The art of DJing

Disclaimer: This material is a summarized version of Eduardo Lazarowski’s lectures at the CAT Cincinnati Tango Marathon. April 30th & 31st 2017. This document has no commercial value and is presented only for educational purposes. This material should be taken as an incomplete guide to stimulate the interest of the reader in the field.
Sources and references


Acknowledgments: Special thanks to Lorena Bouzas (DJ, organizer) and Osvaldo Natucci (DJ, tango historian) for sharing their knowledge and long standing experience musicalizing at the most prestigious milongas of Buenos Aires. The author is indebted to Maestro Julian Hasse (musician, arranger, bandoneon player) for assisting on the basic principles of tango music.
Useful books to consult

Tango Stories: Musical Secrets
by Michael Lavocah
Norwich, England
2012

Encyclopedia of Tango
by Gabriel Valiente
Lexington KY US
2014
Useful links

*El Corte Tango DJ Manual*
by Arnoud de Graaff, Michiel Lombaers, and Eric Jeurissen

*Tango DJing* – by Michael Lavocah
http://www.todotango.com/english/history/chronicle/481/Tango-DJing-Part-1:-Music-for-dancing/
http://www.todotango.com/english/history/chronicle/510/Tango-DJing-Part-3:-Shaping-the-evening/

The King of the milonga – History of the milongas and Djing in Buenos Alres
http://tanzbar.dk/the-kings-of-the-milonga-la-nacion/

Interview to Felix Picherno
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXIAziV8yFo
### A few dates to take into account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Invention of the gramophone (by Emile Berling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>First (acoustic) tango recording: Orquesta Típica Vicente Greco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Electric recording (paste discs in 78 rpm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>First tango long play (Carlos Di Sarli, Music Hall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Magnetic recording (tapes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Stereo vinyl records re-editing old mono-tracks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Compact disks (CD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The art of DJing

Part 1: *Fundaments of tango music for dancers*

- Rhythm, melody, and harmony in tango dance
- The major periods of tango music (Old Guard vs. Golden Age)
- The orchestra singer
Elements of tango music …
… to take into account when arranging a playlist

**Rhythm**: Metric movement of patterned recurrence of a beat or accent. Most tangos are played as four beats per bar. The first and third beats are strong, while the third and fourth are weak.

*Rhythm is the most fundamental element of tango dance.*

**Syncopation**: a rhythmic emphasis is placed were there normally would not be one. Syncopation is also playing strong (off-beat) between beats.

**Melody**: Succession of sounds and silences that develops in a lineal sequence and that has its own identity and musical meaning

**Harmony**: Elements of melodic character, complementary but independent of the main melody. **Polyphony**: Many voices, each of them expressing its own musical idea in harmony with the other voices
Classification of the Orchestras based on Style

While all orchestras exhibit a rhythmic backbone to appeal to dancers, their styles vary according to rhythmic strength, melodic interceptions, and complexity of harmonic arrangements.

- Driven by the Beat
- Melodic segments
- Harmonic arrangements

Canaro
Lomuto
Donato
D’Arienzo
Biagi
Rodriguez
Tanturi (Castillo)

D’Agostino
De Angelis
Tanturi (Campos)

Fresedo
Caló
Di Sarli
Demare

De Caro
Pugliese
Troilo
Laurenz
Gobbi
Classification of the Orchestras based on Style

The *traditionalist* school (initiated by Canaro) maintains the choppy, heavily rhythmic style of the Old Guard trios and quartets. The Evolutionist school (initiated by Firpo’s melodic arrangements and expanded by De Caro and Fresedo) incorporates elements of classic/erudite music into tango.

### Traditionalists

- **predominantly rhythmic**
  - Francisco Canaro
  - Edgardo Donato
  - Francisco Lomuto
  - Alfredo Carabelli
  - Orquesta Tipica Victor

### Evolutionists

- **Rhythmic but with frequent melodic and harmonic orchestrations**
  - Roberto Firpo
    - Julio De Caro
    - Osvaldo Fresedo

1930s

- Juan D’Arienzo
- Rodolfo Biagi
- Ricardo Tanturi
- Alfredo De Angelis
- Angel D’Agostino
- Enrique Rodriguez
- Ricardo Malerba

1940s

- Carlos D Sarli
- Anibal Troilo
- Osvaldo Pugliese
- Pedro Laurenz
- Miguel Calo
- Lucio Demare
- Alfredo Gobbi
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Artists</th>
<th>The music of the ‘20s &amp; ‘30s:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1930s       | Francisco Canaro, Edgardo Donato, Francisco Lomuto, Alfredo Carabelli, Orquesta Tipica Victor, Osvaldo Fresedo | • Is 5-7 BPM slower than that of the ’40
• Is linear and easy to predict
• The choreography is rather simple |
| 1940s       | Juan D’Arienzo, Rodolfo Biagi, Ricardo Tanturi, Alfredo De Angelis, Angel D’Agostino, Enrique Rodriguez, Ricardo Malerba, Carlos D Sarli, Aníbal Troilo, Osvaldo Pugliese, Pedro Laurenz, Miguel Caló, Lucio Demare, Alfredo Gobbi | The music of the ‘40s & ‘50s:
• Is Energetic, Extravert
• Invite to complex choreographic arrangements
• The embrace is artistic |
The “milonga” (social dance) emerged as massive phenomenon during the 40s…

The period between ~1937 to 1955 is known as the Golden Age or just The Forties

The music of the Golden Age continue energizing the milongas of the 3rd millennium
The Forties

Three factors contributed to the massive appealing of tango dance in 1940:

- The technical quality of a new generation of musicians and their insertion into the popular strata
- The surge of young musicians/composers (e.g. Troilo, Pugliese, Di Sarli) and poets (e.g. Homero Manzi, Homero Expósito)
- The preponderant role of the vocalist and the re-invention of the Tango Canción (Tango Song)
The singers of the 30s

- Nasal sound
- Strictly adjusted to the orchestra tempo
- Purity of the language
- Neutral voice, monotonous, voided of feeling. No major stylistic differences between singers
The singers of the 40s

Orchestra and singer functioned as a unity. The singer delivered personality

- Singing with the soul, natural “street” language with frequent (but not always) use of lunfardo slang
- Phrasing in harmony –but not necessarily on tempo, with the instruments
- Distinctive voices: Echagüe, rhythmic; Fiorentino, melodic; Berón, romantic, Castillo, bully. Morán, dramatic
Part 2: How to build a play list

- Primary and secondary orchestras. The forgotten orchestras
- Behind the console of the DJs in Buenos Aires
- Create your tandas. Build your playlist
The DJ’s role is to please the dancers with quality music
DJ’s dilemma
What to play?

• More than 30,000 tangos have been recorded by >200 orchestras, but …

• Only 1,500 -2,000 tangos (T, M and W) by <30 orchestras are danced in modern milongas
## Classification of Orchestras Based on # of recorded tracks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orchestra</th>
<th>tracks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canaro</td>
<td>3798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firpo</td>
<td>2862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresedo</td>
<td>1252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D'Arienzo</td>
<td>963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lomuto</td>
<td>958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Angelis</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pugliese</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troilo</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. T. Victor</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Caro</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caló</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varela</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donato</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodriguez</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di Sarli</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biagi</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demare</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurenz</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobbi</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malerba</td>
<td>42</td>
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</table>
Number of tangos played by DJs during the Tango Dance World Championship. Buenos Aires 2015

Posted on FB by the Club de Musicalizadores de Tango

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DJ Name</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Di Sarli</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan D’Arienzo</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo Tanturi</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osvaldo Pugliese</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anibal Troilo</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miguel Calo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Osvaldo Fresedo</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucio Demare</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel D’Agostino</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfredo De Angelis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodolfo Biagi</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro Laurenz</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrique Rodriguez</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Canaro</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgardo Donato</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riccardo Malerba</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfredo Gobbi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTV</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 152
Primary

Juan D’Arienzo
Carlos Di Sarli
Aníbal Troilo
Osvaldo Pugliese

The bread and butter of the milonga
Must be played at every milonga

Secondary

Ricardo Tanturi
Miguel Caló
Alfredo De Ángelis
Angel D’Agostino
Osvaldo Fresedo
Rodolfo Biagi
Enrique Rodríguez

Always played

Old guard

Francisco Canaro
Edgardo Donato
O. Tipica Victor

Great for waltzes and milongas. Be cautious with tangos, they could bring the energy down

Forgotten (but not forgettable)

Pedro Laurenz
Lucio Demare
Alfredo Gobbi
Ricardo Malerba*
José García
Hector Varela*

Great orchestras, but not well-known by all dancers (*and even resisted by some DJs)
Periods of orchestra’s popularity in nowadays milongas. Rating is indicated from high (dark green) to low (light green). Their most popular singers are indicated with white fonts within approximate years of their tenure.
Combining **Tangos, Milongas, Walses** (and **Cortinas**) (by 6 different **orchestras**)

A • TTTT C TTTT C TTTT C MMM C TTTT C WWW C

B • TTTT C TTTT C MMM C TTTT C TTTT C WWW C

16 T + 3M + 3W + 6C = 70 minutes
TIPS
• Know your music
• Know the level of dancers and their preferences. Ask the organizer for suggestions
• Start your playlist with a well-known, energetic tanda, e.g., D’Arienzo, Di Sarli
• Watch the audience, pay attention to the dancers’ feet
• Be dynamic, keep the energy high but balanced
• Be ready for a “change of mind” in your playlist. Always have back up tandas!

Within Tandas:
• One orchestra per tanda.
• Same period of the orchestra, if possible, same year. Be aware of different versions of the same tango by the same orchestra (different periods)
• Do not combine instrumental with sung tangos (with exceptions)
• Do not combine singers in one tanda (with exceptions)
More tips

• Don’t lose your concentration: you may not be able to dance much when you DJ
• One or two tango tandas of the ’30s is enough!!!
• Do not abuse with the music of the 1950’s. **Be careful with the singers of the ‘50s.**
• Don’t be afraid of playing Di Sarli and D’Arienzo 2, 3 times through the night

• Don’t play:
  • Soloist tango singers (Gardel, Goyeneche, Julio Sosa, etc)
  • Vanguard tango (Piazzolla, Rovira, Salgan, L. Federico, Stamponi, Stampone, etc)
  • Fantasy tango, e.g., Mariano Mores (great for stage but not for social dance)

• **Do not re-invent the wheel. The best tango music for dancers has been invented >70 years ago!**
Cortinas

- Should be clearly different from the tanda
- Nice energy
- Should get dancers off the floor
- Be remembered by your tandas not by your cortinas

External factors

- Audio system: get there early and run a test
- Light and temperature have an impact
- Interruptions and special moments during the milonga: have a plan to get back into the flow
- Gender balance: watch out for leaders exhaustion
Be generous

*It is not about the DJ*

*it is about the dancers*