined for one,
Yet for another everything is prohibited.
Who determined that
The world should be this way?
My heart asks,
Does it have to be this way?
Does it?

For them the squares and boulevards,
For me such a pauper's place.
Why should the others always fool me,
Why for me there is only a well of tears?
Why does it say on that sign:
'Entry is forbidden?'
For them, why is my house, my little berth
My bed, as hard as a stone?

Does it have to be this way?...[21]

The songs that were coming out of the horrid conditions in Europe, whether in camps or in ghettos were composed in Hebrew, Russian, Polish, French, Rumanian, Hungarian, and even German. These songs are a remarkable testament to the creative ability of a people to demonstrate their endurance, ingenuity, and resourcefulness under the most inhuman conditions.

The songs also served to rally and organize people for survival and struggle against their tyrants. Through all the songs there flows the will to live, to preserve dignity and the cherished traditional customs of learning and teaching. They describe the crowded quarters, the scarcity of

[21] http://holocaustmusic.ort.org. (Accessed November 19, 2015).

food, the irritations and degradations heaped upon the Jews.

During the war, the Nazis ordered Kaczerginsky to select books from the YIVO and hand over his selection from the archives for shipment to Germany. However, he managed to conceal and to save a very large number of original works and manuscripts, preserving them throughout the war. After escaping the Vilna ghetto, he joined the partisans and continued to gather songs from many sources, including his own poems, which were then incorporated into this work. Kaczerginsky's book, a critical resource for musicians and scholars around the word, contains 250 texts and 100 tunes from 30 ghettos, camps and forests (where the Jewish partisans had their encampments). It consists of an anthology of songs gathered by Zami Feder, entitled "Katselider" (Concentration Camp Songs), a notebook of songs by Lusik Gerber, a number of songs collected by the American-Yiddish poet H. Leivick (1888-1962), and Kaczerginsky's own compositions. Given the popularity of the tango, many of the songs appear in this style (Czackis 2003; 23).

The songs can be grouped into different categories: lullabies; work songs; satirical songs and ballads; prayer songs, songs of pain and anguish, shame and humiliation; songs of ghetto life; songs of heroism, hatred for the enemy, faith and hope, struggle and joy in victory. Almost entirely absent are the songs of normal times, love and marriage, children, joy in work and study, humor and merriment. Yiddish tangos appeared in ghettos such as Vilna, Kovno, Lodz, Bialystok, Shauliai, and even in Auschwitz. Although they differ fundamentally from traditional Argentine tangos, they still retain the rhythm and sense of tango.

Kaczerginski wrote the poem, "Friling" (Springtime), after the death of his wife, and the poem is set to a soulful tango melody by Abraham Brodno. It has become one of the most loved Yiddish songs. The tango's lyrics tell of the author's sadness and sense of despair and loneliness:

I roam through the ghetto from alley to alley,
And I cannot find any haven;
My beloved is not here, how can I bear it?
Oh, people, at least say something.
The blue sky illuminates my home
But what benefit do I have from it now?
I stand like a beggar at each gate,
And beg for a little bit of sunshine.

Springtime, dispel my sorrow,
And bring back my beloved, my adored one to me.
Springtime, on your blue wings,
Oh, take my heart with you and return joy to it.

This year springtime came very early,
And my longing blossomed for you once again,
I see you before me all laden with flowers,
Happily you come to me.
The sun showered the garden with its rays,
The earth has sprouted its green.
My adored one, my darling, where have you gone?
You are never out of my mind.

Springtime, dispel my sorrow…(ibid.).

Figure 10: Performance of the prisoner tango orchestra in Stalag VIIIA (USHMM Collections)

CHAPTER III (1950–TODAY)

1. AMERICAN THEATER

This section of the thesis will review the role of the tango in American Musical Theater. From 1950 to 1960, at least one Broadway show created by Jewish composers each year, containing a song set as a tango, generally used for romantic and sometimes malevolent ends (Roberts, 1999: 119). Given the multiple-decade development of the tango in Europe and the United States, these songs are almost always humorous, and rarely involved an Argentinian or Latin setting or theme to justify their musical style. Harold Rome's *Wish You Were Here* (1952) has "Don José of Far Rockaway," sung by a comic supporting character who proclaims what he wishes to be true: that he is a Latin lover at heart who women cannot resist.

The play-within-a-play in the musical *Me and Juliet* (1953), one of the only comedic attempts by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, includes the tango "No Other Love." Sung in the show by a chorus girl for an audition to be a lead understudy, the romantic sound of the tango, and the warmth with which it is performed, draw in the girl's coach and the solo becomes a love duet.

Two shows that play on the more sinister side of the tango's nature came in 1954. The popular "Hernando's Hideaway" in *The Pajama Game* describes a "dark, secluded" secret club where couples can meet for surreptitious trysts. In a bit of cultural confusion, the lyrics tell that "all you hear are castanets," and indeed the Spanish instrument is prominently featured in the song's orchestration. John Storm Roberts claims that "Hernando's Hideaway" was the last tango to be heard on Broadway until the 1980s. He also states that the popularity of this song is "a monument both to the tango's durability and Broadway's continued talent for squeezing

juice out of apparently long empty fruit" (Roberts, 1999: 135).

While the American public may have found new dances and musical styles to move and listen to, American theater's fascination with the tango was far from over. In the 1954 musical version of J.M. Barrie's 1904 play *Peter Pan*, Captain Hook's band of pirates accompany him, at his request, with a menacing tango while he plots the Lost Boys' death. The following year, the musical *Ankles Aweigh* had the passionate, and somewhat masochistic, tango "Kiss Me and Kill Me with Love."

A couple of tangos that poke fun at the Broadway composers' cultural befuddlement in representing anything "Latin," came in the latter half of the 1950s. Leonard Bernstein wrote "I Am Easily Assimilated (The Old Lady's Tango)" for his 1956 operetta *Candide*, based on the work of the same title by the 18th century French author Voltaire. In the original version of the libretto, the characters arrive in Buenos Aires. The Old Lady, though her father was Russian and she grew up speaking Polish, is instantly speaking "Spanish" (although what she's actually singing is a mix of Spanish, German, and French) and dancing a tango (which chronologically wouldn't have been created for about another 150 years). The song uses klezmer harmonics as well as tango rhythms to demonstrate the cultural mix of the narrative. In the more often performed revised version of 1973, this song is sung while the characters are still in Paris to attract the attention of some Spanish lords. It's likely, however, that Bernstein chose the tango setting because of the original location, Buenos Aires.

Charles Strouse's *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960) had the tango "Spanish Rose," sung by a Hispanic American secretary of indeterminate Latin origin, is a comic act of defiance towards her boyfriend's racist mother, who calls her Spanish. She claims that she will marry her boyfriend and embrace every Latin stereotype, eating tacos, clicking castanets, drinking tequila,

and dancing the tango. Regarding Judaism, Charles Strouse explains in his memoir, "Put on a Happy Face: A Broadway Memoir" (Union Square Press, 2008), that he only "grudgingly went to Sunday Hebrew School…. In fact, at my father's insistence, I was never formally Bar Mitzvahed." Yet, through his composition it obvious that Jewish sounds penetrated his work, especially in *Bye Bye Birdie.*

Other tangos in shows at the end of the 1950s include "A New-Fangled Tango" from Harold Karr's *Happy Hunting* (1956) and "I Know Your Mind" from Harold Rome's *Destry Rides Again* (1959). "A New- Fangled Tango" is being taught at a party, where the characters are urged to "give up the mambo" (which had become popular in the past decade) in favor of this new take on an "old- fashioned notion," which apparently didn't require any movement. Keeping with the trend of titillating tangos, "I Know Your Kind" is an attempt at an act of seduction. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Rome played piano in local dance bands and was already writing music while studying architecture and law at Yale University. After graduation, he worked as an architect in New York City, but continued to pursue his musical interests, arranging music for local bands and writing material for revues at Green Mansions, a Jewish summer resort in the Adirondacks.[22]

John Roberts claims that "the tango had pretty much vanished from any US scene to mention by the late 1940s, or ... early 1950s" (Roberts, 1999: 201). As the previous paragraphs show, however, the tango was far from dead on the American theater stage throughout the 1950s. While his claim may be justifiable while looking at the rest of popular music, tangos (as created by Jewish composers) continued to pop up in shows throughout the 1960s and 1970s, albeit with

[22] Harold Rome Papers, Music Library of Yale University - http://drs.library.yale.edu/HLTransformer/HLTransServlet?stylename=yul.ead2002.xhtml.xsl&pid=music:mss.0049&clear-stylesheet-cache=yes

less frequency than in previous decades. This slippage reflects the decline of Latin music's popularity in the United States. In general, the rise of the popularity of rock and roll, and the relative decline of musical theatre's popularity as a whole in these decades.

Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones' *The Fantasticks* (1960) includes a song with a "tango feel," "Never Say No," sung by two fathers reveling in how easy it is to manipulate their children. Schmidt said of it and the flamenco song that follows it: "[W]e wanted it to be sort of Latin in feeling but evoking a *commedia* underpinning at the same time" (Farber and Viagas 1991; 90). While Schmidt may have achieved what he intended, it can leave the listener a bit confused about why he felt the need to mix a 19th-century Cuban dance with 17th-century Italian theatrical styles.

A few years into the 1960s, the original 1963 production of Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock's (same duo that created *Fiddler on the Roof) She Loves Me*, featured the cautionary tale "Tango Tragique," a mocking account of a blind date that ends ominously. The song was cut from the 1993 revival, and was merely referenced by the character who originally sang it. This song's French title, along with two other show tunes that appeared in the late 1960s, highlight how the tango was embraced and assimilated into French popular music, "perhaps because one of its instruments was the accordion" (Roberts 1999; 207).

Interestingly enough, these tango songs also have melancholic subjects. *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* (1968) is a revue show of the songs of French-speaking Belgian singer-songwriter Jacques Brel, whose work developed quite a following in France. His song "Funeral Tango" ("*Le tango funèbre"*) is included in this off-Broadway revue. Jerry Herman's 1969 Broadway musical *Dear World* is also set in Paris: "Garbage" is sung by a madwoman and a sewer man about how the world has become an evil place as evidenced by the

contents of its garbage.

The 1970s saw equally few tangos used in stage musicals by Jewish composers, but these few examples are more in line with the conventional mood and thematic content of the dance. In "The Cell Block Tango" from John Kander and Fred Ebb's *Chicago* (1975)—an erotic display of passion and murder—six women recount how they murdered their husbands. The Broadway show *Baby* from 1983, which concerns the stories of three expectant couples, uses a tango to express powerful emotions. In the tango, "Romance," one of the couples, trying to conceive, uses the stereotype of the amorous nature of tango. David Lee Shire, a Jewish-American composer and songwriter, wrote the music and lyrics.

The idea of the tired middle-aged married couple attempting to reignite desire would be repeated in 1996 in the off-Broadway revue musical *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* for the song "Marriage Tango," created by Jimmy Roberts. Roberts grew up with a religious Hebrew education and exposure to Jewish music. His grandfather was both a cantor and a rabbi, and thus he felt that his Jewish heritage ran through his blood—the same as his love for musicals:

> It is almost considered a joke that most of the great composers of musical theater in America were Jews: Rodgers, Gershwin, Sondheim. The notable exception was Cole Porter, but he learned quickly he had to get a Jewish sound. So I feel like I'm part of that line of Jewish composers – I live in New York, and for some reason have an attraction to both music and drama.[23]

The 1980s saw a resurgence in the popularity of the tango as a form of social dancing. The French dance show *Tango Argentino*, which moved to Broadway in 1985, was a part of this revival. Full of music and dancing, the sophisticated production helped pique interest in learning the tango, and "as had been the case ever since the first tango in *The Sunshine Girl*, Broadway

[23] Roberts interview: http://www.thereportergroup.org/Article.aspx?aID=2192 (Accessed 02 January, 2016)

and the dance floor were somewhat in lockstep" (Roberts 1999; 226). Dance clubs offering lessons appeared all over the country. The rediscovery of the tango led to another Broadway event that opened about a decade later: the long-running show *Forever Tango*.

Tangos in the 1990s and 2000s continued along already established trends. "Tango: Maureen" from Jonathan Larson's *Rent* (1996) is about a sexual and unfaithful woman, "The Madness of King Scar" from *The Lion King* (1997), "Dance with Me, Darling" from *Bat Boy* (2001), "Along Came Bialy" from *The Producers* (2001), and "Adolpho" from *The Drowsy Chaperone* (2006) are all seduction attempts in some form and all were written by Jewish composers. The latter example is from a show that is an homage or parody of musicals from the 1920s and 30s. The song is sung by Adolpho, a buffoonish caricature of the Latin lover cliché.

The tango as a dance and as music offered versatility to showcase both romance and lust, elegance and vulgarity; the tango was used by Jewish musical theatre composers to express many different emotions and situations in their shows, and tangos are still being showcased in today's musical theater.

2. PIAZZOLLA, GOLIJOV, AND MODERN JEWISH TANGO

This final section provides a focus on the life of famed Argentinian composer and bandoneonist Astor Piazolla, his Jewish influences, as well as his impact on the *Nuevo Tango* style of music. I will also chronicle the role that the Argentinian tango plays in select Jewish communities around the world and discuss the role of Argentinian-Jewish composer, Osvaldo Golijov, and his musical work combining his Jewish upbringing with elements of the Argentinian tango.

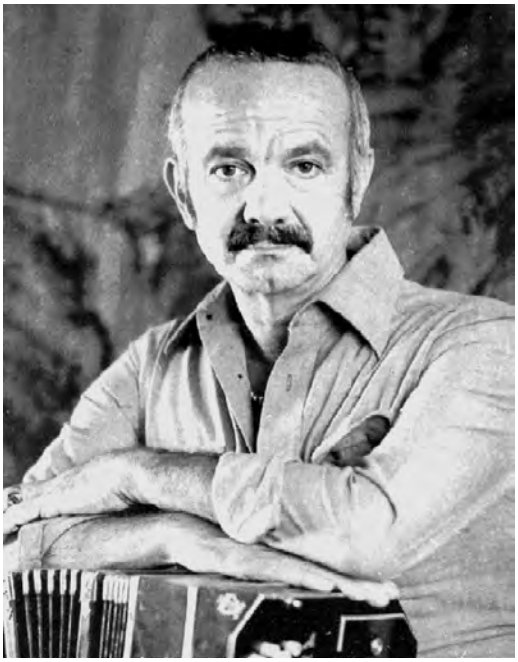

Figure 11: Astor Piazzolla in 1971 (Photo courtesy of Rainer Zenz)

Astor Panteleon Piazzolla was bom on March 11, 1921 in Mar del Plata, a seaside city located near Buenos Aires. His family moved to New York City from Argentina while he was still a toddler. When he was only a child, Astor Piazzolla earned money working in the nearest Jewish synagogues as a janitor. Later in life, he mentioned that some of his music was influenced

by the songs he heard at the synagogues where he worked (Gorin, 2001: 30). When he was eight years old, he received his first bandoneón as a gift. Before long, he began to take music lessons. At first, his attitude toward music was casual; it wasn't until he heard the piano music of Johann Sebastian Bach, played by his neighbor, Bela Wilda, a Hungarian Jewish pianist who was a student and disciple of Sergei Rachmaninoff, that he became infatuated with studying music full time. Wilda became his teacher and began teaching him to play Bach. Since Wilda was a pianist and had no knowledge of the bandoneón, he arranged Bach's piano pieces for Piazzolla so that he could play it on his most beloved instrument.

Piazzolla and his closest friend Stanley Sommerkovsky, a Polish Jewish-American, wandered the streets of New York, played in Central Park, and sometimes disguised themselves as adults by wearing coats and hats to enter jazz clubs where Cab Calloway or Duke Ellington played. His experiences in Harlem gave him one of his lifelong loves, an appreciation for jazz (Azzi and Collier 2000; 91).

Piazzolla moved back to Buenos Aires with his family in 1937. There, he became the youngest member of Aníbal Troilo's orchestra, serving as the main bandoneón player. Piazzolla started making arrangements and compositions for this tango orchestra. Over the next few years, he improved his understanding of classical music by taking lessons with Alberto Ginastera, a protégé of Jewish-American composer Aaron Copland. In 1953, Piazzolla received the Fabien Sevitzky award for his classical *Buenos Aires Symphony*, in three movements, and won a French government scholarship to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. After listening to Piazzolla's improvisation of a tango on his bandoneón, Boulanger told Piazzolla that his destiny was not, as he had thought, as a classical composer but more in the tango (ibid.). This changed Piazzolla's

career, and he returned to Argentina and began composing an extensive collection of tango music, including individual works and several film scores.

Piazzolla organized his octet called El Octeto Buenos Aires, and began composing arrangements and new compositions for various string orchestras in Argentina. In addition, he started to produce experimental works for a variety of instruments, including a quintet of violin, bandoneón, bass, electric guitar, and piano (Piazzolla 2006; 2). After the debut of this new experimental music, he weathered harsh criticism from conservative Argentinian tango musicians and historians who weren't thrilled about his new sound and found it vulgar (Azzi and Collier, 2000; 72). This led to the emergence of the era of *Nuevo Tango.* Piazzolla attributed this new sound to the merging elements of traditional tango, the music that he heard as a child in the United States (specifically jazz and the music of the synagogue), and classical motifs inspired by the works of Bach, especially through its use of counterpoint.[24] Piazzolla's influence transformed the sound of the tango—it elevated it to more sophisticated audiences, and today his music can be heard in concert halls all over the world. While Judaism cannot take credit for influencing *Nuevo Tango*, it, nevertheless, played a role in shaping and inspiring the young Piazzolla on his journey to transform tango through the different relationships he had with Jewish artists, friends, and in the Lower East side synagogues where he worked as child.

Osvaldo Golijov grew up in an East European Jewish household in La Plata, Argentina. Born to a piano teacher mother and physician father, Golijov was raised surrounded by classical chamber music, Jewish liturgical and klezmer music, and the *Nuevo Tango* of Astor Piazzolla. After studying piano at the local conservatory and composition with Gerardo Gandini he moved to Israel in 1983, where he studied at the Jerusalem Rubin Academy and immersed himself in the

[24] Christine Denniston, "The Dark Age of Tango." http://www.history-of- tango.com/dark-age.html (Accessed 24 June, 2012).

colliding musical traditions of that city. Upon moving to the United States in 1986, Golijov earned his Ph.D. in composition at the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied with George Crumb, and was a fellow at Tanglewood, studying with Oliver Knussen. [25]

Figure 12: Osvaldo Golijov at his home studio in Buenos Aires (Photo courtesy of www.osvaldogolijov.com)

In the early 1990s, Golijov began to work closely with the St. Lawrence String Quartet and the Kronos Quartet. Both ensembles were the earliest to perform Golijov's volatile and category-defying style in its true, full form. In 2002, the classical label EMI released *Yiddishbbuk*, a Grammy-nominated CD of Golijov's chamber music, celebrating ten years of collaboration with the St. Lawrence String Quartet. This collaborative work featured a number of tangos.

[25]Biography of Osvaldo Golijov, http://www.osvaldogolijov.com (Accessed 2 January, 2016).

The name "Yiddishbbuk" is derived from an apocryphal book of Psalms; its few remains are hidden in the notebooks of Franz Kafka. According to Golijov, each of the piece's three movements "is a little bit of the Jewish 20th century," titled by the initials of Jewish cultural figures and historical events.[26] The first movement memorializes three children killed at Terezin; the second movement commemorates author Isaac Bashevis Singer, in whose stories Golijov detects rhythms that inspired his compositions (including ones mixing klezmer sounds with the rhythms of tango); the third movement honors composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein.

While Golijov acknowledges his own Jewish influences, he does not believe religiosity is a necessary condition for connecting with his music. "The idea is to transcend the origins," he writes.[27] For the composer, these origins are diverse. Golijov's home country Argentina is mostly Catholic. During his youth, however, he shared a bedroom with his great-grandfather, whom he watched pray in Hebrew and Yiddish. When was in Israel, he was exposed to Sephardic, Arabic, and Christian music for the first time. This cultural hodge-podge permeates his compositions. Golijov's linguistic and musical facility allows him to engage with many musical languages. He believes that "certain cultures have explored certain aspects of the human soul others haven't." For example, when Golijov attempts to write about the feeling of desolation, he draws upon Argentinian tango and the Spanish flamenco. "It's a dialogue," he writes, comparing the musical contributions of various cultures to different rabbinical interpretations of Jewish texts (ibid.).

Golijov represents a new wave of Jewish musicians and poets that have been reinventing the tango since the 1980s. These artists include Gidon Kremer, a Latvian violinist that has focused many of his projects and recordings on the music of the Argentinian and Yiddish tango;

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[26] The Yiddishkeit of Classical Music (http://www.timesofisrael.com/the-yiddishkeit-of-classical-music) (Accessed 2 January, 2016)

[27] Biography of Osvaldo Golijov, http://www.osvaldogolijov.com. (Accessed 2 January, 2016)

Alejandro Szwarcman, a Buenos Aires-based poet and lyricist who has become one of Argentina's most beloved writers of modern tango lyrics; and Gotan Project, a musical pop group based in Paris, consisting of Jewish musicians Edouardo Makaroff and Philippe Cohen Solal. Formed in 1999, the Gotan Project performs original tango songs combining them with layers of techno beats, samples, and breaks.

The tango continues to inspire Jewish communities around the globe. For example, in Ukraine, the tango is having a strong resurgence as part of various dance programs through communities of Jewish teens and young adults. One example is the use of tango in forming relationships at a Hillel International's Kiev branch where complete strangers have the opportunity to meet each other through classes in milonga and tango waltz. One participant of a this class compared learning tango steps to trying to learn Jewish traditions, she stated, "I had this fight with tango – but you learn when you get through the difficulties it's incredible. I used to fight the same way with Shabbat, with holidays. When it's difficult, I don't want it, I don't need it. But then you realize it brings you so much joy. It's just about getting on to the next step …just like the tango."[28]

Back in Argentina, Yiddish tango is making a comeback. For Gustavo Bulgach, the band leader of the world-renowned Buenos Aires Yiddish Tango Club, the music is a reminder of his childhood in Buenos Aires in the 1970s and '80s. Born to a family of Russian Jewish immigrants, Bulgach grew up in Argentina learning Jewish folk music from his grandfather, a passionate music lover, and in the synagogue founded by his grandfather. Bulgach's renditions of tango draw on these traditions and, at the same time, offer a fresh take on the genre. Bulgach combines tunes and rhythms from both tango and klezmer more freely, as in his self-composed

[28] Telushkin, Naomi, 12 July 2012: http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/in-ukraine-tango-meets-torah/ (Accessed 8 January, 2016)

"Librescu Tango."[29] And in other pieces still, the combination is already inherent in the music — for example, Bulgach notes that legendary Piazzolla often said his favorite 3-3-2 rhythm was influenced by the Jews. Bulgach says it has become common practice at Jewish concerts in Argentina for the musicians to perform an old Yiddish tango as part of the repertoire. At the same time, documentaries and concerts of Jewish tango music have sprung up across the United States, and Jewish tango music has even reappeared in Eastern Europe.

Above all, though, Bulgach says tango is more about a feeling than a specific harmony or rhythm. "To me, the tango is like the blues," he says. "It's an attitude. It's darkly lit. It's ecstatic. It's out of control. Tango is more than the music you hear in Buenos Aires, it's something you breathe."[30]

[29] Weiss, Anthony, 26 August, 2014; http://www.jta.org/2014/08/26/news-opinion/united-states/yiddish-tango-links-time-space-and-musical-styles-1 (Accessed 9 January, 2016)
[30] ibid.

CONCLUSION

Argentinean filmmaker Gabriel Pomeraniec's 2005 feature documentary, *Tango: A Story with Jews*, explores tango music and its Jewish influences. From beginning to the end, the film simply can't contain its enthusiasm for all things relating the Jews and tango. Much like myself, the director of the film tries to chronicle and create the case for showcasing this important, and sometimes overlooked and unobserved relationship.

Tango: A Story with Jews, is based on journalist and historian José Judkovski's book of the same title, which is quoted throughout this thesis. Judkovski, who narrates the film, is an engaging narrator of all things related to Jewish tango. He explains that Argentine Jews immersed themselves in the music to capture it for future generations. Judkovski creates a strong case that the music of the tango came from the Jews, and that there is a Jewish obligation to pass on the love of the tango to others. While I certainly agree that there was a relationship between the new klezmer sounds emerging from the new immigrants arriving to Argentina's shores, I disagree that Jews deserve full credit for the formation of the tango.

At the height of its popularity, there was no question that Argentina's national dance was shaped by Jewish immigrants. As I write about in the first chapter of this thesis, Argentina first welcomed East European Jews to its shores in the 1880s. Fleeing pogroms and other manifestations of anti-Semitism, these Jews arrived in South America determined that their new countries would become their homelands. Both the documentary and this thesis explain that many of these Jews brought the instruments with which they played klezmer music. The klezmer musicians found a natural partner in the music of the tango.

In the film a young contemporary Jewish musician says that when he plays tango music,

"klezmer phrasing is imprinted on every note I play."[31] A Jewish singer notes the influence of cantorial music in the composing and singing of early twentieth-century tangos. "What would Buenos Aires be without the imprint of the Jews?" he asks wistfully.[32]

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, however, I have come to understand and appreciate that the creation, development and evolution of the tango is not something that any one cultural or ethnic group can take credit for; it something greater than that – it is a continually developing art form that still today is inspired by various cultures and music forms while continuing to be reinvented by those in Argentina and those in the rest of the world. And, while I do believe that there is something "intrinsically Jewish" about the tango, I now certainly understand how so many other cultures played a major role in its creation and development.

My appreciation for this important art form increased in the process of researching and writing this thesis. I hope that through this thesis I've been able to show that the musical nuances between the Argentinian tango and Jewish music are undoubtedly linked. Examining the role Judaism played in the development of the tango helped me fully understand how a cultural group can influence not only the creation of a dance but in a creation of a way of life. I look forward to continuing the exploration of tango's music, dance and poetry throughout the rest of my cantorial career.

[31] Pomeraniec, Gabriel *Tango: A Story with Jews* Israel Films, 2009
[32] ibid.

APPENDIX A
LANDMARKS IN ARGENTINIAN JEWISH HISTORY

16th – 18th centuries: Significant numbers of *marranos*, secret Jews, most of them Sephardic, settled in Argentina in response to the Inquisition. Many assimilate.

1813: Argentina, now independent of Spain, declares end of Inquisition. Jewish immigration from Central and Eastern Europe begins.

1860: First Jewish wedding recorded in Buenos Aires; first congregation founded soon afterward.

1880s: Pogroms in Eastern Europe attract thousands of Jews barred from entering North America.

1889: Moiseville established by 824 newly arrived Jewish *gauchos.* Residents appeal to Baron Maurice de Hirsch who founds the Jewish Colonization Association. Eventually, over 100,000 Jews settle the Pampas.

1906-1912: 13,000 per year Jews leave Eastern Europe, Morocco and Ottoman Empire for urban areas of Argentina. Many with musical ability join tango orchestras; many of their children become major tango performers, composers and orchestra conductors.

1920: 150,000 Jews live in Argentina, the newest arrivals, nearly all in Buenos Aires.

1930-1945: Continued immigration to Buenos Aires and Rosario from countryside and Europe as the Holocaust unfolds. Numerous noted Jewish classical and film music composers settle in Argentina to escape the Nazis.

1946-55: Some Jews leave for Israel and North America under Juan Peron. Nonetheless, 310,000 Jews live in Argentina in 1960s.

1992- 1994: Bombings of Israeli Embassy and AMIA Community Center caused further emigration from Argentina.

2015: While there is considerable anti-Semitism in Argentina, 150,000 Jews remain. Argentina is the seventh largest Jewish community in the world.

APPENDIX B
SELECTED JEWISH TANGOS ON COMMERCIAL RECORDINGS

- Beygelman, Dovid & Moshe Broderson. “Ikh ganve in der nakht” (“I Steal in the Night”). (Popularized at Ararat Yiddish Revue Company of Lodz.)

- Beygelman, Dovid & Moshe Broderson. “Tsi darf es azoy zayn?” (“Does it Have to Be This Way?”). (Popularized at Ararat Yiddish Revue Company of Lodz.)

- Ciganeri, Jeremia & Abraham Szewach. “Far Mentshn bin Ikh freylekh” (“People See Me Happy”) (Yiddish theater tango, Bs. As.)

- Ciganeri, Jeremia & Abraham Szewach. “Ikh vel laydn in der Shtl” (“I Will Suffer in Silence”) (Yiddish theater, Buenos Aires.)

- Ciganeri, Jeremia & Abraham Szewach. “Vu iz dayn Shmeykhl?” (“Where Is Your Smile?”)) (Yiddish theaters, Buenos Aires.)

- Ellstein, Abraham & Jacob Jacobs. “Farges Mikh Nisht” (“Forget Me Not”) (From the New York Yiddish operetta *Mayn Malkele [My Little Malke]*).

- Ellstein, Abraham & Molly Picon. “Mazl” (“Luck”). (Created for Yiddish film *Mamale*.)

- Ellstein, Abraham & Molly Picon. “Oygn” (“Eyes”). (From Jacob Kalich’s Yiddish stage production *Eyn mol In lebn [Once in a Lifetime]*).

- Gold, Artur. “Gdy w ogrodzie botanicznym” (“In the Botanical Garden”). (In Polish, composed by noted Warsaw musician Gold who perished in the Treblinka concentration camp in 1943.)

- Matos-Rodriguez, Gerardo. “La Cumparsita.” (“The Little Parade”). (First performance, 1917, at café La Giralda, Montevideo, Uruguay. Later recorded in Yiddish by José Derasner)

- Maud, Zuni. “Di Grine Katshke” (“The Green Duck”). (Living Traditions) (Quirky autobiographical song by the leading Yiddish puppeteer of the 20th century; tune features tango rhythm)

- Meyerovsky & Benzion Witler. “Ikh hob Tsayt, Ikh vel vartn” (“I Have Time, I Will Wait”) ((Popularized in the Yiddish theaters of both Buenos Aires and New York.)

- Olshanetsky, Alexander & Chaim Tauber. “Ikh hob dikh tsufil Lib” (“I Love You Too Much”). (From the New York Yiddish musical *Der katerinshtshik [The Organ Grinder]*.

- Sandler, Jacob. “Main erster Tango” (“My First Tango”). (Sandler, a singer and choral conductor, worked both in Yiddish theater and liturgical jobs in New York and Philadelphia after emigrating from Russia. Recorded several of his tango songs before 1931 death.)

- Sandler, Jacob & L. Cibutaru. “Ich hob dich Lieb” (“I Have Your Love”). (This is one of many songs created by this pair for the New York Yiddish theater.)

- Sandler, Jacob & L. Cibutaru. “Tate, Mame” (“My Father, My Mother”). (This was a staple in the New York Yiddish Theater and was often performed in a tango style.)

- Sandler, Jacob & L. Cibutaru. “Zwei Schwartze Oygn” (“Two Black Eyes”). Another song from the New York Yiddish theater rendered by Sandler as a tango.)

- Strock, Oskar & Isroel Sabeschinski. “Farges mikh nisht” (“Do Not Forget Me”). (Popularized by Russian gypsy singer Pyotr Leschenko.)

- Strock, Oskar & S. Krontayer. “Vu ahin zol ikh gehn?” (“Where Shall I Go?”). (Popularized by Leo Fuld and Menasha Oppenheim in Europe, Israel and U.S.)

- Witler, Benzion. “Ales farloyrn” (“Everything is Lost”) (Tune taken from pre-war Polish tango; used in Yiddish stage productions in both Buenos Aires & New York during the war.)

- Witler, Benzion. “Gedenk” (“Thought”). (Adapted from a folk tune for use on the Yiddish stages in Buenos Aires & New York.)

- Witler, Benzion. “Libste” (“Beloved”)

- Yablokoff, Haiman. “Papirosen” (“Cigarettes”). (Yiddish words added to a popular Polish tune in 1932 by this lyricist, musician, Yiddish theater director. A starving orphan boy tries to sell hand-rolled cigarettes on the streets. In Buenos Aires, *papirosen* was also a name for prostitutes, which may explain its adoption as a tango song and musical theater number there and elsewhere.)

APPENDIX C
SELECTED TANGOS FROM WORLD WAR II-ERA GHETTOS AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS

- Beygelman, Dovid. “Kinder Yorn” (“Childhood Years”). (Written in Lodz Ghetto.)
- Beygelman, Dovid & Isaiah Shpigl. “Makh tsu di eygelekh” (“Close Your Little Eyes”). (Written in Lodz Ghetto.)
- Beygelman, Dovid & Isaiah Shpigl. “Nit kayn rozhinkes” (“No Almonds & Raisins”). (Written in Lodz Ghetto addressing Yiddish drama on the nostalgic Yiddish almonds and raisings theme.)
- Brodno, Avrom & Shmerke Kaczerginski. “Friling” (“Springtime”). (Written by Kaczerginski after wife Barbara died in the Vilna Ghetto.)
- Broydo, Kasriel. “Moyshe halt zikh” (“Moses, Hold On”). (“Dos Lid fun bialystoker Geto”) (“Song of the Bialystok Ghetto”).
- Gebirtig, Mordkhe. “Minutn fun Bitokn” (“Moments of Certainty”). (Krakow Ghetto.)
- Hershkovitz, Yankele. “Amerike hot erklert” (“America Has Declared”). (Lodz Ghetto.)
- Hershkovitz, Yankele. “Vayl ikh bin a yidele” (“Because I Am a Jew”). (One of many of Hershkovitz’s Lodz Ghetto songs.)
- Kaczerginski, Shmerke. “Yid du Partizaner” (“Jew, Partisan”).(Song from Vilna Ghetto celebrating Jewish partisans.)
- Petersburski, Jerzy & Ramon Collazo. “Pato.” (Serena-Electro 1929) Petersburski, Jerzy & Zenon Friedwald. “Ta ostatnia niedziela” (“Our Last Sunday”) (Serena-Electro 1936)
- Rosental, Leyb. “Mir Lebn Eybik” (“Love Me Forever)
- Rozental, Leyb with Misha Veksler. “Peshe fun Reshe” (“Peshe, the Girl from Reshe”) (Written for revue of the same name in Vilna Ghetto, starring Rozental’s sister Chayele, shortly before Leyb was taken to German camp in Estonia and ultimately shot there.)
- Scheider, Klemens. “Ich hab’ kein Heimatland” (“I Have No Homeland”). Marek Weber Orch. (Electrola 3072, 1933)
- Veksler, Misha & Leyb Rozental. “Yisrolik” (“Ghetto Kid”). (Vilna Ghetto)
- Weill, Kurt & Bertolt Brecht. “Song of the Nazi Soldier’s Wife.” (Written after these famous artists escaped from Germany, then broadcast in Europe to bolster morale.)

APPENDIX D
NOTED ARGENTINIAN JEWISH TANGO ARTISTS AND PROMOTERS

- **Isaco Abitbol (1917-1994):** Born in Alvear, Corrientes and moved to Buenos Aires in 1930. Highly regarded bandoneónist; founded Cuarteto Santa Ana with an extended discography.

- M**ordechai David "Max" Glücksmann (1875-1946)**: Arrived in Buenos Aires in 1890 from the Austrian Empire. Became importation agent for Odeon Records in1904. Founded *Discos Glücksmann* which eventually cornered the tango market in Argentina by 1914. He was also fundamental through his deals in creating royalties for artists and in making tango visible through movie theaters in Argentina.

- **Moisés Smolarchik Brenner "Ben Molar" (1915-2015):** He was an Argentine author, composer, musical producer, and talent scout. He created the National Day of the Tango, held annually in December, placed bronze plaques on all 40 corners of Calle Corrientes and produced an interdisciplinary artistic project that combined art, poetry, and music to promote Argentine tango.

- **Josef Nezow "Jose Nieso" (1907-1966):** Born in Russia, Nieso was a noted tango violinist and composer. He is especially remembered for his compositions and performances with the orchestra of Roberto Firpo, which he joined in 1927.

- **Oscar Rubinstein "Oscar Rubens" (1914-1984):** Rubens is a noted Jewish lyricist and poet, and the younger brother of Luis Rubinstein, see below. His celebrated tangos include: "Dejame así," "Gime el viento," "Lloran las campanas," "Tu melodía," and "Corazón qué has hecho," just to name a few.

- **Luis Rubistein (1908-1954):** Famed composer of tangos and the older brother of Oscar Rubens. The Rubinstein family emigrated from Odessa to Buenos Aires. Some of his tangos include: "Cuatro palabras," "Tu perro pekinés," "Inspiración," "Ya sale el tren," "Cadenas," "Nada más," "Tarde gris," and "Marion."

- **Abraham Moisés "Alberto" Soifer (1907-1977):** Soifer, a son of Russian immigrants, was a well-regarded pianist and composer who created partnerships with many top tango performers in the 1930s. He directed several tango orchestras in Buenos Aires and provided music for many films.

- **Bernardo Mendel Sucher "Manuel Sucher" or "Manola" (1913-1971):** Sucher was a violinist and pianist who is mostly known for his partnership with bandeleonist Felix Liesker. Throughout the 1930s, he was one of the most famous arrangers and composers of tango music in Argentina.

APPENDIX E
LIST OF FIGURES

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