

Piazzolla *Here & Now*

CENTAUR 3488 (62:13)

Review by Huntley Dent (1)

Review by Dave Saemann (2)

Review by Jacqueline Kharouf (3)

Review by Maria Nockin (3)

Interview by Jacqueline Kharouf (4-9)

Review by Huntley Dent

PIAZZOLLA *Milonga sin palabras. Tanguano. Milonga en re. Las cuatro estaciones porteñas* (arr. Roldán). *Oblivion. María de Buenos Aires: Allegro tangabile* (arr. Alsina/Roldán). **Chiquilín de Bachín** ^{1,2,3}. *Che, Tango, Che!* ^{1,2,3}. **3 Preludes:** No. 2 *Flora's Game: Milonga Prelude*. **GARRETT-GROAG** *Magic Fire: I am an immigrant;* ³ *Everyone took it for granted* ³ • Nancy Roldán (pn); José Cueto (vn); ^{1,3} Gabriella Cavallero (voc, spkr); ² Laura Ruas (db) • CENTAUR 3488 (62:13) ³ Live: Frederick, MD 7/22–23/2015

The world of tango is inseparable from Astor Piazzolla, and outpourings of his music are never likely to cease as long as musicians and audiences are captivated by it. But as the headnote suggests, this isn't a normal Piazzolla program but a highly personal amalgam instead – part concert, part theater piece, part cabaret – that weaves music and words together. Its aim is to evoke the bittersweet experience of an immigrant who had to leave her homeland, Argentina, in order to truly appreciate and absorb tango. In that sense, there is nothing else quite comparable to the enticements of this very appealing album.

At the heart of the program are pieces Piazzolla composed for violin and piano, some of them original, others rendered as arrangements. Devotees of the *nuevo tango* that Piazzolla engendered will recognize one of his most popular works, *Las cuatro estaciones porteñas* from 1970, which airlifts Vivaldi's model of the four seasons to Buenos Aires. It originally existed for a quintet that included the concertina-like bandoneón, but there have been countless arrangements (including one for piano trio I reviewed in *Fanfare* 38:6). Pianist Nancy Roldán tells us in the program note that during her "years of transcription fever," it took courage to work up to an arrangement pared down from a quintet to violin and piano. Yet the spirit of the tango is what really matters, and Roldán – vastly experienced after teaching at the Peabody Conservatory for 30 years – along with her regular duo partner, violinist José Cueto, performs with free-wheeling personality, creating the proper smoky-sexy atmosphere. One can't help but be reminded of the only close relation in the standard repertoire, the *Blues* movement in Ravel's Violin Sonata.

It's appropriate to refer tangentially to classical music, because Piazzolla absorbed it along with jazz as new ingredients in the tango recipe. The original works on the program show how dazzling his recipe remains, filled with seductive emotions that evoke memory, nostalgia, and longing with as much power as the tango's signature eroticism. Everything that Richard Strauss might intend in the German word *Sehnsucht* (longing, desire, unrequited love) is present in Piazzolla's rhapsodic *Milonga sin palabras*. The other violin-piano works are just as distinctive and richly deserve to be known. Here we need to expand our perspective, because the immigrant who had to leave home in order to fully appreciate (and long for) tango is Roldán herself. As evocative as her pianism is, she wanted to express her experience in words, too.

To that end, actress-singer Gabriella Cavallero recites brief excerpts from the play *Magic Fire* by Lillian Garrett-Groag. At a time when the word "immigrant" has become politically abused, it's moving to be reminded, as we are here, by the speaker's opening words, "I am an immigrant in a country of immigrants." But far beyond that, art is on a constant journey of migration, a journey by which music has a uniting force beyond measure. In her note Roldán tells us that these excerpts (accompanied by her on piano) "bring to light the underpinnings of the tango: the essence of what it means to be an immigrant, the taunts and deceptions of memory, and the heartfelt nostalgia for loves and homes left behind."

The live recitation is performed expertly by Cavallero, with the right mixture of involvement and wry

observation, as in “Argentina drifts in and out of the shadows like the ghost ship in *The Flying Dutchman*.” She returns as the singer in bonus tracks of two Piazzolla songs, “Chiquilín de bachín” and “Che, Tango, Che!,” done with the heat of authentic tango passion. The ensemble here consists of the Cueto-Roldán Duo and Laura Ruas, principal double bass of the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra. These are live performances, and if you aren’t transported to a steamy Buenos Aires hideaway, you deserve to spend winters in northern Minnesota (or some other region where I imagine, probably wrongly, that the tango hasn’t penetrated). The final bonus track features Roldán as solo piano in the second of Piazzolla’s Three Preludes, a moody and strongly Modernist farewell from the central persona of the program.

The headnote looks a bit intricate and tangled, but this riveting and moving album delivers *Piazzolla Here and Now*, which is also its title. The phrase implies immediacy, spontaneity, and a message for the present moment. All of that comes through splendidly. My only note of caution is to audio sticklers, since the program was recorded in several venues around Baltimore with different acoustics and microphone placement. To avoid confusion, I haven’t detailed all the individual dates, which span from 2000 to 2014–15. **Huntley Dent**

Review by **Dave Saemann**

My father was twice an immigrant. He left Nazi Germany for Palestine in the late 1930s, then left Israel for America in the early 1950s. In his last years he was especially enamored of the Viennese light music his parents danced to on the radio in Germany. Not surprisingly, I am particularly drawn to the Argentine-born pianist and arranger Nancy Roldán’s insights into the tango. Having made her career in the United States, Roldán was taken to immersing herself in the tango as an émigré artist. Anyone who loves the tango has a particular affinity for Astor Piazzolla’s music. In the short excerpts from the playwright Lillian Garrett-Groag recited on this album, as accompanied briefly by Roldán’s piano in Piazzolla’s *La última grela*, we hear that for the Argentine immigrant to America, an all-consuming love of music is not just a memory, but “a movement of the heart.” In Piazzolla’s original music on this CD for violin and piano, plus Roldán’s reworkings and at times full transcriptions of other pieces for this ensemble, we hear the authentic voice of the Buenos Aires streets. Roldán and violinist José Cueto form a genuine duo, trading ideas and blending tones with an ease that only comes from legitimate compatibility and considerable joint experience. Their sound is an ideal vehicle for Piazzolla’s music: alternately rich and raspy, with a rhythmic alertness that projects dances both in the present and in memory. I never have experienced a more telling evocation of Piazzolla’s spirit than on this album.

The program opens with *Milonga sin palabras*, a summoning of memory, not just in thought but with smell and taste. *Tanguano* is a tango as one might have been imagined by Stravinsky, witty and acerbic. *Milonga en re* is a sort of Argentine take on a Chopin nocturne. Roldán’s arrangement of *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* makes an important addition to the repertory for violin and piano. Although the pieces were composed separately, together they have a unity of feeling along with effective contrasts. The work opens with “Spring,” a tribute to that season’s crazy, rejuvenating power. People on the streets look about them and see each other anew. In “Summer,” you can feel the pavement’s warmth underneath people’s feet. There is a tender edginess in the heat. “Autumn” evokes a bittersweet contentment. One’s eyes tear up, but real crying is stifled. “Winter” has a soulfulness with the mood of Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence.” The work ends with a beautifully elegant Baroque gesture, perhaps in an homage to Vivaldi. *Oblivion* features wonderfully rhapsodic playing by Cueto. Roldán’s arrangement of *Allegro tangabile* is a kind of Argentine humoresque. Gabriella Cavallero sings two of Piazzolla’s songs with passion and splendidly authentic style. Texts and translations are not provided, although they are readily available online. *Chiquilín de Bachín* is about a boy selling roses in a diner, while *Che, Tango, Che!* is a wary tribute to the tango’s all-consuming nature. The album concludes with a solo piano work, *Flora’s Game*, as if Bach had written a chorale prelude on that traditional Argentine song, the *milonga*.

The CD’s sound engineering generally is very good, although the live recording of the two songs is a little dim. Nancy Roldán’s immigrant journey has given us a wonderful souvenir of Argentina with Piazzolla

Here and Now. In her and José Cueto's hands, Piazzolla's music speaks with rare passion and eloquence. Highly recommended. **Dave Saemann**

Review by Jacqueline Kharouf

Nancy Roldán, José Miguel Cueto, and Gabriella Cavallero on Their Latest Album, *Piazzolla Here & Now*

Piazzolla Here & Now, the latest album from the Cueto-Roldán Duo, features the music of Astor Piazzolla, transcribed for piano and violin, along with the vocal talents of Gabriella Cavallero, who both sings and performs excerpts from the play *The Magic Fire* by Lillian Garrett-Groag. José Cueto (violin) and Nancy Roldán (piano) perform Piazzolla's music with a partnership of dynamics, articulation, and rhythmic effects reminiscent of dance. Each musical voice shares the task of leading or following, accompanying or soloing, but each gives its full weight and presence to the overarching compositions of both the pieces that Piazzolla wrote originally for violin and piano, such as *Tanguano* and *Milonga en re*, and the pieces Nancy Roldán transcribed for the duo, such as *Las cuatro estaciones porteñas* and *Allegro tangabile*.

Roldán's transcription of Piazzolla's "Four Seasons," in particular, resets the weight and presence of the instruments in the original composition for the dialogue and equanimity of the piano and violin, which move in concentric circles—not answering and calling, but speaking together. The seasons of Argentina are fluid and colored by several rhythmic turns and phrasing. Originally written for Piazzolla's favored quintet arrangement of violin, piano, electric guitar, bass, and bandoneón, *Las cuatro estaciones porteñas* for violin and piano is a mostly successful interpretation of the original, barring the missing sound of Piazzolla's signature bandoneón.

However, some nimble finger work by Roldán and Cueto, who even mimics some of the more striking and breathy percussive sounds handled by the bass and electric guitar, retains the camaraderie of the original arrangement. Cueto's rich sound threads the theme through the four seasons, and both performers deftly balance the weight of the three absent instruments on the sheer skill of their playing. In two of the bonus tracks, the duo (along with bassist Laura Ruas) accompanies Gabriella Cavallero, who performs *Chiquilín de Bachín* and *Che, Tango, Che!* Cavallero, an actor and voice-over artist with two Emmy nominations for her narration work, has a solid and striking voice both when she embodies the authenticity and yearning of the tango music and when she narrates two excerpts from *The Magic Fire*. This play, centered on an Argentinian woman remembering her parents (who were also immigrants) and her lost homeland, grapples with themes of nostalgia and the immigrant's longing for the impossibility of returning to the homeland.

Despite the missing ensemble feel that is familiar to Piazzolla's music, *Piazzolla Here & Now* reinvents the tango for the true partnership of this world-renowned instrumental duo. **Jacqueline Kharouf**

Review by Maria Nockin

Piazzolla Here and Now is a recording of that composer's music arranged for violin, piano, sometimes with a vocalist and, on occasion, with a double bass player. Argentine born pianist Nancy Roldán and Puerto Rican violinist José Cueto are known as the Cueto-Roldán Duo. Their performances embody the spirit but not always the exact sounds of the music Argentine composer Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) wrote for the bandoneon, an instrument he played that is similar to the accordion. Although Piazzolla didn't elevate the tango to the highest level of classical music, he did bring it into the concert hall. The first selection on this disc is the *Milonga sin Palabras* (*Milonga without Words*). Since Milongas usually have a lively 2/4 tempo, the dance performed to a Milonga usually involves fast tango steps with few pauses. On this disc, Cueto and Roldán also perform the *Milonga in Re*, originally written for violin and piano, and Roldán plays the *Flora's Game Milonga Prelude*, the only piece for solo piano. The Milonga is a charming duet and the Prelude is an unusually smooth piece from Piazzolla, which Roldán plays with exquisite grace. *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* (*The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*) are Piazzolla's tango compositions representing the seasons of the Argentine year. He wrote the music for *Verano Porteño* (*Summer*) in 1965 as incidental music for Alberto Rodríguez Muñoz's play *Melenita de Oro* (*Golden Mop of Hair*). In 1969 he composed *Otoño Porteño* (*Autumn*), and in 1970 he completed his *Seasons* with *Invierno Porteño* (*Winter*),

and *Primavera Porteña* (Spring). In writing *Spring*, he made use of the counterpoint that he learned decades earlier from famous composition teacher, Nadia Boulanger.

On tracks three and nine actress and singer Gabriela Cavallero reads historically interesting lines from Lillian Garrett-Groag's *The Magic Fire*, a play about an immigrant family living in Buenos Aires during the regime of Juan Perón. *Oblivion*, one of Piazzolla's most traditional tangos, can be heard on the soundtrack of Marco Bellocchio's film, *Henry IV*. The Cueto-Roldán Duo perform *Che Tango Che* and *Chilquilín de Bachín* with double bassist Laura Ruas and Gabriella Cavallero, singing the text. The tango is a wild piece and the group performs it with the emotional punch it deserves. During the creation of the operetta *Maria de Buenos Aires*, Piazzolla and singer Amelita Baltar often dined with lyricist Horacio Ferrer at a traditional porteño restaurant in Bachín. Baltar recorded *Chilquilín* in 1969 and her rendition is available on a Sony Records International CD entitled *Amelita Baltar Interpreta Piazzolla y Ferrer*. Although her interpretation is original, the sound on this Centaur recording is much more listenable. The Cueto-Roldán Duo, Gabriella Cavallero and the other musicians who play Piazzolla's music on this recording are fine artists who play Argentine music with idiomatic intensity. I found that Centaur's sound engineering captured their music in glorious detail and I recommend this disc to everyone who enjoys Piazzolla and tango music. **Maria Nockin**

AN AIR OF NOSTALGIA

A Conversation with Nancy Roldán, José Miguel Cueto, and Gabriella Cavallero on Their Latest Album, *Piazzolla Here & Now* **By Jacqueline Kharouf**

In 1989, the last year of his life, the Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla gave an interview to Gonzalo Saavedra, a Chilean journalist for *El Mercurio*, who asked Piazzolla about his musical philosophy. Piazzolla spoke about the tango and the study of classical music that influenced his particular, world-renowned style. He also spoke about musicians following that style and taking it on for themselves: "I say: Let everyone to do it for themselves. If they write like me, the worse for them. If they can follow this style of tango, this life-style that I do with music, then OK. But my main style is to have studied. If I had not, I would not be doing what I do, what I've done. Because everybody thinks that to do a 'modern tango' is to make noise, is to make strange thoughts, and no, that's not true! You have to go a little deeper, and you can see that what I do is very elaborate. If I do a fugue in the manner of Bach, it will always be 'tanguificated.'" For their latest collaboration, Nancy Roldán and José Miguel Cueto have studied the music of Piazzolla and made it their own, transcribing some of Piazzolla's work for piano and violin as well as performing pieces Piazzolla wrote originally for these two instruments. The result is not a reconfiguring of the tango into something modern, strange, or noisy, but art that is nostalgic for the tango of the 1950s, the style of tango that, as Piazzolla told Saavedra, lived in Argentina "when Buenos Aires was a place where people wore tango, walked tango, where there was a smell of tango all over the city." In Argentina, this nostalgia for the past also extends to the nostalgia of the immigrant for the homeland, an aspect of the tango's cultural significance that Gabriella Cavallero embodies in her performance of excerpts from the play *The Magic Fire* by Lillian Garrett-Groag. These excerpts, interspersed between the pieces performed by the Cueto-Roldán Duo, add context to the work of the entire album, which is ultimately a celebration of Piazzolla and the legacy of the tango. I spoke with Roldán, Cueto, and Cavallero about their working relationship, their collaborative process, which both honors Piazzolla's original compositions and completes their new transcriptions, and, of course, the still compelling nostalgia of the tango.

This first question is for Nancy Roldán and José Miguel Cueto. How did you first decide to work and perform together? And then, as a follow-up, how did you (as a duo) decide to work with Gabriella Cavallero? And then, I'll ask the same question of Gabriella Cavallero. How did you first decide to work with Nancy and José?

Nancy Roldán: There are those moments in life when you find a perfect association that calls for continuity. José and I have performed together for several decades. We have always had an affinity that is

difficult to quantify or to explain. Our friend Linda Hogle generously wrote of our playing, “They lift one another like the two wings of a bird.” When we play together, we find each other speaking a common language that we didn’t even know existed – and when that happens it’s magic. In my professional life, I’ve been extremely lucky to have this experience with José (as well as with my long time piano-duo partner Noel Lester). Playing with José is easy, not that our rehearsals are not fiery and often very entertaining! But we always find a blending of sound, ideas, and interpretation. We match each other’s colors, and everything is enabled not by tempo but by *timing*, probably the most powerful element in any “shared” performance. (Regarding Gabriella and myself, please see my answer to your last question below.)

José Miguel Cueto: I have always admired Nancy’s total commitment to the musical content of everything she plays. She is not about notes and flash, she is about the message of the music, the power of a beautiful phrase, a beautiful sound, a beautiful color. There is a deep sincerity, a truth to her playing which for me is the mark of a great musician. Playing with her has made me a better musician. Our music dialogue strengthens our own individual ideas, which creates the strongest kind of ensemble.

Gabriella Cavallero: Many years ago, I saw the world premiere of the play *The Magic Fire*. When I heard the words opening the play, “I’m an immigrant in a country of immigrants...” and “That’s no longer memory, but a movement of the heart...,” I didn’t stop crying for the rest of the night. There’s great power in a shared experience. It’s why I love the theater and music – their ability to unite and reach people in subtle ways. I found myself in the theater that night, astounded and moved not only by the similarities of the playwright’s family story to my own but by the influence of music in her life. At the same time, across the country, my mother, who happens to be Nancy Roldán, had just started her journey with the Tango. When she read Lillian Garrett-Groag’s play, her words became the inspiration to include story and poetry and song in the many tango shows that followed. And thus began our foray in sharing a stage, with her and with José, which we’d always wanted to do.

Unlike most duos or duets, which are typically performed with the two instruments in dialogue or with one leading and the other accompanying, I noted that your musical voices have a warmth and generosity more reminiscent of dancing and camaraderie. Astor Piazzolla is known for reinventing the tango, and that partnership between the instruments is evidently a part of the composition, but I wonder if you could describe a bit of your collaborative process. How do you work together to develop that signature “large and luxurious tone,” as Alex Ross noted in his NY Times review?

NR: I like your description of our ensemble collaboration. We share a particular conception about duos, which needs to be integrated in the realm of chamber music as a true collaborative art where the participants allow music to be the main arbiter, to give room for the music-making process. Such ensembles are those where partners work in conjunction, giving 100 percent each, to create/convey/express art. The concept is rooted mainly in sound – something that has been my obsession ever since I became fascinated by music. It is my impression that the sonority is the result of the collaboration and careful listening to one another. I am absolutely fascinated by ensemble work that allows for flexibility of expression and constant discovery. I have heard some say that performing chamber music is a compromise. I cannot disagree more! The great composers who conceived their music did not think of parts but of a single unit where many different colors are essential. Beautiful ensemble work seems to be a gift, such as dancing like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire did, or in the particular way great Argentine tango dancers live “in the moment,” not only expressing the music but becoming integrated with it. An important aspect of ensemble is the ability to “read” or anticipate the other during the “live” moment of performance, which happens actually on stage, where anything (not practiced in rehearsal) could and will happen.

JC: Working together is one of the challenges and miracles of any partnership. An artistic partnership goes beyond playing together and keeping the tempo. This phenomenon is so special and difficult to describe. It’s rare and exciting to find somebody who knows my intention, and without compromising is able to create in the moment. Besides collaboration, our obsession with TONE may be the element that explains the description “large and luxurious.” We are always aware of style, tone production and projection.

This is a question for José Miguel Cueto. First, I must admit that I have a bit of a bias for violin because I play the instrument (not very well, but I love to play), but I wanted to ask you about the style of your

playing. The album notes mention that you play a 1920 Scarampella violin, and I wondered if that particular instrument gives you a certain advantage when playing Piazzolla's music. Your playing on this album is very bold and reminiscent of an older style of playing when the violin was considered more of a dance instrument. Is your sound linked more to the instrument or linked to the specific style of playing? Can a particular instrument and a particular style be mutually exclusive or are the two inevitably connected?

JC: I love the violin. To me, playing it is the closest I can get to the human voice. It's my way of singing. I've always been in search of that violin that will give me the largest palette to inspire me and allow me to convey my deepest musical thoughts. The moment I played my Scarampella for the first time, I was impressed by the power of the instrument and felt there was an untapped, maybe hidden, quality of sound there. The Scarampella is the instrument I have found matches my playing, my conception of sound. It's another partnership that allows me the freedom of expression in any music style I happen to be involved with at the moment. My other violin is a copy of Fritz Kreisler's Guarnerius, made in 2005 by Luiz Bellini, my great friend, mentor, and favorite luthier. He made this instrument specifically for me and for the way I play. Bellini is no longer with us, but every time I play his violin I feel his presence and greatness, both as an instrument maker and as a person.

I am so grateful to have found the Scarampella that allows me the freedom of expression in any music style I happen to be involved with at the moment. However, this is not specific to Piazzolla. It's up to me to choose the way to fit a particular style. I admire the players of the past who had a discernible personal tone signature.

I also wanted to ask you about the effects you bring out with the violin. Not only do you use pizzicato (right hand and left hand), and sliding double-stops, do you also do some drumming on the violin and some very striking bow scratches?

JC: Many of the violin effects originate in the tango tradition and also in Piazzolla's search for particular sound effects, which he conceived of and worked out with the violinists who played with him. In the transcriptions of *Las cuatro estaciones*, Nancy wanted to recreate some of these sounds, including the color of the bandoneón, which is often called the soul of the tango. Among the violin strokes is what is called "Lija" (heard in the opening of *Verano*), a noise similar to a guiro sound, produced in the violin by playing behind the bridge. Another effect heard in *Invierno* and *Verano* is the "látigo" (whip sound) that consists of a very fast upwards glissando toward an indeterminate high "pitch." The drumming on the table of the violin is intended to imitate the drumming on the bandoneón. To imitate the particular vibrato of the bandoneón, I at times play a double-stop consisting of an open string and a fingered [unison](#) pitch.

NR: The piano provides the harmonic ground and as much as possible the dissonance that occurs when the bandoneón "marries" the piano in tango ensembles. The piano has to cover its own part, as well as that of the bass and the bandoneón, and also joins in melodic discourse. The violin provides color and the "piangendo" effect of the bandoneón. One particular effect I learned from tango masters is the "yumba" – a clustered ascending glissando that starts with a strong accent on the fourth (or "weak") beat and is played diminuendo toward the down (or "strong") beat, where it abruptly ends.

*On the album, Gabriella Cavallero narrates two excerpts from *The Magic Fire*, a play by Lillian Garrett-Groag. The play focuses on a woman named Lise Berg, the daughter of two immigrants who fled to Argentina following World War II. As Lise looks back on her past in Argentina, her family, and the political situation of the times in which they lived, she recalls her parents' passion for music. In the first excerpt recorded for the album, Lise recalls this passion as something that supersedes memory: "And that's no longer memory, but a movement of the heart warming to the glow of what we first loved: paradise lost." In the album notes, Nancy Roldán explains that these excerpts illuminate "the underpinnings of the tango: the essence of what it is to be an immigrant, the taunts and deceptions of memory, and the heartfelt nostalgia for loves and homes left behind." Indeed, the entire album, and the music of Piazzolla, could be described by its attempt to recall and, in a small way, recreate the past. How have your experiences influenced or informed the emotion – the passion for this music – which is so clearly evident on the album?*

NR: I grew up listening to classical music on the radio, especially to Kreisler, so the violin was already enticing me since long ago. I also loved the folklore of my country, which I used to play and sing for my family. My family loved Carlos Gardel, but ironically, his presence did not become real for me until I had

left Argentina and lived in Puerto Rico, where his music was adored. Another Argentine musician who had impressed me enormously was Horacio Salgán, an amazing virtuoso pianist/composer of tangos. But it was Piazzolla – his fire and intensity – who left me dumbfounded when I heard him and his quintet perform at the Organization of the American States in DC in the 1980s. Who would not want to play that music? I did, but at the time, I didn't dare. I was concertizing with Liszt, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Guastavino ... and I could not see myself embracing this style. Years later, at the urging of a friend, we played a concert titled "The Golden Age of Tango" and I was inspired to create concerts which included the story of tango, with spoken and sung narratives (which is how Gabriella entered the picture). And of course all my own "migrations" throughout my life fuel my passion. Being so far away from my family for most of my life – first leaving Argentina to pursue a life as a musician in the States and subsequently moving several times can't help but feed that missing and longing that is the backdrop of the tango.

JC: My first musical memory ever is the voice of Carlos Gardel, listening to one of his records when I was a toddler. I played that LP over and over until I scratched it beyond recognition. I still remember my favorite selection from the records and its red and maroon cover. So, Gardel has always touched my soul – a great singer, composer and artist. He is tango personified. My first visit to Argentina truly solidified my passion for this music. It was in La Boca, the cradle of tango and its people, that I listened to Tango ensembles and to the soulful, beautiful bandoneón live for the first time.

And then, with such a focus on nostalgia, and the loss of one's homeland, I found the title Here and Now somewhat ironic. Or perhaps the title refers to the second excerpt from The Magic Fire, which introduces the immigrant's hope for returning home. Such a hope is a kind of self-deception, however, because no matter how much an immigrant longs for home, he/she will never return. I think that's a really compelling aspect of the immigrant's journey and it marks a notable shift in the album. After the excerpt, the duo performs the pieces Oblivion and Maria de Buenos Aires: Allegro tangabile, which Nancy Roldán arranged for violin and piano. I wonder if you could speak to your decision to choose these two specific excerpts from The Magic Fire and how the music continues to explore the immigrant's experience, both looking toward the past and hoping for a better future.

NR: When I first read Lillian Garrett-Groag's words in *The Magic Fire*, I was deeply moved not only by her family's story, which reminded me so much of my own in many ways, but by her language which so eloquently captured the spirit of the immigrant heart and by default that of the tango. The music of Piazzolla and the music of Argentina always touches my heart in indescribable ways. Yet, here were these words that did describe some of the journey that so many people have experienced in leaving their homelands and families. What a gift for an audience!

There is no question that Tango is nostalgia, a looking-back, but it is also forever present, like the great music of Piazzolla and so many great composers. *Piazzolla Here & Now* honors not only his lasting presence in the world but also the power of his music to make this overwhelming passion and longing a palpable, immediately-present feeling when you hear it.

Do you ever think that art overly romanticizes the immigrant's experience?

NR: It is possible that any experience may be romanticized by art. There are many cases among musicians, or political expatriates, whose desire to revisit their roots may be considered an obsession. Such is the case of many musicians, such as Carlos Gardel who sang to his "Beloved Buenos Aires," or Astor Piazzolla who lived all over the world but wanted to die in Buenos Aires. So many great artists decided to leave their country for political reasons, such as Juan José Castro, a wonderful conductor who left Argentina because of the Perón regime; Pablo Casals, who left Spain because of Franco; and Béla Bartók, who left his beloved Hungary because of the war. But they never forgot where they took their first steps. It's my impression that everybody has experienced some form of emigration, some absence that makes one "homesick." In my case, I came to the USA by choice. I was a "legal green card" holder and adopted the USA as my home with all my love and admiration. Despite these choices and my love for the USA, I do have a soft spot for Argentina, the Argentina I remember from long ago. Argentina is a country of immigrants, just like the U.S. I grew up surrounded by immigrants, people who had fled their European homes because of the World War II. When we first decided to record an entire Piazzolla album the idea was (and is) to perform his wonderful music, which touches us very closely, as musicians, artists, and family. So, having said all of the above, this album is primarily about Piazzolla and his amazing music. This brings me to the mystery of Tango and its universality. It resides in its origins. It was born in

the slums of Buenos Aires, the result of the nostalgia of immigrants who arrived at the port of Buenos Aires in Rio de la Plata, at a place called La Boca. These immigrants lived in shantytowns where together they sang their songs of love for their “faraway lands.” The instruments themselves come from different countries. When we present our tango programs we talk about the roots, the dance, the history, development ... and we always end with Piazzolla. The entire tango story is indeed Romantic.

My favorite piece on the album was the series titled Las cuatro estaciones porteñas, which Roldán also arranged for violin and piano. In these four pieces, Piazzolla moves through the seasons, each piece specifically textured to a corresponding season, but also linked to the set with a recurring theme. As with the pieces Piazzolla wrote for violin and piano, Roldán's arrangement retains that distinct “tango style” in which the violin and piano are not so much in dialogue, but move together. Like Vivaldi's Four Seasons, which has a pastoral narrative, I wondered if Piazzolla's “Four Seasons” also had a narrative. Or, in another way, how closely does this set of pieces express the seasons of Argentina?

NR: I am so glad you enjoyed these pieces! I love them.

Before I answer in full, here is a little information about my musical background. I am a trained classical pianist and until the year 2000 I never thought I could play anything resembling tango at all. Besides classical music, I had played nationalistic music with Argentine folklore roots such as music by Julián Aguirre, Carlos Guastavino, and Alberto Ginastera. But an invitation by the Uruguayan musicologist Dr. Susana Salgado brought me closer to tango. She insisted I would do well and I accepted to play for the program she organized for the Library of Congress titled *The Golden Age of Tango*. On that occasion Jose and I met the Uruguayan bandoneón master Raúl Jaurena. The bandoneón is the soul of tango. Further performances with Raúl and Argentine bandoneón master David Alsina opened my heart to the style. This was a learning experience that has lasted for this entire 21st century and still continues.

I had to learn many things about playing in the style of tango. The pianist of tango plays somehow differently from the classical pianist. There are special effects that are part of the style. I learned these from David and Raúl. Having played with them in different groups, quartets and quintets, and listening to the amazing Piazzolla orchestrations, it was my obsession to recreate such sonority for two instruments. I play with the piano full top-open and with a particular piano rack built for me by my son, which allows me to listen and integrate with the violin. I think this is why the sound can be both intense and intimate, as the two instruments are intertwined in a sort of dance (as you described before) and always aware of one another. Regarding narrative, I am not aware such a narrative exists. The pieces were written in different years, but were performed in concert by Piazzolla himself as a set. According to the book *Le Grand Tango* by Azzi and Collier, “Verano” (Summer) was written as incidental music for a play by Alberto Rodriguez Muñoz in 1965. “Otoño” (Fall) was written in 1969, and “Primavera” (Spring) and “Invierno” (Winter) in 1970. At the time of my transcriptions I did not know the dates and have always performed them starting with “Primavera.” Regarding the actual seasons, it is important to remember that Piazzolla is talking about the “estaciones porteñas,” that is, the seasons in Buenos Aires. The word “porteñas/porteños” is the name given to the inhabitants of Buenos Aires because of their living near the “port” of Buenos Aires. In a way, the seasons are universal, but in Argentina and in particular in Buenos Aires there is an air of nostalgia, which alternates with the intensity and nervous energy of the big city life. In the old times the city rarely slept. Some call it the Paris of the Americas.

I want to ask Nancy Roldán about her transcription process. Aside from the technical details, such as transcribing different clefs for different instruments, negotiating key shifts, etc., how do you transcribe the weight each instrument carried in the original composition to the new arrangement for the duo? Do you find that transcription limits your ability to express the movement and dynamism of the full, original composition? Or does it allow for more freedom and expression?

NR: In these transcriptions, I have kept the melodies that exist in Piazzolla's own orchestration for the set as well as in the piano trio versions that I first read from an Argentine edition, long ago in Argentina. I enjoyed performing the trio versions. Since we play as a duo so often, I searched for a version of *Las cuatro estaciones porteñas* for violin and piano to integrate in our duo programs. Such a version did not exist which is why I set out to transcribe them. Regarding transcriptions, this has been a true and exciting learning experience. Besides adding counterpoint, I added some effects in the violin and piano. These effects reflected my experiences with the bandoneón masters I performed with. For instance, a tango piano-effect appears in the glissandi that prelude “Verano” (see “yumba” above). The dissonant chord

effects are my attempts to imitate the bandoneón color throughout the compositions. In order to reflect the “Piazzolla” and “tango sound” I have trusted my instincts, my heart, and José’s ability to create the sound conceptions I had in my head. I am not a violinist but have a good idea of the effects I wanted. Having a partner like José, willing to try myriads of sounds to reflect my crazy thoughts, helped immensely in creating the “dancing-duo-sonority” you hear. One of my inspirations in transcribing reaches me from the past, and that is Franz Liszt, the master of all transcribers. Transcription allows for some freedom of expression, but only as it reflects the sonority originally conceived for the work itself. In that sense, it allows the transcriber to read into the spirit of the music. It’s kind of crazy and beautiful at the same time.

Finally, I wanted to end with a question about your collaboration with Gabriella Cavallero (voice) and Laura Ruas (bass). The bonus songs with Cavallero and Ruas, Che, Tango, che! and Chiquilín de Bachin, are such a treat on the album. Not only are they beautiful and expressive pieces, they also demonstrate the versatility of the Cueto-Roldán duo, in that you can add other musicians and still maintain that signature, authentic sound and presence. Gabriella adds so much texture and emotion to the pieces. Like her narration of the excerpts from The Magic Fire, Gabriella’s singing balances between melodrama and genuine emotional tone. I wonder if Gabriella could speak a little to that balance. In terms of creating an emotional journey, do you apply a different process for a sung performance versus a spoken performance?

NR: I will let Gabriella answer the latter part of the question. I have high respect for Gabriella Cavallero, who is greatly admired and has received many awards for her work as narrator and actor. I also love her as my daughter and have always wanted for us to work together. The tango shows I produced (and still produce) gave us the perfect opportunity to partner music, song, and language. It’s a privilege to share the stage with her. When I was putting this CD together, I decided that inclusion of some of the narrative pieces we often use in performances would be essential for listeners – to provide another “road” into the spirit of the tango.

Gabriella Cavallero: As an actor, I approach pieces from the inside, from whoever the character is speaking or singing, so I never think of my way in to a piece as melodramatic, which is more put “on.” But, I have to say there’s something about Argentina, just in the language for instance – the expressiveness of that *über*-passionate Italian influence added onto the already lyrical open Spanish language – that could absolutely make one think of melodrama. As an actor, I am often cast in highly emotional roles, and it makes sense now. I grew up with Argentinian musicians – my mother Nancy Roldán and my father Hugo, who was a jazz pianist – so I have the immigrant experience of having grown up far from all my relatives, feeling always an “otherness” from my American friends. And I was also (very fortunately) surrounded by gorgeous lyrical music all the time. I’m a big believer in the power of music to open the heart, so going right to the gutsy, juicy heart of a piece runs in my veins. In the novel *The Gods of Tango*, Carolina de Robertis writes, “Music, arrow to pierce all barriers. Music, the great equalizer. Music, invader of centuries. Nectar of demons, whiskey flask of God.” That quote stopped me in my tracks. Such a perfect description of music’s power, because even though I’m an actor, it’s music that’s always inspired me and guided me. The segments in this recording, however, are particularly special to me. In that live performance, I was on a stage speaking those words while listening to my amazing mother Nancy playing this aching melody behind me. When she stops playing the piano mid-monologue, the void of her music hits me right in the gut. As far as the songs go, they are about a tragic, destitute little beggar boy, *Chiquilín*, and about the brutal way tango seduces and ravages a woman (*Ché, Tango, ché!*) – not exactly light drawing-room fare! It’s impossible to tread lightly with these lyrics or this aching, evocative music – it demands a certain weight and depth of commitment.