

petter bræinert  
fano

**bienvenido**

When we began to plan the renovation of the beautiful landmark carriage house that would become the Vilcek Foundation's new headquarters, we knew we wanted it to include a cultural event space, one flexible enough to accommodate art exhibits, film showings, and musical concerts — a tall order indeed. Yet we accomplished just that, and have already put it to good use to display artworks and show films. It now gives us great pride to present our first concert here. On a more personal note, it gives us special pleasure that the artists you'll hear tonight all hail from Slovakia, the country from which we emigrated, when it was still part of Czechoslovakia.

Peter Breiner, as you'll read in Jadranka Važanová's insightful essay in this publication, is that rare musician who is at home anywhere in the musical world, whether classical, jazz, rock 'n' roll, Baroque, or — as you'll hear tonight — tango. His skill knows no bounds, either: He is an accomplished pianist, composer, arranger, and conductor — a "musical polyglot," to quote Ms. Važanová. His wide-ranging talent and interests have found him audiences of all ages, throughout Europe and Asia, in Israel and Australia, and, of course, the United States. He joins us here, tonight, in New York City, where he now lives, to perform with T(ri)ango, a name he coined to reflect the three instruments (piano, violin, and accordion) played in his tango music concerts.

For the Vilcek Foundation concerts, Peter is accompanied by Stano Palúch on violin, and Boris Lenko on the accordion, both widely recorded and in-demand artists. We welcome Peter with his colleagues and thank them for agreeing to perform for a select audience of our friends and supporters of the Vilcek Foundation.

Enjoy the concert!

Marica and Jan Vilcek

**“if nostalgia is  
a country,  
tango is its capital.  
tango writes  
of time, loss,  
and love.”**

**robert farris  
thompson**

# tango metaphors

Born from the music and dance of immigrants in the late nineteenth-century suburbs of Buenos Aires, tango has been a metaphor for longing, passion, and the search for identity. Complex and ambiguous, over time, tango bridged different ethnic, social, musical, and even geographical worlds. Diverse cultural and historical coincidences shaped tango into a genre whose refinement is all but coincidental. The history of tango reflects a subtle relationship between coincidence and purpose, a twosome that so often is the crucial ingredient in the great creations of mankind. The encounter between tango and Peter Breiner also can be seen as both random and fated. As a composer, arranger, pianist, and conductor who moves comfortably among numerous musical styles, genres, and performance venues, Breiner found in the multiple musical and cultural dimensions of tango a natural habitat, where crossing—or, perhaps, erasing—boundaries not only was allowed but virtually inevitable.

The roots of tango history are entangled in the social and cultural diversity of the nineteenth-century River Plate (*Río de la Plata*) region, centered in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, which attracted European immigrants from Spain and Italy, seeking a better life. They came together there with native Argentines, Europeans born in Argentina, and a black population of both African and Argentine origin. From this fertile mixture was born the dance, music, and poetic elements of tango. The etymology of the word “tango” has been the subject of heated discussions, but there can be little doubt that its dance and rhythmic features bear traces of Cuban dances, namely *habanera*, which had spread throughout South America by the mid-nineteenth-century, and in Brazil had been adapted as *tango brasileiro*<sup>1</sup>. Black Cuban sailors arriving in Buenos Aires brought with them the *habanera*, where it was undoubtedly influenced by the steps of Afro-Argentine dancing

1  
Robert Farris Thompson, *Tango: The Art History of Love* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), p. 25.

2  
Gérard Béhague, “Tango,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 25, ed. by Stanley Sadie (London and New York: Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 73–75.

groups called *candombes*. The result was the *milonga*, a dance in duple meter and syncopated rhythm, which contributed to the rhythmic structure of the tango. No less important was the artistic participation of gauchos, who added the stamping patterns and rigidity of the Andalusian *fandango* to the tango dance, and the Andalusian trilling technique to the tango song.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Argentine tango as we know it today had pushed its way from the poor suburbs of Buenos Aires into the salons and ballrooms of the upper class, where initially it was disdained for its violent and sexual character. But the simultaneous spread and growing popularity of tango in Europe — mainly Paris — accelerated its acceptance into downtown Buenos Aires. Along the way, tango absorbed the passion, seriousness, longing, outrage, despair, and insecurity of Argentines, who were questioning their own identity. Some scholars have interpreted the flamboyance, rigidity, and elaborately staged and restrained behavior of the dancers as a mask for those ambivalent feelings. Anthropologist Julie Taylor says that tango, in all its respects — lyrics, dance, and music — reflects the precise nature of that Argentine ambivalence.<sup>3</sup> She contends that Argentines resort to the tango as “a way of confronting the result of their search — a self-definition whose very essence is doubt.”<sup>4</sup>

The lyrics were an essential aspect of the genre; they molded its nostalgic character. Still, the tango was more “a sad thought danced,” in the words of Enrique Santos Discépolo, one of the great tango lyricists. Audiences wanted dancers, and dancers wanted music — not words — because “when sadness comes in, it is a thought to which they listen.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, Argentine dancers move to lyrics they can hear even when they are not sung. So the writing has continued,

<sup>3</sup> Julie Taylor, “Tango,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 2/4 (November 1987), 481–493.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *Tango*, p. 26.

...it was disdained for its violent and sexual character...

and the silent  
tango texts enhance  
the tango's intimate and  
reflective nature.

Tango music developed in kaleidoscopic turns, a brightly colored "seething and shifting" of its heritages.<sup>6</sup> The neo-Kongo bass beat of *habanera*, with a simple melody played over it, later changed to the four-beat *el cuatro*. The original tango ensembles were instrument trios consisting of flute, violin, and guitar, with the accordion or piano sometimes replacing the guitar. Around 1900, a new combination emerged, made up of the violin, piano, and bandoneón (a diatonic accordion with 38 and 33 buttons on either side of its bellow). After 1911, when bandoneónist Vicente Greco (1889–1924) formed the first *orquesta típica*, which featured the violin, flute, guitar, and bandoneón, larger bands were formed, some of them comprising as many as four bandoneóns, two violins, one violoncello, one double bass, and a piano. The famous bandleaders and composers of tango, including Francisco Canaro, Roberto Firpo, Julio de Caro, Osvaldo Pugliese, and Horacio Salgán, among many others, each added to the ever expanding repertory of musical elements. But it was especially the rhythmic percussive ornaments, such as *arrastre* (a peremptory roll in the bass functioning as a drag), and an offbeat phrasing, *síncopa*, that became the signature elements of tango.

In the 1950s, starting with Pugliese and Salgán, and continuing with Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992), tango music became intermingled with jazz and classical music. Piazzolla, who studied composition in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, transformed traditional large-scale tango into the so-called *tango nuevo*. He replaced the large band with a smaller chamber ensemble; introduced a more ambitious harmonic spectrum, a Baroque-like contrapuntal language; transformed the

...tango  
absorbed  
the passion,  
seriousness,  
longing,  
outrage,  
despair, and  
insecurity...

...it is this multi-dimensional character that also resonates with musical polyglot Peter Breiner...

articulation and phrase structure; and incorporated elements of jazz.

He wanted to elevate tango musically and to spotlight the virtuosity of the musicians, while renewing the popular tango yet preserving its essence. As Martín Kutnowski wrote, Piazzolla took tango “out of the ballroom and made it appropriate for the concert hall.”<sup>7</sup>

“The tango bears strong yet mutable links to place and culture, wrote Chris Goertzen and María Susan Azzi, in “Globalization and the Tango.”<sup>8</sup> This “semantic flexibility” and the ability to link times, spaces, and styles, predestined tango for globalization and international fame, spreading its popularity to such distant places as Japan, Finland, and Slovakia. It is this multidimensional character that also resonates with musical polyglot Peter Breiner. Although not so unusual in the past, today it is rather rare to see the concert pianist conducting the orchestra from behind the piano and, eventually, playing his own music. Breiner is a complete musician: he plays, arranges, and conducts the music of disparate styles and genres, from classical, jazz, popular, and film to folk and the traditional music of various world cultures, revealing fascinating connections between them. Thus, Breiner’s rendezvous with tango is both natural and unique. As a pianist/composer/arranger, he shows us the interconnection between jazz, tango, and classical music, accomplishing what pianists who specialize rarely can, or do.

In the Argentinean tango Breiner discovered “a new and completely original phenomenon: music containing an awe of the intensity unknown in any other musical genre.”<sup>9</sup> In his arrangements of classical tangos, he revived Piazzolla’s

7  
Martín Kutnowski, “Instrumental Rubato and Phrase Structure in Astor Piazzolla’s Music,” *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana*, 23/1 (Spring–Summer 2002), pp. 106–113.

8  
Chris Goertzen and María Susana Azzi, “Globalization and the Tango,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 31 (1999), pp. 67–76.

9  
Peter Breiner, “Triango: História,” <http://www.triango.sk/historia>.

intention to promote tango musically, unveiling its unknown stylistic possibilities, while allowing musicians to exhibit their individual mastery. Incorporating the musical-stylistic elements of Baroque and the Classical era, along with "jazz improvisations, a taste of central European waltz, playing based on a detailed research of sources but also on a maximum creativity where stylistic distance provides an extraordinary and observant insight,"<sup>10</sup> Breiner enriches the classical tango of Arturo Bernstein, Tito Ribero, Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi, Pascal de Gullo, Carlos Gardel, Julian Plaza, Cole Porter, and Astor Piazzolla, among others. He approaches the work of traditional tango composers with a refreshing energy and humor, alleviating the sometimes too heavy despair and sentiment of tango with witty and congenial musical surprises (rhythmic percussive scratches, played by violin; sudden jazz passages; and dissonant harmonies). His sensitive arrangements of old tangos respect the personal styles of their authors, retaining the tango character while at the same time imprinting his own distinct signature. Breiner's fluency in many musical languages is most effectively revealed in his original tangos, notably *Miss Mendacity* and the beautiful, nostalgic piece with the ideal tango title, *When? Never?*

Tango is just one in the broad scope of Breiner's arrangements, which range from the music of Bach, Gershwin, and Čajkovskij to Russian folk songs, Christmas carols, Baroque music, the Beatles, Elvis Presley, Chinese and Malaysian music, and, most recently, Leoš Janáček's operas. In all of them, he successfully links styles and periods. In the late eighties, as a young composer from a small town in the former Czechoslovakia, it was his Beatles concerti grossi, *Beatles Go Baroque*, that paved the road for him

...alleviating  
the sometimes  
too heavy  
despair  
and sentiment  
of tango...

10  
Diego  
Fischerman,  
"In the  
Beginning  
There Was a  
Misunderstand-  
ing." Liner notes  
for *Triango*.  
Pavian Records  
PM0034-2  
(2007).



to a global audience. His sensitivity to emotional nuances and mood also enabled him to become a prolific author of film scores. Today he is one of the most recorded artists in the music industry — he is featured as a composer, arranger, pianist, or conductor on more than 150 CDs, as well as on television and radio programs.

The world was listening to the work of Peter Breiner at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, for it was his arrangements of the national anthems of the 200 participating countries that were selected to be played at the awards ceremonies.

His interpretation of the U.S. national anthem provoked lively — some would say, controversial — responses from the American people, and demonstrated succinctly his deep understanding of and creative responses to any music he approaches. In his thought-provoking arrangement of *The Star Spangled Banner*, he presented the victorious verses of the middle part (“And the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air...”) using a musical contrast of soft-sounding strings in high register, thus leaving space for a moment for contemplation. The composer says he was “surprised and overwhelmed” by the reactions, and by the “power of music,” when the people listening to his arrangements were — as he puts it — able to “read between the lines.”<sup>11</sup>

Breiner, who lived in Toronto from 1992 to 2007, before moving to New York City, performs frequently in his native country. It was on one of his trips to Slovakia that he met the musicians Stano Palúch and Boris Lenko, which led to the collaboration that eventually produced the tango arrangements to one of Breiner’s most successful projects.

...sometimes,  
in the most  
inspired  
moment we  
don't even  
follow the  
agreed form...

11  
Peter Breiner,  
[http://  
pages.interlog.  
com/~pbreiner.](http://pages.interlog.com/~pbreiner)

In *Triango*, which Diego Fischerman calls “a fertile mixture of the trio — violin, accordion, and piano — and tango,”<sup>12</sup> Breiner’s tango arrangements are interspersed with classical music and jazz improvisations and marvelously synchronized, with the three musicians each contributing in his unique way. Breiner says: “We put a lot of emphasis on improvisation; sometimes, in the most inspired moment we don’t even follow the agreed form.... We do have written arrangements, with some space for improvisation in almost every one; but even the way we play the arranged passages every time is slightly different, depending on our mood, audience reactions, and many other factors. The magic of playing in a chamber ensemble that improvises is that there are moments when we ‘read each others’ minds,’ and that results in some great moments.”<sup>13</sup>

...to facilitate  
the crossing  
of borders  
and new  
beginnings...

Tonight, Peter Breiner and *Triango* bring us closer to the theme and mission of the Vilcek Foundation, to facilitate the crossing of borders and new beginnings. Tango succeeds in reaching us all with its timelessness, nostalgia, and semantic flexibility, because we all are immigrants, in one sense or another. Like the blend of immigrants whose search for identity helped give birth to the tango, we are all — in the decisions we make, the lives we lead, the work we dream of doing but never quite manage, and the choices we feel obliged to make to satisfy expectations of others — constantly questioning and negotiating our identities.

<sup>12</sup>  
Fischerman,  
*Triango*.

<sup>13</sup>  
Breiner,  
personal  
communication,  
March 2008.

*Jadranka Važanová*

Like the subject of her essay, scholar and author Jadranka Važanová (née Horáková) lives in New York City but finds her true home in the world of music. In the years between earning her M.A. in musicology and aesthetics (from the Univerzita Komenského, in Bratislava) and her Ph.D. in ethnomusicology (from the Graduate Center, City University of New York), she lectured on Slovak traditional music in Zagreb, Vienna, and Berlin, and taught world music classes at Hunter College. Her research studies — focused on the music of ethnic groups, transformational processes in musical cultures of Europe, and wedding traditions of Slavic people — have been widely published. Today, Ms. Važanová works at the Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale (RILM) in New York, where as Senior Editor, she translates, accesses, abstracts, and indexes Slovak, Czech, Polish, Russian, Bulgarian, and German materials.

**peter breiner:**

**doing what  
comes naturally**



*Peter describes his fluid movement among musical styles and professional metier as "coming quite naturally — i don't have to think about it."*

You are just as likely to find Peter Breiner conducting an orchestra playing Haydn or Mozart — where he might also be doubling as pianist — as you are to be listening to his film and television scores or his widely recorded arrangements of pop and holiday songs. And if you happen to be browsing Facebook, you'll find him there, too. When he's not on tour, chances are he's online trying to organize an ad hoc group of musicians to join him for one of his "house concerts," where the repertoire depends on "who shows up." It might be jazz, tango, classical, swing, or something else altogether.

Peter's renowned versatility has its roots in classical music. He began playing piano as a young child in Humenné, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia), then still under Communist rule. His formal training began at age nine, upon his acceptance to the Kosice Conservatory of Music. There he studied piano, composition, conducting, and percussion. It continued at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, where he had the good fortune of studying under Alexander Moyzes, considered one of the three leading composers of his generation in Slovakia. Ten years after graduating at the master's degree level from the Academy in 1982, Peter emigrated to Toronto, Canada, where he lived for fifteen years before moving to New York City. The difference between the capital of Ontario and the cultural capital of the United States has been dramatic for him. "New York has this incredible energy," he says. "In two years in New York, I've made more useful contacts than in fifteen years in Toronto." Given what he had accomplished before the move to Manhattan, one can only imagine what the future holds.

It is difficult for Peter to identify any one performance or recording that led to the widespread popularity he now enjoys. He has conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, the Vienna Mozart Orchestra, the Hungarian State Radio Orchestra, the Nicolaus Esterhazy Orchestra Budapest, the Polish Radio and TV Symphony Orchestra, the Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra, the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Capella Istropolitana, the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra National de Lille, France, and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (where he played *Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue* for an audience of 70,000). The majority of his compositions and arrangements have been recorded by companies the world over — he is, in fact, one of the most widely recorded artists, with 150-plus CDs to his credit, and millions sold. But if push came to shove, certainly his arrangement of Beatles songs, *Beatles Go Baroque*, would be a top contender for expanding his audience appeal. It was, he says, “my ticket to a much broader exposure.” It has sold more than half a million CDs worldwide, and counting. *Elvis Goes Baroque* and *Christmas Goes Baroque I and II* followed. Undoubtedly, however, his largest audience to date was composed primarily of television viewers tuned in to the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. At the awards ceremonies, billions were listening to Peter Breiner’s arrangements of the national anthems of all the participating countries.

Peter describes his fluid movement among musical styles and professional métier as “coming quite naturally — I don’t have to think about it.” He has long felt this is the path he should follow, and cites Leonard Bernstein as a role model in this crossing of musical genres. Dismissing that he is unusual in this regard, he believes the “trend [in the music industry] is to join different styles.” As he says, “there’s much less than six degrees of separation between Bach and the Beatles.”

It is this philosophy that garners Peter Breiner acclaim and fans wherever he performs, whether on stage in front of thousands or in an intimate roomful gathering.

For a comprehensive  
discography of Peter Breiner's  
work, go to  
<http://breiner.ca>



# stano palúch

His artistry has been called phenomenal, his ability to coax extraordinary new sounds from his instrument indescribable. Slovak violinist Stano Palúch is in that class of modern artists for whom musical boundaries pose no impediment. He crosses over with ease from classical to folklore, from bluegrass to tango to jazz — and back again. He has recorded dozens of CDs, and composes, arranges, and scores movies. Stano is one of the original members of Triango.

# boris lenko

Slovakian-born Boris Lenko is, today, one of the foremost and in-demand European accordion and bandoneon players, considered a pioneer in innovative repertoire for accordion in his native country. This popular figure at concerts and festivals in Austria, Germany, France, Russia, Serbia, Switzerland, and numerous other venues is also a laureate of several domestic and international competitions. In addition to his personal appearances around the world, Boris is a professor of accordion at his alma mater, the Academy of Music and Drama in Bratislava, Slovakia. He is one of the founding members of Triango.



# Triango variations

Julian Plaza  
Arturo Bernstein  
Peter Breiner  
Tito Ribero / Leopoldo Díaz Vélez  
Pascal de Gullo  
Julian Plaza  
Rivero / Bo / Biasi  
Carlos Gardel  
Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi  
Cole Porter  
Astor Piazzolla

Payadora  
La gaita  
When? Never?  
La milonga y yo  
Lágrimas y sonrisas  
Nostálgico  
Calle Cabildo  
Volver  
Muy del aeroplano  
So In Love  
Oblivion

piano provided by  
steinway & sons

Design by AHOY Studios

