Analysis of and Performance Suggestions for Astor Piazzolla’s Piano Solo Work, *Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, Sunny’s Game*

D.M.A. Document

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Abstract

This document focuses on the composer Astor Piazzolla (1921-92) and his solo piano work, *Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game-Tango Prelude, Flora’s Game-Milonga Prelude, Sunny’s Game-Valse Prelude* (1987). Astor Piazzolla, one of the most influential figures in tango history, has put significant efforts into the transformation of the tango and promoting the tango globally. Furthermore, he revolutionized the tango with his new style, *nuevo tango*, in which he incorporated classical music and jazz elements into this popular music genre.

Piazzolla was very prolific, and his oeuvre includes more than one thousand works. He also composed for solo piano, although most of these pieces are shorter in length. His most famous piano solo work is perhaps *Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, and Sunny’s Game*. *Leijia’s Game* is titled in the score as *Tango Prelude*. *Flora’s Game* is a *Milonga Prelude*, originally the dance that preceded the tango. *Sunny’s Game* is a *Valse Prelude*; it also belongs to the tango family, which is the tango version of waltz.

This paper explores this particular piano work by Piazzolla using style and formal analysis. Chapter 2 surveys the history of the tango. Chapter 3 deals with the style and formal analysis of the three pieces. In addition to a discussion of Piazzolla’s composition style in the pieces, performance suggestions are offered based on the
analysis, along with experience gained from playing the piece. Chapter 4 offers overall performance recommendations on *rubato*, rhythm, pedal, dynamics, articulations, and fingerings for *Three Preludes*. 
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Vita

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Chapter 1: Introduction

An Overview of This Document

Formerly, the tango was considered more of a popular music than a classical music. However, in the past thirty years, the tango has begun to be incorporated into the classical music tradition. The tango has also become a global music, instead of flourishing only in Buenos Aires—where it was originated.\(^1\) Astor Piazzolla has put significant effort into the transformation of the tango and promoting the tango globally. He revolutionized the tango with his new style *nuevo tango*, in which he incorporated classical music and jazz elements into this popular music genre.

Piazzolla was a bandoneón player, piano player, and composer for all different types of instruments. He was very prolific, and his oeuvre includes more than one thousand works. Most of the pieces he composed are for ensembles, especially for the bands that he founded himself. Quite a number of the ensemble pieces have been made into piano arrangements. He also composed for solo piano, although most of these pieces are shorter in length. His most famous piano solo work is perhaps *Three Preludes*

for Piano: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, and Sunny’s Game. Leijia’s Game is titled in the score as Tango Prelude. Flora’s Game is a milonga prelude, originally the dance that preceded the tango. Sunny’s Game is a valse prelude; it also belongs to the tango family, which is the tango version of waltz.

In music history, the term “prelude” was originally used for music that precedes other music. For instance, in J. S. Bach’s (1685-1750) twenty-four preludes and fugues, the prelude serves as a light movement before the fugue. Later composers such as Frédéric Chopin (1810-49), Claude Debussy (1862-1918), and Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) all composed numbers of preludes. These preludes were typical of others in their eras and in the present day, as they no longer functioned as an introduction but rather served as a collection of character pieces. Each piece conveys different moods, and some even have programmatic titles. Piazzolla’s Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, and Sunny’s Game fits the characteristics of the present day prelude, the three short pieces each telling a different story.

This paper explores this particular piano work by Piazzolla through historical, style and formal analysis, and performance suggestions. Chapter 2 surveys the history of the tango. Chapter 3 offers the style and formal analyses of the three pieces. In addition to a discussion of Piazzolla’s composition style in the pieces, performance suggestions


will be offered based on the analysis study, along with experience gained from playing the set of pieces. Chapter 4 offers overall performance recommendations on *rubato*, rhythm, pedal, dynamics, and articulations for *Three Preludes*.

**Astor Piazzolla’s Biographical Background**

Born on March 11, 1921, in Mar de Plata, Argentina, Piazzolla was one of the most influential figures in tango history. The most frequently reproduced image of Piazzolla shows him playing a bandoneón with his eyes closed and both hands extended to an incredible length.

He was a child prodigy in playing this concertina-like instrument, which originated in Germany. Both the bandoneón, together with the concertina, belong to the accordion family. His family moved to New York City in 1925. When Piazzolla was eight years old, his father got him his first bandoneón from a pawn shop. After he studied it for a year with Andrés Dáquila, he recorded his first noncommercial record. At age thirteen, young Piazzolla met Carlos Gardel, who was the most established tango singer of the century. He hired Piazzolla to play a newspaper boy part in the movie *El Did Que Me Quieras* (1935). Two years later his family moved back to Argentina permanently. Piazzolla started to play in tango orchestras, one of which was led by Aníbal

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Tróila. In 1954, Piazzolla won a government scholarship to study composition in Paris, where he studied under Nadia Boulanger. She inspired him to compose in his native music style rather than mimicking other classical composers’ styles; this was the starting point of his nuevo tango style. After a year of studying in Paris, Piazzolla returned to Argentina and formed his own group, the Octeto Buenos Aires. The octet consisted of two bandoneóns, two violins, cello, double bass, electric guitar, and piano. Compared to a traditional tango group called orquesta típica that usually has ten to twelve musicians, Piazzolla’s Octeto Buenos Aires had a smaller number and was set in more of a chamber ensemble style. Other than the different instrumental setting with which he was experimenting, Piazzolla also had experimental new ideas with his group. For instance, instead of the simple I-V harmony that the traditional tango utilizes, he would use complex contrapuntal classical elements and jazz harmony, or he would ask his violinist to articulate the instrument in between the bridge and tail piece on the violin to create a new sound. However, the reaction toward his innovative ideas was often not very pleasant. Nevertheless, he continued standing up for his ideas. In 1958, he disbanded his octet and went back to New York City to work as an arranger. In October of the next year, his father passed away in Argentina while he was in New York City. One of his most famous works, Adiós Nonino, was written in memory of his father.


7. Nonino is Italian for grandfather; Piazzolla’s children called his father Nonino.
Piazzolla then returned to Argentina and formed his quintet. The band was comprised of bandoneóns, violin, bass, electric guitar, and piano. Although he was pushing his new tango even further with this group, he still was not getting much positive feedback by the old school tangueros. There was a story told by Piazzolla in *A Memoir*, in which he once went with his quintet to San Pedro. The fashion at the time was to play a concert and then have an open discussion with the audience. One man stood up and said to Piazzolla, “Maestro, now that the concert is over, why don’t you play a tango?” Piazzolla’s reaction was to throw a notebook at the audience. Piazzolla later formed many other groups, but the quintet was always his favorite. In 1965, Piazzolla released an album featuring only his compositions for the first time—*Piazzolla en el Philharmonic Hall de New York*. Piazzolla’s new tango—a fusion of tango, classical, and jazz music—was widely accepted by Americans and Europeans; because of his great success abroad, Argentines finally were able to accept that everything changes, even the tango.

In 1973, Piazzolla had a heart attack; however, it did not slow him down from composing and performing. He then moved to Italy after accepting a fifteen-year contract offered by Italian producer Aldo Pagani (b. 1932). This was also the period when his famous works, such as *Libertango* (1974), *Summit* (1974), and *Suite*


Troilenana (1975), were produced. As Piazzolla’s popularity kept rising, he continued to tour and performed all over the world—in Europe, South America, Japan, and the United States. In addition, he continued to compose and record with numerous types of instruments. In this period he wrote some well-known pieces, such as Le Grand Tango (1982) for cello and piano. In 1986 he recorded “Suite for Vibraphone and New Tango Quintet” with the jazz vibraphonist Gary Burton. He also recorded many more records that are still popular today, such as Tango Apasionado, La Camorra, Five Tango Sensations, and others. In 1988, Piazzolla survived another heart attack and underwent a quadruple bypass. He still toured and performed afterwards despite his energy level not being what it was before. In 1990, Piazzolla had a stroke in Paris. After suffering from its effects for the next two years, he passed away in Buenos Aires on July 4, 1992.

**Astor Piazzolla’s Musical Background**

Astor Piazzolla’s musical style, in general, can be described as a fusion of tango, classical, and jazz music. For instance, he might use a tango rhythm with a classical harmonic sequence, along with jazz improvisation.

Piazzolla’s first encounter with classical music was in 1933, when he studied with the Hungarian pianist Bela Wilda, who was a pupil of Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943). Piazzolla once said that with Bela Wilda he learned to love Bach. In 1936, after

10. Gorin, 134.
12. Ibid., paragraph 3.
his family moved back to Argentina, he heard the tango violinist Elvino Vardaro’s (1905-71) sextet on the radio. That is when Piazzolla fell in love with the tango. When he was playing in Aníbal Troilo’s tango orchestra, he did some arrangements for the group as well. Besides arranging scores for the tango orchestra, Piazzolla was also composing works for other types of instruments, most of them being in the classical style. For instance, he composed a piano concerto, which he showed to the great pianist Arthur Rubinstein (1887-1982), who was living in Buenos Aires at the time. Piazzolla recalled in A Memoir how he just went and knocked on Rubinstein’s door, asking Rubinstein to play his work, a piano concerto for which he had not even composed the orchestral parts. Rubinstein recommended that Piazzolla study music and arranged for him to study with Alberto Ginastera (1916-83). Therefore, in 1941, Piazzolla became the first composition student of this very important Argentine classical composer, who helped to fulfill his need for more advanced musical training. Piazzolla spent almost five years learning with Ginastera. According to Piazzolla, Ginastera gave him his real musical foundation, including teaching him his strong orchestration skills. With Ginastera, he did not just master composition technique; he was also being taught how humanism is important for a musician. For instance, Ginastera told Piazzolla that “a musician


could not just stay in his scores . . . a musician has to know about painting, literature, theater, film.”

In 1943, he studied piano with the concert pianist Raúl Spivak (1907-75). He wanted to play the piano at a very advanced level, but the shape of his thumbs pointed outward due to playing the bandoneón, which made it difficult for him to achieve the facility on the piano that he desired. However, Piazzolla said that he did not waste his time with Spivak because he did all his work, including arrangements, on the piano. Although the bandoneón was Piazzolla’s primary instrument, his training in the piano explains why his piano works are very pianistic.

Piazzolla formed his first orchestra in 1946, whereupon he started to develop his new ideas for the tango. For instance, he started to use large dynamic and complex harmonic content in his pieces. Such ideas caused controversy among traditional tangueros at that time. Perhaps the controversy he raised among members of the tango society and his belief at the time that the tango was cabaret music led Piazzolla to feel the need to search for a different genre of music. In 1949, he disbanded his orchestra and stopped playing the bandoneón. He was obsessed about learning and finding a different genre for himself other than tango. He took a conducting course with Hermann Scherchen (1891-1966), wrote many arrangements for other orchestras, and also wrote for film. He won

15. Alberto Ginastera, quoted in Natalio Gorin, 73.
17. Ibid., 130.
the Fabien Sevitzky award in 1953 with his *Buenos Aires* Symphony (1951) and was
offered a scholarship to study in Paris for a year.

In 1954, he went to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979), who was
also the teacher of famous composers such as Aaron Copland (1900-90), Jean Françaix
(1912-97), and Donald Grantham (b. 1947). Boulanger encouraged Piazzolla to find his
true self. According to Piazzolla, “That trip in 1954 was crucial in my life. It marked a
boundary. It was when Nadia Boulanger found the key to the true Piazzolla.”18 Piazzolla
went to Boulanger with many of his neoclassical compositions. After Boulanger spent
two weeks analyzing the works that Piazzolla brought with him, she told him everything
he had was well written but there was no spirit in it.19 Boulanger asked Piazzolla what
kind of music he played in his country. Reluctantly, he told her that he was a tango
musician who played the bandoneóns. Boulanger asked Piazzolla to play his tango, and
when he finished, she told him that tango was the true Piazzolla. “Do not ever leave
him,” she said.20 Piazzolla went back to where he started—the world of tango—and took
his bandoneón out of the closet. Also, the fact that Boulanger made Piazzolla analyze
four-part counterpoint for eight months played a vital role in his way of incorporating
contrapuntal writing into his tango pieces.

Aside from the classical elements that he used in his works, the other significant
element in his works was jazz. The fact that Piazzolla spent his childhood until age

18. Astor Piazzolla, quoted in Gorin, 132.
19. Gorin, 70.
20. Ibid., 71, quoting Nadia Boulanger.
sixteen in New York City contributed to his love for jazz. According to Piazzolla in Gorin’s *A Memoir*, Piazzolla and his friend would go to hear Cab Calloway, the legendary figure in the world of jazz, when they were still in high school. Piazzolla stated that he was familiar with the name Cab Calloway because his father liked the singer and was always listening to him singing on the radio.\(^{21}\) His exposure to jazz when he was young was influential in his utilization of jazz elements such as improvisation into his tango music.

**Overview of Piazzolla’s Compositions**

Piazzolla was a very prolific composer.\(^{22}\) According to the score list compiled by Noritake Yonezawa, Piazzolla had at least 732 pieces published, although some of them are already out of print.\(^{23}\) Piazzolla would sometimes compose one piece and then make it into different arrangements for different instrumental needs. As an example, for his most famous piece, *Adios Nonino* (1959), he wrote twenty different arrangements. The number 732 does not include all the arrangements made by Piazzolla and others. If all the arrangements are also included, the number of published scores would be more than fifteen hundred. Also, Piazzolla wrote the music for about sixty films.\(^{24}\) For instance,

\(^{21}\) Gorin, 37.

\(^{22}\) Refer to Gorin, 220, for a discography of Piazzolla’s works. Also see appendix A.


\(^{24}\) Eva Pinter, liner notes to *Astor Piazzolla: Le Grand Tango*, Hänssler Classic 93.205, 2007, CD.
Oblivion (1984) was written for the film Enrique IV by Italian film director Marco Bellocchio (1939- ). Numbers aside, Piazzolla composed for many different instrumental combinations in addition to his compositions and arrangements for the tango orchestra. A few examples include 2 Piezas breves Para Viola y Piano (1977); Verano Porteno (1965) from The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires for bandoneón, piano, cello, electric guitar, and contrabass; Histoire du Tango, for flute and guitar; Le Grand Tango (1982), featuring cello, which he dedicated to Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich (1927-2007); and of course the tango song Balada Para Mi Muerte (1970), for voice and piano.

There are many solo piano scores of Piazzolla on the market now. Many of them are arrangements done by others and not originally composed for solo piano by Piazzolla. There are a few solo piano pieces, including some of his early works such as Suite Op. 2 (1943), Piano Sonata Op. 7 (1945), Piano Suite No. 2 (1950), and Preludio 1953 (1953), none of which are tango. They were composed during the period when Piazzolla was trying to become a classical composer. Thus, all four pieces are neoclassical in style, with dissonance and chromaticism strongly emphasized instead of conventional harmony. It is known that after he went to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger, he started back on the path of the tango. One should not assume that all his compositions after 1954 would be tangos. For instance, Vayamos al Diablo, the piano solo composed in 1965, was not a tango. The piece was set in B minor and in a fast tempo. The nonstop running passages have a restless feeling, such as running to the Devil, as suggested in the title; it could be categorized as a character piece. Still, Piazzolla is best known for
his tangos, and he definitely composed a few tangos for solo piano. There are piano
solos without a composition date, such as *Imagenes 676*, *Chris-Talin*, and *Angle*, which
are attractive short tango pieces. One later work was *Pedro y Pedro* (1980), dedicated to
Pedro Maffía and Pedro Laurenz, both bandoneón players and band directors.\(^{25}\) Considering the dedication, one could imagine that this piece is indeed a true tango. Piazzolla’s
best-known solo piano work is perhaps *Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game,*
and *Sunny’s Game* (1987). All three preludes are associated with the tango. *Leijia’s
Game* is a *tango prelude*, *Flora’s Game* is a *milonga prelude*, and *Sunny’s Game* is a
*valse prelude*, which is a tango waltz prelude.

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\(^{25}\) Gorin, 55.
There have been many claims as to the origins of the tango, and the question remains debatable to this day. Some claim the word tango originated in Africa, meaning “African dance.” Others believe that it is derived from the old Spanish word tañer, meaning “to play an instrument.”¹ The tango is the result of a fusion of cultures, reflecting the period from 1840 to 1940 when most immigrants came to Argentina. Many came from Italy, Spain, and France and often settled in Buenos Aires.² The tango contains elements of the Candombe from Uruguay, the Contradanza from Spain, the Polka Mazurka from Europe, and the Habanera from Cuba. In addition, both the Polka Mazurka and the Habanera stimulated the emergence of the local Argentine dance called the Milonga. In fact, the tango began as just a new way to dance the Milonga.³ Moreover, the Habanera, Milonga, and tango all share the same rhythmic pattern (see figure 1). All of these dances (and songs) contributed to the formation of the tango.⁴

² Simon Collier, Artemis Cooper, Maria Susana Azzi, and Richard Martin, ¡Tango! The Dance, the Song, the Story (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 36.
³ Ibid., 45.
⁴ Ibid., 40.
However, in the twentieth century, the tango was best known as the music and dance of Argentina. San Telmo, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, was described as a tango barrio (tango neighborhood). That is to say, one would feel the tango everywhere just by walking the streets of San Telmo.  

**Tango—The Dance**

Public recognition of the tango primarily regards the dance form and secondly the music. Tango scholars have divided the history of the tango into roughly three periods: the old guard (1880-1920), the new guard or the golden age (1920-50), and the avant-garde period from 1950 onwards. Because of the passionate and exotic flavor of the dance, it was often associated with lust and the underclass. Therefore, in the old guard period of tango history, the tango as a dance was actually just a visual part of the

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5. Granados, 14.

6. Collier et al., 198.
tango music; dancers followed the music and were not soloists. But the public interest in
the dance was not to be ignored. At the beginning, the dance was performed in brothels
and cafés and was associated with the underclass for those in the high society of Buenos
Aires. It was considered so until 1907, when the tango started to become a social dance
in Paris and then became popular in England in 1912. Later on, the tango developed into
the most popular ballroom dance after World War I. Starting around 1935, in the period
of the golden age of tango, complex choreography began to flourish and the dance
finally dominated in the place where it originated: Buenos Aires.

There are several different types of tango dance form: the Argentine tango, the
Uruguayan tango, and the ballroom tango, among others. The tango nowadays is danced
by a couple; there is an emphasis on the posture and frame, and the male figure usually
leads. There is flowing footwork, and the steps are sometimes improvised to show the
ability of the dancers. Originally, however, the dance was not meant to be performed by
a couple. It started with men on the street who danced to the music with improvised
footsteps to display their prowess and to compete with each other. The first group of
women who danced the tango were objects of derision. The tango has come a long
way—from a dance of the lower classes to the pride of the Argentine nation today.


**Tango—The Music**

To people outside of the country, the tango is best known as the dance of Argentina; however, that is not how the tango is seen by the Argentineans. To them, the tango can mean a song or a dance, and the dance music is just one part of tango music.\(^{10}\) As stated earlier, the history of tango music can be roughly divided into three periods: old, new, and the avant-garde. Ysomar Granados explained in her doctoral dissertation that the tango scholar Horacio Ferrer has made a clear description of the elements of the old and new periods.\(^{11}\) For instance, in the years of the old period—*la guardia vieja* (old guard) of tango (1880-1920)—the instrumentations were simpler, usually consisting of only three different instruments: flute, harp, or violin. A guitar would sometimes substitute for the harp. These were the instruments that people had readily available.\(^{12}\) After 1900 the piano started to become part of the instrumentation; thus, the piano, violin, and bandoneón combination began to appear. Tango was considered to be the music of the lower class in the old period. It was always performed live, because recorded music did not become popular until around 1907.

In the new period—*la guardia nueva* (1920-50)—the tango orchestra began to form; therefore, the instrumentation was no longer in just three parts. Piano, violin, bandoneón, and bass were the basic parts of the orchestra. Most of the musicians were able to read music; therefore, they did their own arrangements for pieces. Compared to

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10. Denniston, 57.
the old period when the melody of the tango was not written down and was passed on
aurally, the tango started to become a more structured composition; it had two or three
parts: A-B or A-B-C. This was when the vocal part of the tango was born, and tango
singer Carlos Gardel\textsuperscript{13} became a legendary figure. In these songs the text placed an
emphasis on serious and sad stories. Tango songs continued to flourish after Carlos
Gardel, and the music and dance also reached its golden age,\textsuperscript{14} with the tango finally
being recognized as a national idiom of Argentina. Also, compared to the old period
when only live performances were offered, many tango records and films were being
made.

After the end of the golden age (1950), the avant-garde period started to mature
the tango. One development was the advent of small ensembles. The \textit{tango nuevo} (new

\textit{tango})—led by Piazzolla began to transform the genre into an international sensation.
Piazzolla added electric guitar to his instrumentations, which then became a standard
practice for tango groups later on. Also, as Piazzolla himself expressed, the \textit{tango nuevo}
was not considered to be dance music. However, dancers found that they could actually
create interesting choreographies to some of those pieces that were not originally com-
posed for that purpose. As this new tango music became popular for dance performances
on the stage, it also captured the hearts of tango music lovers internationally.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Cliff Eisen, “Gardel, Carlos.” In \textit{Grove Music Online} (New York: Oxford
University Press, 2010), http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.osu.edu/
subscriber/article/grove/music/45192 (accessed February 23, 2010), paragraph 2.

\textsuperscript{14} Goertzen and Azzi, 68.

\textsuperscript{15} Denniston, 205.
Tango Music Structure

The structure of the majority of tangos in the old guard—or traditional tango—was set in the conventional three part A-B-C form. By 1915, the two-part A-B tango began to become the norm, with the B section usually in the relative minor or dominant of the original key.\(^{16}\)

There were basically three types of tangos in the new period: \textit{tango milonga}, \textit{tango romanza}, and \textit{tango canción}.\(^{17}\) \textit{Tango milonga} is in A-B-A form and is of moderate tempo. The A section is usually melodic and, in contrast, the B section is very rhythmic. However, the characteristics of the sections have been reversed since 1950. \textit{Tango romanza}, as it suggests, has certain Romantic period characteristics. It is rich in tone, highly expressive, and especially lyrical. It is sometimes sung, but is more often played as an instrumental. It is typical to include a piano in the set up. \textit{Tango canción} literally means “tango song” in English. As the title suggests, it is meant to be sung; therefore, \textit{tango canción} is very melodic and simpler in structure as compared to \textit{tango romanza}. It can be set in A-B-A (different lyrics for the A sections) or A-B-C form.

The tango is usually in simple duple meter, 2/4, but is sometimes in 4/4. \textit{Tango vals}, the tango waltz, would be set in compound duple meter—6/8. The tango has distinctive rhythmic accompaniment patterns, usually played by piano in the orchestra: patterns 1 and 2 (see figure 1).

\(^{16}\) Béhague, paragraph 3.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
Piano in the Tango Orchestra

What is the piano’s role in the tango orchestra? Due to the heavy weight of the instrument, making it hard to move from place to place, the piano was not in the tango orchestra in the early period. Around 1900, in the old guard period, Roberto Firpo (1884-1969) introduced the piano into the orchestra. The role of the piano was simple: mainly playing tonic and dominant chords and assuming the rhythmic governance of the group. In the new guard, other than being the foundation of the rhythm along with the bass, the piano also played a “harmonized accompaniment” role. The piano would play bridges between the passages, doing embellishments such as trills and chromatic runs or exchanging the melody with other parts in the orchestra, like a dialogue. When it came to Piazzolla’s era, the piano’s unchanging role was still the foundation of the rhythm. But in Piazzolla’s compositions for his orchestra, the piano sometimes played important solo parts as well. For instance, in one of his most famous works, *Adios Nonino*, Piazzolla wrote several different arrangements for the piece. One of the arrangements has a long, technical piano solo at the beginning of the piece. This approach was definitely far removed from the old guard’s simple tonic and dominants but was also a further


development from the new guard’s already more elaborate piano part. Although the piano began to play a much more important role in orchestras as the tango evolved, the star of the orchestra was still the bandoneón, which carried the main melody.
Chapter 3: Piazzolla’s *Three Preludes* for Piano

Piazzolla has separated himself from other tango composers by innovating the “new tango” style. The following quote by Piazzolla might explain the reason for the innovation:

> You could change anything in Argentina—religion, the law, the money, twenty thousand presidents. Just don’t change the tango. Ask them who Bach, Picasso, or John Coltrane was and they don’t know. Once, when Aaron Copland came to hear us, I said, “Play good, you guys, Aaron Copland is out there.” They said, “Who’s Aaron Copland?” That’s the world of the tango for you—drinking, drugs, prostitutes, cops, gigolos, thieves, idiots. I got out of that business. I hated it. I found another way.¹

Although perhaps not Piazzolla’s intention, this comment, besides stating his reason for the new tango, at the same time suggests three characteristics of his new tango: (1) Bach, representing classical counterpoint; (2) Coltrane, representing jazz concept; and (3) roots in traditional tango.

One of Piazzola’s late works, *Three Preludes for Piano: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game,* and *Sunny’s Game,* was composed in August 1987 in New York City. There is no documentation about the reason for this composition or about the choices of titles for the three preludes. However, the conductor and pianist, Pablo Zinger, who was the music director for Piazzolla’s music production *Tango Apasinado* in 1987, played Leijia’s

Game in the recording, *The Rough Dancer and the Cyclical Night (Tango Apasionado)*, for which Piazzolla was co-producer along with Kip Harahan. Zinger recalled that *Leijia’s Game* might be named after Kip Harahan’s baby daughter.² By the same token, both *Flora’s Game* and *Sunny’s Game* and may be named after real people, even though there is no supporting documentation.

This chapter will provide an analysis of Piazzola’s piano work, *Three Preludes*. In addition to a discussion of Piazzolla’s compositional style in these pieces, performance suggestions will be offered based on the analysis along with experience gained from playing the set of pieces.

*Leijia’s Game: Tango Prelude*

In music history, “prelude” originally referred to an introductory piece preceding other music. Starting in the Romantic period, composers began to consider preludes as a collection of short music pieces, and they no longer functioned as “preceding” music.³ *Three Preludes* falls into the category of preludes after the Romantic period. Each prelude can very well stand on its own; therefore, this set of preludes can be and has been performed both together or separately.

*Leijia’s Game* is subtitled as a *Tango Prelude*. The structure of this piece can be roughly set as a traditional three-part tango form. There are eight small sections that can be combined into three larger parts. Intro, A, bridge, B, bridge, A', A", and coda are the

². Refer to transcript of interview with Pablo Zinger in appendix B.

³. Ledbetter and Ferguson, paragraph 1.
eight sections, where the intro, A, and the first bridge comprise the first part; B and the second bridge are the second part, followed by A', A'', and the coda as the third part (see figure 2).

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{Intro} & A & \text{Bridge} & B & \text{Bridge} & A' & A'' & \text{Coda} \\
\text{ } & \text{ } & \text{ } & \text{ } & \text{ } & \text{ } & \text{ } & \text{ } \\
\text{First Part} & \text{Second Part} & \text{Third Part} \\
\end{array}
\]

Figure 2. Structure of Leijja’s Game from Piazzolla’s Three Preludes.

Leijja’s Game is an unmeasured prelude. Unmeasured preludes are an early French tradition, dating back to the seventeenth century; Louis Couperin (1626-1661) wrote a number of unmeasured preludes.\(^4\) The fact that Piazzolla chose to set Leijja’s Game as unmeasured, it can be considered as one of the classical elements that Piazzolla employed in this piece. Because there are no bar line indications in the score, system numbers will be used here instead of measure numbers to function as reference points throughout the analysis of Leijja’s Game. The squares, circles, bracket markings, chord names, and fingerings in the figures throughout this paper are not in the original score; they are labeled by the author to illustrate the analysis. There is no time signature or key

signature for this prelude. However, Piazzolla did indicate the style he desired for this piece, which is marked *Cantabile e libero*—meaning an unrestrained, singing style. The key center of *Leijia’s Game* varies throughout the piece, but it stays in the minor mode most of the time. Table 1 illustrates the formal analysis of *Leijia’s Game*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>System numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2-8 (first half)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>8 (second half)-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>11-3 (3/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>13 (last 1/4)-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>15-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&quot;</td>
<td>22-28 (3/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>28 (last 1/4)-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Leijia’s Game* begins with one system of *ad lib.* introduction. The introduction phrase is comprised of notes of minor tonic triads, the roots of which move in half-stepwise motion; figure 3 shows the root for each tonic triad. Notice that the root of each tonic triad key centers is moving chromatically—from C to C♯ to B to B♭ minors. The same four roots of each tonic triads are repeated once more in an octave higher register, with alternation of the note placements. The two extra B-minor and B♭-minor triads at the end make up this four-plus-four-plus-two broken-triad introduction phrase. Analyzing sequential writing is especially helpful when first approaching this piece.
Without doing so, the pianist might feel the notes are scattered everywhere.

Acknowledgment of the sequential patterns makes it easy for the performer to orient his or her hands on the keyboard in terms of finding the register and notes. Piazzolla has demonstrated a substantial amount of sequential writing in this particular piece; however, most sequential writings are sequential but not functional in the traditional sense. Therefore, it is recommended to analyze the obvious sequences and key centers of the piece in order to provide a better understanding of the overall structure and to significantly reduce the time that might normally be require to learn the piece. Figure 4 illustrates the theme of the A section.

Most of the time in the sequence, the first three notes of each phrase state the key center. Similar to the introduction, the key center moves in half-step motion; it starts from B minor to A# minor, to A minor, to G# minor, to G minor, then to F# minor. There is a hint of tango rhythm here in the theme: the dotted eighth, sixteenth, and two eighth notes (G, F#, G, F#; see figure 4). Although almost identical, the numbers of the
notes for phrases one and two are different. Phrase two has two more eighth notes (G and F♯). The uneven number of notes creates an improvised sense to the listener. One of Piazzolla’s composition techniques are his incorporation of jazz elements in his compositions. He sometimes uses jazz chord progressions, but the most important concept that he borrowed from jazz is probably the “swing,” because he felt that swinging made
the music come alive. He also emphasizes the freedom one gets from improvisation.⁵

Tango itself has a strict form and does not allow improvisation as jazz would. But Piazzolla encouraged the instrumentalists in many of his ensembles to play as they felt.⁶ Despite his fondness for jazz music since he was a child in New York City, the reason for his use of jazz elements had a lot to do with the musicians with whom he worked. Piazzolla himself said: “I’ve always written thinking of the musicians I have with me. But I also gave them freedom to fly. I had pianists who improvised like gods: Osvaldo Tarantino, who came from tango; Pablo Ziegler, who was schooled in jazz; Gerardo Gandini, a scholar in contemporary music.”⁷

The free singing style *Cantabile e libero* with the *ad lib.* that Piazzolla instructed at the beginning of the prelude suggest an improvisational style of playing. Aim for a relaxed feeling, and exploit the freedom that has been given by the composer—no time signature and no bar lines, meaning that *rubato* can be used. These are the key factors to consider when performing this prelude, especially for the introduction passages and the theme for the A section. Performers should also pay attention to the “breath marking” sign between each phrase in the A section, indicating that the performer should literally “breathe” and take a little bit of time between the phrases when playing. Therefore,

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⁶ Ibid., 159.

⁷ Astor Piazzolla, quoted in Gorin, 58.
instead of thinking as a pianist, thinking as a singer for this section would help in interpreting _Leijia’s Game_.

There are two segments that make up the A section; systems 2-4 (figure 4) is the first segment, and systems 5-8½ is the second segment. The piece is carrying a single melody line until the double voices in the second segment appear. Figure 5 shows the first two systems of this segment. Although the texture is doubled, the melody to the listener is still in one stream because the voices are in a parallel octave. The key register moves higher, and the first climax of the piece arrives in _fortissimo_. There is a bridge section followed by the A section. Similar to the introduction, the bridge section is also comprised of a broken minor tonic triad. The bridge section starts with C# minor-C minor-G# minor-G minor. The connection between the key centers could be explained as the tonic and dominant relationship. Figure 6 shows the key centers and also shows the sequence is moving to the higher register. It is easy to note that once again, similar to the introduction, Piazzolla used sequential writing and repeating the phrase in a higher register.

The B section, marked _meno mosso_, is the first time that a contrapuntal texture is introduced in this prelude. The length of the B section is not long, only 2½ systems. There are only two key centers in this section: D minor and A minor. The bass stays in G throughout the section. Again, Piazzolla used a repetition of the patterns in different registers to make up the B section. A frequent practice in modern tango, introduced here by Piazzolla, is _cromático_. To tango musicians, _cromático_ means “the chromatic pick

Figure 7 illustrates the first cromático in four thirty-second notes, and the second cromático in quintuplet thirty-second notes. This figure also demonstrates Piazzolla’s classical traits, as he employed the layered-voices technique that is similar to Bach’s


writing, which consists of the top main melody line, the chromatic inner motive, and the G pedal point in the bottom voice.

Attention to dynamics is something that the performer needs to be mindful of here. The beginning of the B section starts with *mf*, crescendos to *ff*, then back down to *mf* at the end of the B section. Because the B section is simply made up of a repetition of the same musical patterns, dynamic variations are especially important to make this section interesting. Every phrase should be presented at a different dynamic level, although it is not marked for every one of them.

Following the B section is another bridge section. Similar to the first bridge and the introduction, this bridge is again comprised of a series of broken minor tonic triads in different inversions. This time the bridge section starts with G minor, moves to G♯ minor, F♯ minor, A minor, B♭ minor, E minor, F minor, E minor, G♯ minor, and finally ending on G minor. Close hand placement can help a performer when playing this passage. Every circled group shown in figure 8 is within an octave range, and most of the key centers are going in half-step motions.
The third part of *Leijia’s Game* is comprised of A', A'', and the coda. The main melody of the A'' section is similar to the original A section at the beginning of the piece. In figures 9 and 10, the respective beginnings of the A and A' sections are placed back to back to show the slight differences in the theme for its return in the A' section. The A' section starts with the tango’s signature chromatic pick-up: four sixteenth notes (B♭, B, C, C#); the right hand repeats the same melody three times. The left-hand key centers are the same as the original A section. Although the notes are the same, the rhythm patterns have changed. Also, in the original A section, the emphasis and the long note of the left hand are the first note (bass note). Compare this to the A’ section where the first note becomes a pick-up and the second note becomes the long note.

The performer should be aware of this change, as the emphasis of the voice has changed. The A' section is made up of three segments: the first segment is system 15 to the middle of system 17; the second segment is the other half of system 17 to system 19, followed by the third segment of systems 20 and 21. In the second segment, the note B is prominent in the left-hand throughout; at the climax of the A' section, the right hand finally arrives on B, and the phrase also ends on B (see figure 11).

The third segment sounds most like jazz because of the harmony Piazzolla used here. He used minor seventh intervals in the left hand at the beginning of every phrase (C and B♭, B♭ and A♭, G# and F#). The last phrase of the third segment has a clear C# major-minor seventh chord formation—C#, E#, G#, and B (see figure 12).
The A' section should be interpreted in a lyrical singing style, as *cantabile* is indicated here. In addition, *meno mosso* is also indicated, giving the performer the suggestion to differ the A' and A section. Most of the time, a returning theme should not be played the same as the first time, unless indicated by the composer. Piazzolla already specifies here that the A' section is not the same as the A section. As the right hand is in a repetitive pattern and has almost the same notes in each phrase, the bass notes in the left hand provide the clues for the key centers. Hence, the left-hand bass should be stressed, but without accented notes. *Forte* is marked at the beginning of the second segment. Every phrase should crescendo until it reaches the *fortissimo* at the climax in system 19. After the melody reaches the high note B and comes down, one should make
sure that one follows the *legato* marking. Therefore, do not detach each interval, and do not accent on the strong beat; see fingerings in figure 11.

The A" section is also comprised of three segments. The melodies of the A' and A" sections are identical, with only the register of the first and second segments of the A" section set two octaves higher than the A' section. The third phrases of the third segments in both the A' and A" sections are set differently by Piazzolla (see figures 13 and 14).

In the A" section, Piazzolla chose to repeat the sequence again and then is followed by the Coda to end *Leijia’s Game*. Remembering details like this are helpful when memorizing the piece, because playing two almost identical sections can be confusing. The coda is similar to the intro and bridges sections in the piece. It is made up of different broken minor triads in sixteenth notes. The triads are moving a half-step down from B minor, finally arriving at F♯ minor (see figure 15). The coda is marked *prestissimo*, *fortissimo*, *molto dim.*, and finally *piano*. The coda suggests a dramatic ending, and Piazzolla has indicated how to make one. Following the dynamic markings and playing it as fast as possible are the keys to producing the desired effect. In the author’s case, redistribution of notes between the hands is necessary for playing the coda smoothly. Figure 15 also provides a suggestion for different hand use, based on the aim for minimal movement between hands when changing them.

*Leijia’s Game* is more of a song than a piece for piano, due to the prominent single melody line throughout the piece, and the fact that there are breath markings in the score. One of Piazzolla’s famous tango songs, *Balada para un loco* (1969), had text

by Horacio Ferrer. There is a long narrative section for this song; next is narration with a simple piano accompaniment, followed by singing with a tango orchestral accompaniment. The form of the song is similar to *Leijia’s Game*. The structure of both pieces is added on, section by section.

Regarding pedaling in *Leijia’s Game*, there are no pedal markings in the score. Although there are no bar lines for the whole piece, each phrase is easy to identify. Other than the introduction, bridge, and coda sections, most of the time each phrase belongs to one key center. Therefore, the guideline for pedaling could be to change pedal for each phrase. To quote Pablo Zinger, based on his understanding of Piazzolla’s intention when Zinger was working with Piazzolla, music to Piazzolla “was not about playing clean, it
was about playing dirty.’” Hence, pedaling is totally up to the performer’s discretion, even if it sounds “muddy.”

**Flora’s Game: Milonga Prelude**

The *Milonga* was an Argentine folk song and dance that came before the tango; in fact, the tango began as a new way to dance the *Milonga*.\(^9\) The word *Milonga* also refers to the place where one goes to dance the tango. In 1917, the term *Tango Milonga* was invented for the tango that was specifically designed for dancing, just as *Tango Canción* was designed for singing.\(^10\) The structure for the *Tango Milonga* is usually set in the A-B-A form at a moderate tempo. The B section in this scheme is commonly a very rhythmic section.\(^11\)

With some similarity to the structure of a *Tango Milonga*, *Flora’s Game* is set in Intro-A-B-Bridge-A form, with a faster and very rhythmic B section. The introduction section is from measure 1 to measure 32; the A section is from measure 39 to measure 73; the rhythmic B section starts at measure 74 and ends at measure 98; the A section then returns in measure 115, and the piece ends at measure 150. Figure 16 shows the formal analysis of *Flora’s Game* with the subjects indicated in each section. It is noteworthy that in contrast to *Leijia's Game*, *Flora’s Game* has a time signature and bar

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9. See interview transcript in appendix B.

10. Collier et al., 45.


lines, with the meter set in 4/4 without any key signature. It is easy to assume that

*Flora’s Game* is in A minor because the introduction is set in A minor; however, the A
and B sections are composed in various key centers that are changed frequently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Measure numbers and subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro.</td>
<td>1-7 a 8-13 a' 14-17 a'' 18-24 b 25-32 a''' 33-38 transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>39-44 c 45-48 d 49-54 e 55-60 c 61-64 d' 65-69 e' 70-73 d''</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>74-77 f 78-85 g 86-89 h 90-93 i 94-98 j 99-105 k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>106-114 l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>115-120 c 121-124 d 125-130 e 131-136 c 137-140 d' 141-144 e' 145-150 d''</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16. Formal analysis of Piazzolla’s *Three Preludes: Flora’s Game*.

The introduction starts at a slow pace, marked *Lento, tempo di milonga*, quarter
note = 90. The left hand plays an augmentation of the *Milonga* rhythm, while the *Tango*
and the *Habanera* share the same rhythm. Thus, instead of \( \text{\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) -- ++(0.5,0) -- ++(0.5,0) -- ++(0.5,0) -- cycle;
\end{tikzpicture}} \), the left hand
contains a dotted quarter and eighth note plus two quarter notes (see left hand in figure
17). As the soprano voice moves in the step-wise motion, the A minor scale in measure
5 restates the key center. In measure 7, the meter changes to 5/4, which is a common
contemporary compositional style.

The beginning is marked *tristemente*, which implies that a calm and subtle
feeling be achieved in playing thus requiring that the hands do not move excessively.
The movements of the soprano and alto lines consist only of neighboring tones requiring fingers only; therefore, they are not difficult to execute.

The left hand is the main character here; the performer must make sure that it is brought out, but not harshly. In measure 8 the meter returns to 4/4 and the melody from the beginning also comes back, while the accompanying dynamics are stronger; it is set in forte now instead of piano that appeared in the very beginning. This time, however, the original alto and bass lines are all played in the left hand, which now become the tenor and bass lines. The right hand also has two voices, of which the soprano is more
prominent (see figure 17). Because the soprano tune is carried out over the strong and weak beats of the moving eighth notes, a syncopated milonga/tango rhythm is created (see figure 18). The tenuto markings are not in the score, the author has added them on as an indication of the beats. It is noteworthy that Piazzolla simply used only the slur to achieve the effect. The embedded melody, as shown in figure 18, is again reminiscent of Bach’s style of writing.

This contrapuntal texture with the added voice has the essence of a fugue, which is one of the compositional styles that Piazzolla was very fond of using. Starting with measure 18, the new subject, “subject b,” is introduced, which is also the climax of the introduction. The first fortissimo of the whole piece happens here and is marked appassionato. The tango characteristic cromático that was in the Leijia’s Game is again used here in Flora’s Game. Even though this is a new subject, the syncopated milonga/tango rhythm is still prominent in the right hand. Similar to measure 8, instead of using accent or tenuto markings, Piazzolla used slurs here; therefore, clear presentation of the slurs is important in achieving the syncopated milonga/tango rhythm. The bass line moves in chromatic linear motion from G# to G to F# to F and then E. In measure 20 there is a
A glissando from the note F descending to F# an octave lower. It is noteworthy that it is tricky to land on the F# because the pianist can draw the fingers only across the white keys; thus, taking a slight amount of time here is acceptable.

When listening to Piazzolla’s recordings and comparing it with the scores, it is significant that, when present, a glissando is used as a tool connecting notes that are separated by more than an octave rather than as an indicator of embellishment. For instance, the Milonga Picaresque in the recording “The Rough Dancer and the Cyclical Night (Tango Apasionado),” the clarinet part in measures 35 to 36 has a glissando from the B below the middle C to the B an octave above. Like the glissando in the Milonga Picaresque, the glissando here in Flora’s Game should be blended in and played not too strong so that it does not stand out. In measure 23, instead of a simple triplet or quadruplet chromatic pick-up, Piazzolla placed a triplet plus quadruplet sixteenth notes pick-up before measure 24. It is important to play it as triplet plus quadruplet, not just an evenly executed septuplet (see figure 19).

Starting at measure 33, a six-measure transition has been placed here before the arrival of the A section, which appears as two-measure phrases. The left-hand, although not composed in the milonga/tango rhythm, has notes that are still made up of subject a (notes A, E, F, and E) that are reminiscent of the beginning (see figure 20). Piazzolla used a short imitative texture in measures 33 and measures 34, where the first two notes of the left hand plus the right-hand melody of measure 33 become the melody of the left hand in measure 34. This is again a hint of one of Piazzolla’s compositional techniques through which he incorporates classical elements in his compositions.
This transition section is marked *rubato*. There are generally two types of *rubato* in the *Three Preludes*. One of them is by incorporating the alteration of the rhythm or tempo of the passage as a way to achieve the desired expressiveness.\(^{13}\) The other one is the Chopin style of *rubato*, usually meaning that the melody line does the free “robbing time” expression while the accompaniment line maintains the steady tempo. According to Alejandro Marcelo Drago in his D.M.A. dissertation, wherein he mentioned that if one compares Piazzolla’s score and its performance, one would find that Piazzolla executes many anticipatory, delaying, and regrouping notes; however, he does all of it in a

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way to achieve his desired musical intensity.\textsuperscript{14} Perhaps the term “agogic accent” would be the best description for some of the alteration that Piazzolla was employing in the score. To quote Matthias Thiemel, the meaning of agogic accent is “the deliberate abandonment of mechanical regularity in note values.”\textsuperscript{15}

Maintaining the programmed musical intensity here ought to be the pianist’s main focus. In the author’s opinion, in this particular transition the purpose is served better if a performer pushes and pulls back the time of the phrase to create the desired intensity for the passage instead of doing the \textit{rubato} in the rhythm alteration way or adding the agogic accent, as Piazzolla sometimes did in his performances.

The A section is from measure 39 to measure 73. This section is tight in its construction; it has the unity and stability that are very classically oriented, as compared to the deconstructive modernism strategies.\textsuperscript{16} There are two main subjects (subject c and d) in the A section that serve as the foundation for all the other subjects in the A section; as such, all of the other subjects contain fragments and alternations of these two subjects. The key center of subject c is in B♭ minor; therefore, the functional harmony can be traced in its theme. For instance, measure 30 is made up of the tonic chord in B♭ minor while measure 40 is the predominant chord. In measure 44 there is a submediant chord

\textsuperscript{14} Drago, 121-24.


that is followed by a dominant-seventh chord in B♭ minor leading to a cadence; then in measure 45, it is back to the tonic chord of B♭ minor (see figure 21).


The A section is marked *Libero, espressivo*, indicating the expressive expression and that is unrestrained and free and is desired for this section. Although there is no *rubato* marking, *rubato* could be used here as the singing and accompanying type of *rubato*, meaning that in playing, the left hand maintains the steady accompaniment pattern while the right hand freely imitates singing. In addition, careful shaping of the dynamic flow is the key to expressive performance here, not just in this passage, but generally performance of any type of music. There are three dynamic indications in the
whole A section, which are the *mezzo forte, the forte, and the piano*, wherein exaggeration is often needed to convey the desired expressiveness.

In measure 45, another subject (subject d) is introduced, but the left hand is kept the same as measures 39 to 42. Subject e enters in measure 49, where the right-hand melody recalls the right-hand melody from measures 39 to 42. The left hand of subject e (mm. 49-54), however, is comprised of several different seventh chords. As figure 22 indicates, measure 49 is an E♭ minor seventh; measure 50, an A♭ dominant seventh; measure 51, a D♭ major seventh; and measure 52, a G♭ major seventh that resolves to B♭ minor in measure 53. In measure 54, both hands are constructed with two *arpeggio* chords that are B♭ minor and A minor, with the right hand playing the B♭ arpeggio and the left hand playing the A minor as both of the hands play in notes-against-notes motion. Having the key centers a semitone apart creates an interesting clashing sound (see figure 22).

A series of seventh chords is often heard in jazz music, especially when the seventh chords are moving through the circle of fifths. As incorporation of jazz elements into his compositions is one of Piazzolla’s compositional techniques, it is included here and is evident in the construction of the subject e. These seventh chords belong to the circle of fifths and are moving in ascending fourths. Because the bass notes are the root of each seventh chord, emphasis of the first (bottom) note of the left hand is necessary here in order to sustain the harmony, and the overall dynamic for the left hand must not be too soft. Subject c returns in measure 55 an octave higher in the register; subject d returns in measure 61 with an added quadruple sixteenth chromatic pick-up (F♯, G, G♯,
A) in the left hand; subject e' enters in measure 65 and has its melodic and harmonic structure largely the same as that of the subject e, except that the melody in subject e moves in fifths with the added voices that are circled in figure 23.

When one plays similar melodic and harmonic structural passages, following the above-mentioned clarification of details helps one in memorizing the compositional element. For instance, knowing structural details like this, according to the author, serves as a marker when performing the piece without music in order to know where one is and what follows.

The B section starts in measure 74. It is a very rhythmic section with a contrasting tempo and dynamics similar to that of the A section. It is marked *Vivace Più Mosso* with the tempo marking quarter note =168. Piazzolla used the augmented *milonga/tango*
rhythm in the left hand, which is similar to the treatment of the left hand from the opening introductory section (see figure 17). The only difference is that Piazzolla divided the last quarter note into a dotted eighth note and a thirty-second triplet. Figures 24 and figure 25 place the left hand of the introductory section (mm.1-2) and the left hand of the B section (mm.74-75) side by side for comparison.

The right-hand tone cluster is reminiscent of the other tango rhythm \( \text{\textit{3+3+2}} \) (see figure 26). In addition, with the emphasis that Piazzolla put on the first, fourth, seventh, and eighth notes, the right-hand rhythm is Piazzolla’s signature “3+3+2” rhythmic organization. This is one of Piazzolla’s new inventions for the nuevo tango, whereas the traditional tango rhythm is square; therefore, it is important to accent the indicated chords to create the effect.

The right-hand rhythm does not change throughout the B section although the notes of the cluster change. In contrast, the left-hand here has different sequential patterns, and they are mainly what the author uses to determine different or modified


subjects; however, in addition, the author considers the harmonic progression in this determination. Subject f (see figure 26) has the milonga/tango rhythm plus ascending chromatic pick-ups. Subject g (mm. 78-85) also has the milonga/tango rhythm but with the descending chromatic pick-ups (see figure 27).

![Figure 27. Three Preludes: Flora's Game, mm. 78-79. From Astor Piazzolla, Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, Sunny’s Game (Paris: Editions Henry Lemoine, 1987), 12.](image)

In Subject h (mm. 86-89), the left hand is in the treble clef and the rhythm for the first two beats of the measures is the original milonga/tango rhythm, but it is syncopated with a tie (see figure 28).

![Figure 28. Three Preludes: Flora’s Game, mm. 86-87. From Astor Piazzolla, Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, Sunny’s Game (Paris: Editions Henry Lemoine, 1987), 13.](image)
Subject I runs from measure 90 to measure 93, within which measures 92 and 93 are repetitions of measures 90 and 91 while both hands play the same rhythms. However, the left hand is set in treble clef and moves in a descending chromatic line, but not in a cluster, as there are E minor, B major, B minor, and C minor in broken triads (see figure 29).

Subject j is from measure 94 to measure 98. Both hands are still playing the same rhythm, but the left hand follows the bass clef instead of the treble clef. In addition, the left-hand harmony now moves among various seventh chords. These seventh chords are the C dominant seventh, the A dominant seventh, the D diminished seventh, the G dominant seventh, the G♭ diminished seventh, the F dominant seventh, the C half-diminished seventh, the D dominant seventh, and the C♯ half-diminished seventh (see figure 30).

The above-mentioned series of seventh chords is again Piazzolla’s way of incorporating the jazz elements into his compositions. The course of the B section can be very confusing to the performer, even if one is using the music when playing. Because
the right hand has the same rhythmic pattern throughout and the whole section is in a very fast tempo (quarter note = 168), it is fairly easy to skip one measure or even one system when reading and playing the music at the same time. Memorizing this section is another challenge based on the similarity among the sequences. Thus, it may help with the course of the B section if the performer uses each subject as a mental marker when engaged in the memorization activity. Also, practicing chord changes without the
rhythmic patterns will simplify the passages, thus making it easier to realize the harmony and sequential changes and to help with the memorization of the sections.

Subject k is the last subject of the B section; it spans measures 99 to 105. All of the sequential patterns are completed in measure 98, and subject k begins in a different pattern of rhythms with measure 99. It is marked *accelerando*, with its intensity aiming for the last buildup until it reaches the climax of the piece in measure 104. Piazzolla achieved it by using a series of major and minor blocked triads with increasing speed and dynamic that finally reach the dramatic *fortississimo* in measure 104. The *tremolo* in solid triads from *sforzando fortissimo* and winding down to *piano* in measure 105 follows the dramatic *fortississimo* in measure 104 (see figure 31).

Marked *Tempo primo, Lento meditativo*, the bridge section is constructed to return to the original tempo, which is quarter note = 90, with a slow and meditative type of quiet and thoughtful expression. The key centers for the bridge section are rather ambiguous with the exception of measures 113 and 114, which are the last two measures that return to B♭ minor, the key center for the return A section that follows. Also, if one takes the first notes from the beginning measures of this section, one forms an A-minor triad. The section contains multimeters, which alternate back and forth from 4/4 to 3/4, then 4/4 to 5/4 and back to 4/4. Here, the changing of the meter is not obvious, as it is designed to affect a free-flowing feeling and not a rushed one (see figure 32). Perhaps, in this author’s opinion, it is conceived to allow one’s mind to flow as in meditation before it settles down.
One more section completes *Flora’s Game*, which is the return of the A section.

Everything in this A section is identical to the previous expositions of the A section except for the last two notes, which, as a necessity, have to be altered in order to end the piece. Notes of the A section are the same in all expositions; however, in the last section, the execution should be slightly modified because the accompanying emotions are different. To show the distinct differences between the two sections, perhaps playing it
with a more subtle, calmer expression for this returned A section is more suitable in comparison to the more extroverted interpretation of the original A section exposition.

**Sunny’s Game: Valse Prelude for Piano**

*Valse*, or waltz in French, here could be refer to *Vals*, the waltz in Spanish. Hence, *Sunny’s Game* is the waltz version of the tango. According to tango expert Christine Denniston, *Tango, Vals* and *Milonga* are the tango trinity; therefore, the three preludes together contribute a rounded tango personality to the work.\(^\text{17}\) Other than the musical language, an important difference between the European waltz and the tango *Vals* is the meter; the European waltz is commonly in the simple triple 3/4 meter, while the *Tango Vals* is characteristically in the compound triple 6/8 meter. This characteristic of the tango *Vals* is because when it is used as dance music, the compound triple 6/8 meter can be divided into compound duple 2/4, thus making it manageable to dance the tango to a *Vals* rhythm.\(^\text{18}\) *Sunny’s Game* is set in the typical European waltz’s 3/4 meter; however, the overall musical language and style of this piece suggest that *Sunny’s Game* is definitely not a European waltz. Piazzolla has composed another *Vals* as a part of his *Suite No. 2* for Piano (1950); this *Vals* has a clear three-beat accompaniment pattern in the left hand with emphasis on the first beat. Also, it is marked tempo *Andantino*, with simple triple 3/4 meter. These are the traits of a classical European waltz (see figure 33),

\(^\text{17}\) Denniston, 205.

Figure 33. Piazzolla’s Suite No. 2, no. 3 vals. From Astor Piazzolla, Suite No. 2 for Piano (Buenos Aires: Lagos, 1987), 6.

despite its Vals title that is associated with tango. On the contrary, Sunny’s Game, although it has in its subtitle the French waltz term Valse, it is a true Tango Vals.

Sunny’s Game is the only prelude that has a key signature (E♭ major) and also the only one that is major oriented among the three preludes. Vals is known as the joyful side of the tango;¹⁹ and Sunny’s Game captures the joyful feeling with its major key centers, the Allegro tempo setting, and the flowing melody lines.

The A-A'-B-A''-A'''-Coda best describes the formal design of Sunny’s Game; Table 2 shows the formal structure.

Marked Allegro, timpo di valse, quarter note = 138, the tempo of Sunny’s Game is the fastest among the three preludes. Sunny’s Game starts with a sextuplet chromatic pick-up in the right hand, and then both hands are occupied with triplets in the eighth

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¹⁹. Denniston, 205.
Table 2. Formal analysis of Piazzolla’s *Three Preludes: Sunny’s Game*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>1-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>17-20</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21-24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>third</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>30-37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second</td>
<td>38-41</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42-45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46-49</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50-53</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>54-61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second</td>
<td>62-72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>third</td>
<td>73-80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A''</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>81-88</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second</td>
<td>89-92</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transition</td>
<td>97-98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>99-106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second</td>
<td>107-10</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>111-14</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>115-18</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>119-22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td></td>
<td>123-33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
notes that are moving fast in the key of E♭ major. In this prelude, the harmonic progression for the first subject of the A section consists of secondary seventh chords, plus dominant and tonic chords of E♭ major (see figure 34).

In measure 3, the left hand has a moving parallel fourth that later switches to the right hand in measure 4. The above-mentioned transition should be smooth in its execution to eliminate the fact of the change of hands in the listener’s perception. The formulation requires both hands to remain in the close-hands position, as the three parallel
fourths in the left hand of measure 3 share the same D, C, and B♭ notes with the first three parallel fourths in the right hand. However, the close-hands requirement, as indicated above, may pose a slight challenge for the performer, particularly in measure 4, because it is an awkward hand position. To solve this problem, using a little rubato after the first triplet of measure 4, with the condition that it does not happen when crossing the bar line, can help smooth out the inherent difficulty. The texture of Sunny’s Game is not thick; essentially, the texture is similar to both Leijia’s Game and Flora’s Game, except the rhythmic chordal B section in Flora’s Game. It is evident that all three preludes have prominent single melody lines in the texture; sometimes Piazzolla included a few counterpoints, but he rarely used big chordal sections. Richard Galliano, a composer and an accordionist, who held a long and good friendship with Piazzolla until Piazzolla’s death, stating in the DVD, Astor Piazzolla in Portrait, that Piazzolla liked the linear melody line and he tended to compose that way.20

The second subject of the A section in Sunny’s Game starts in measure 9. There are four four-measure phrases in the second subject that are written sequentially in chromatic harmony. Taking the first measure of each phrase as an example, in each the harmonic progression moves from A half-diminished seventh to G half-diminished seventh to A♭ half-diminished seventh and then finally to B-diminished seventh. Sunny’s Game is the most jazz-like among all three preludes, as the variety of seventh chords are the harmony base throughout the piece. Figure 35 shows all four phrases of

the second subject. In these four phrases, other than the half-diminished seventh chord, the functional, secondary dominant seventh chords are also used and resolved. Despite the traceability of the functional chords in these phrases, the two melodic lines together still manage to create many dissonances. This is yet another interesting compositional trait that Piazzolla employed.

Continuing with the performance related attributes, there are clear dynamic indications although they are not necessary beginning at the first measure of every phrase. For instance, the first forte in measure 10 is in the second measure of phrase 1. In the execution, the performer needs to keep in mind that the dynamic of this subject does get stronger from phrase 1 to phrase 3. The crescendo should happen gradually and not particularly getting louder each time in the beginning of each phrase.

Measure 25 signifies the entrance of the last subject of the A section. Here again, one can trace different seventh chords in this five-measure subject. The progression starts with A half-diminished seventh, followed by F↓ diminished seventh, then C minor-seventh, and finally a B♭ minor seventh chord. This is where the A section winds down, with the diminuendo starting at the end of measure 25 while maintaining decrescendo and finally rallentando in measure 29. Piazzolla used the polyrhythm device here in measure 29, where the left hand ends the phrase in measure 29 while the right hand has the chromatic pick-up for the beginning of the A' section following. The result is that the eighth-note triplet of the left hand is playing against the sixteenth-notes quintuplets of the right hand (see circled part in figure 36, m. 29). Polyrhythm is one of the composition devices that Piazzolla often employed in his compositions.
The A’ section starts in measure 30. The main theme of the original A section can still be heard clearly; however, there is a difference between the two sections: the texture for the first subject of the A’ section becomes more linear than the original A section. There are many blocked intervals in the first subject of the A section, which have all been replaced by single notes in the A’ section. The first subject in the A’ section is still primarily written in the note-against-note manner and also still carries the same melody. However, it feels less busy because the longer note values are employed. There are mostly quarter and half notes in this section. On top of measure 36, “whispering” is indicated, which explains the compositional intention that demands different emotions from a performer when playing these linear and with a softer texture in the A’ section. There are only two main subjects in the A’ section; the second subject of the A’ section
starts in measure 38. The first two phrases for the second subject (phrase 1, mm. 38-41; and phrase 2, mm. 42-45) have similar harmonic structure as the first two phrases in the A section. However, this commonality does not carry into the third and fourth phrases of the second subject. Piazzolla used the designation of diabolique in measure 46, as a result of which Piazzolla used much dissonance and polytonality in this particular phrase as a mechanism to create the intended devilish feeling. Specifically in measure 47, Piazzolla set this measure with polytonality, in which the right hand is set in B♭ major and the left hand is set in E major. Furthermore, Piazzolla used first-inversion solid tonic triads for both of the keys; and when played side by side, the sound effect is more like cluster chords than two functional chords. A similar pattern happens again in measure 51 of phrase 4, where Piazzolla again set A♭ major first-inversion tonic triads and D-major first-inversion tonic triads for the right and left hands (see figure 37). Noticeably, Piazzolla still maintained the seventh chords as the harmonic base for these two phrases (phrases 3 and 4), thus proving that he had not gone off the trail of jazz harmony despite the production of dissonant sounds created by the alignment of the solid triads.

The B section of Sunny’s Game is marked meno mosso, rubato; with it, Piazzolla expressed his desire for a slightly slower tempo that is accompanied with rubato. Piazzolla has done this here because the mood of the piece has changed along with changes in its texture. There are three subjects in the B section, all of which share similar rhythmic patterns; however, the corresponding pattern gets busier each time a subject is introduced. The first subject is formulated through the specification of three sequential, two-measure phrases moving in descending steps. Additionally, the pattern inside each
phrase moves in a minor third sequence. Figure 38 shows that each phrase moves from A♭ to C, G to B♭, and F to A♭. Piazzolla again included common jazz elements—for instance, the construction of the seventh chords in measure 60.\(^{21}\) The main rhythmic pattern for the first subject consists of six eighth notes per measure, with the original E♭ major key center.

The second subject for the B section starts in measure 62 and ends on measure 72. Here, Piazzolla added more notes to the rhythmic pattern so as to result in three triplet notes per measure; however, he maintained the design of the triplet pattern the same as the one he used in the previous A and A' sections. Furthermore, he again employed the jazz harmony in this subject, in which the chord progression is composed of the dominant seventh or ninth chords that move in the circle of fifths. Piazzolla set the inner voice of the subject in parallel tritone, which resulted in very dissonant-sounding
passages. Piazzolla used an $A_b$ pedal point starting at measure 68, with the tritone line moving in chromatic descending order to build up the suspension, finally resolved in measure 71 to $A_b$ major (see figure 39).

The third subject in the B section carries the same harmonic progression and similar melodic line as the second subject. For the first six measures, the second and third subjects are almost identical with the exception of augmentation of the sequence by adding more notes. Through the augmentation, this subject now has four sixteenth passing/neighboring notes instead of the three eighth-note patterns in the last beat of every measure (see figure 40).

The second to last measure of the third subject (m. 79) has a rather tricky rhythmic line for the left hand. The rhythmic line consists of four sixteenth notes with a triplet in eighth notes following a sextuplet, with the first sextuplet containing a rest. Here, this passage requires that the spaces between these notes not be rushed, in order to give the feeling that the line is moving effortlessly when performing. Finally, the third subject ends with nine solid chords in both hands in measure 80. It is specified that the nine solid chords are in fortissimo volume; however, because there are chromatic moving lines in voices, the compositional intent requires that a performer place the appropriate emphasis to bring them out (see figure 41).

After the big moment in measure 80, the A" section enters in the next measure. Piazzolla planned a much smaller structure for the A" section in comparison with the previous A and A' sections. There are two subjects, but the second subject consists of only two phrases plus a short transition of two measures before the next A" section
enters. The main melodic theme from the A section can still be clearly traced. This time the first subject in the A'' section consists a lot more sixteenth-notes rhythm compared to the other two A sections. Figures 42, 43, and 44 are the openings of the A, A' and A'' sections; placing them together clearly shows the variation of the themes for all three sections.

In the beginning of the A'' section, Piazzolla used sixteenth notes groups instead of eighth notes groups to compose the phrase in the left-hand part, as shown in figure 43.


The group of sixteenth notes, compared to the previously used eighth notes, seem to produce a faster and busier feeling to the performer. However, despite the domination of this particular subject with sixteenth notes, the outcome is greater relaxation. This contrary level of relaxation is produced using three different elements. First is through the use of the longer note value of the single quarter note in the third beat of measure 82. Second is the use of the larger range of the register that is three octaves apart from the low B♭ in the left hand to the hand crossing over for the third beat in the high G in measure 82. Third is the use of the dotted rhythms in measure 83 that create the perception of pauses. Therefore, the performer, so as not to contradict Piazzolla’s design, must plan to take time when playing this A" section in order to feel the groove and not rush from seeing a number of sixteenth notes in the phrase. As mentioned earlier, the A" section is more a fragment of the A section and therefore has a lesser number of phrases and a smaller structure. However, the basic harmony plan for the A" section is still similar to the A and A' sections with E♭ major as the key center. The design of the composition makes a return to the A section, and there is a short two-measure transition (mm. 97-98) immediately before the return. These two measures are made up of chromatic passing tones; this two-measure segment plus the combination of dissonant sounds make it stand out in the composition (see figure 45).

The A section returns in measure 99, and it is noted that the interpretation for the original A section and the reprised A section have slight differences. During a performance, the interpretational differentiation can come through if one plays the return section in a more resigned manner or, alternately, at the discretion of the performer, in a
manner that is more fiery. However, in the author’s opinion, because there is a large *accelerando* Coda section at the end, it might be a better approach if one interprets this returned A section in an introverted manner, meaning with a calmer inner emotion. This returned A section is lacking the third subject and moves right to the Coda section in measure 123, which is after the fourth phrase of the second subject.

In the Coda section, the texture of the music becomes thicker gradually (see figure 46). Measure 123 contains mainly two voices, and in measure 124 Piazzolla introduced the third voice. In measure 125 he then introduced yet the fourth voice when the right hand is moving in three-note tone clusters against the single-note assignment of the left hand.

With the execution of the *accelerando* indicated in the score, the full texture arrives in measure 128, with both hands alternating major tonic chords and seventh chords. *Molto crescendo al Fine* is indicated in the Coda section, from *mezzo forte* to *fortississimo*. The big finale passage with accented marking on every note starts in measure 132. Finally, shifting from the big major tonality chords spanning measures 128
to 131, *Sunny’s Game* ends on the E♭ minor instead of the original E♭ major. The Coda section generates much excitement, where the performer risks losing control of the section rather easily; thus, caution and restrain are mandatory here. Although *accelerando* is necessary, taking time to build up the *crescendo* will ensure the stability of the melodic lines (see figure 47).
Chapter 4: Overall Performance Recommendations

The performance suggestions that are offered along with the analysis in chapter 3 are primarily suggestions aimed at specific measures or passages contained therein. In addition, this chapter offers the overall performance recommendations on rubato, rhythm, pedal, dynamics, articulations, and fingerings under subheadings with the same titles.

**Rubato**

*Rubato* is a very important element when performing tango music, especially the lyrical part of the tango. In his, article “Instrumental Rubato and Phrase Structure in Astor Piazzolla’s Music,” Martin Kutnowski asserts the importance of the lyrical component in the tango genre, in the execution of which all good singers include customized distortions targeting the rhythm, the melody, or the dynamics of the piece.\(^1\) This assertion applies to those who sing in the conventional sense; however, it can similarly apply to those who execute the performance on a piano. Therefore, a pianist is advised to perform Piazzolla’s *Three Preludes* with analogous variations. There is no specific rubato marking in *Leijia’s Game, the Tango Prelude*. Despite the subtitle *Tango*

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Prelude, it is Leijia’s Game that brings forth the deepest sensation of tango among the three preludes. In addition, as was conveyed in chapter 3, Leijia’s Game was composed as a tango song. Therefore, although there is no rubato indication in this piece, the pianist is advised to be aware of the necessity of playing rubato in Leijia’s Game with the piano, just as a good singer does with his/her voice. Furthermore, Piazzolla did not insert bar lines for Leijia’s Game, nor did he include the time signature. Both of these omissions are tantamount to an expression of the freedom that is desired for this prelude, which in music making is often associated with rubato. In this particular piece, the pianist is advised to definitely use rubato and to do so freely. In essence, what this means is that the decision as to where to push forward or where to pull backward while complying with the details of every measure or those of the whole picture is completely at the discretion of a performer. In the second prelude, Flora’s Game, there is a rubato indication for one specific passage from measure 33 to measure 38. Although Piazzolla gave specific rubato instruction for one passage only, it is asserted that the A section requires rubato as well. Because the A section is marked Libero, espressivo, with an implication that its performance should be unrestrained and expressive, it is reasonable that the rubato is one way to achieve the recommended expression.

The third prelude, Sunny’s Game, also has one specific rubato indication, which is the middle B section, with an indication of meno mosso, rubato (m. 54). Sunny’s Game is in a fast tempo and, when combined with the way that the music flows—that is, playing it straight through without any rubato—it feels as if one is running a marathon.
and one gets out of breath. Therefore, using the *rubato* in *Sunny’s Game* is needed to create the necessary perception of spaces and pauses.

**Rhythm**

Rhythm is also an important component in the tango genre. The public’s appreciation of tango music is usually not because of its lyricism; it is because of the rhythmic drive of this popular music.

There is a trace of tango rhythm in the first prelude, *Leijia’s Game*, such as the dotted rhythm shown in figure 48. Because most of the *Leijia’s Game* has a lyrical orientation, stressing this rhythm when it appears can enhance the tango flavor in this prelude. *Flora’s Game* has more prominent *minlonga/tango* rhythm, although in an augmented form. As discussed in chapter 3, instead of \[\text{\begin{tabular}{c|c|c|c} \hline
\text{minlonga/tango} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}}\], the left hand of the introductory section contains a dotted quarter and eighth note plus two quarter notes. Thus, the left hand of the introduction requires more squared rhythm; the *rubato* in the left hand is not the right technique here. However, there is another type of the *rubato* that Piazzolla often used, which is the rhythm-alternation type of the *rubato*. This type of the *rubato* can be used in the middle voice eighth note section as shown in figure 49.

The large rhythmic B section in the *Flora’s Game* is the only place in all three preludes that needs strict rhythmic articulation. This is Piazzolla’s 3+3+2 signature.

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2. Ibid., 109.
rhythm, as shown in figure 50, which must be executed with accentuated energy and accuracy.

The **valse** prelude, *Sunny’s Game*, does not really have a square-rhythmic tango pattern. The most important rhythmic factor is the feeling of the down beat of each measure, where the fast running melody lines are flying and at the same time incorporating the **rubato** playing into the melody.
Pedal

There is no pedal marking in the score for any of the preludes in this set. This is in alignment with Piazzolla’s practice, as has been exemplified by this author through some of Piazzolla’s other piano music scores (e.g., Suite No.2; Christ-Talin; Imágenes 676; and Angel: Milonga del Angel, La Muerte del Angel, Resurrección del Angel). As well, none of these works has pedal markings in the score; however, it is impossible not to use the pedal when playing the Three Preludes. The need for pedaling is brought forth by the necessity to connect notes and phrases in addition to creating different tone colors. Different genres require different pedaling technique. For instance in the Baroque music, pedaling use is very limited because of the style of the music and the need to imitate the piano-forte instrument from the period. For the piano music of the classical period, pedaling is used more frequently except if one is interpreting Mozart’s music,  

where too much pedal can destroy the clean and elegant melody lines. In the Romantic and Impressionistic periods, pedaling became a necessity in solo piano music because a performer must accomplish both the big romantic sound and the colorful impressionist tone through pedaling. Contemporary music usually has specific pedal markings to create the sound effect that is desired by the composers, which is often not just the sustain pedal but also the soft and sostenuto pedal. The classical pianists are trained to pedal carefully, unless instructed otherwise by the composer, in order never to blur or muffle the melody line.

Without pedal markings in the Three Preludes, the question is raised as to how a pianist should pedal in Piazzolla’s Three Preludes? The author recommends that one needs to pedal freely while not being afraid to muffle the sound, which is similar to the use of rubato. To quote Pablo Zinger, Piazzolla’s music is not about playing “clean,” but rather about playing “dirty.” The author’s pedaling method for these three preludes aims for maintenance of the bass note in the tonality, as the bass note in these preludes are often the indication of the key centers. The author recommends specific pedaling in the rhythmic B section in the Flora’s Game. However, because the notes for the right hand are already set in clusters and the left hand is also assigned a repetitive rhythmic pattern, one must be aware that too “dirty” as a performance technique is a contrary outcome to the needed effect of the rhythmic section. The author’s solution is to use one half-pedal for each measure or short pedals for each beat in the measure throughout the section.

4. See interview transcript in appendix B.
Dynamics

A pianist’s attempt at playing a piece without the dynamics is just like cooking a dish without the needed seasoning; both outcomes are tasteless. When interpreting a piece of music, the importance of the dynamics is ingrained in every pianist; but when there are so many things going on at once in the music, the dynamics sometimes are unintentionally ignored by a pianist. Piazzolla included detailed dynamic markings in the score; in the three preludes, he included the softest dynamic $ppp$ ($Flora’s Game$, m. 150) to the loudest marking $sfff$ ($Sunny’s Game$, m. 132).

There are many different indications with respect to Piazzolla’s intentions regarding dynamics, such as $molto$ cresec. $al$ Fine ($Sunny’s Game$, mm. 123-24), $cres.$ $Poco$ a poco ($Sunny’s Game$, mm. 109-10), and $molto$ dim. ($Leijia’s Game$, system 29). Piazzolla also included an extreme dynamic range in a short period of time, as in measure 105 of $Flora’s Game$, which goes from $sffz$ to $p$ in one measure. Generally, exaggeration of the dynamics is often needed when performing music, and it is definitely needed in this case so that the performer can achieve an extreme dynamic effect in this particular measure and for every other contrast contained in the three preludes.

Articulations

Piazzolla had clear articulation indications in $Three$ Preludes. There are markings such as slur, phrase marks, $tenuto$, $marcato$, and $sforzando$. Honoring those articulations accurately is the key to capturing the composer’s desired musical style as closely as possible. As an example, in the first phrase of the A section in $Leijia’s Game$ (see
figure 51), Piazzolla put *tenuto* and followed it with a slur marking for the dotted eighth and sixteenth notes, one for the next two eighth notes, and another slur for the last four eighth notes.

The *tenuto* marking on the first and second G are the required legato accents on these two notes. The check marks in Figure 51 were added by the author to indicate the little break between the slurs. With the little breaks between the slurs and the *tenuto* accent on the notes, the tango rhythm is emphasized; in their absence, the whole phrase loses that certain drive that is associated with the tango rhythm.

Another example is at the end of the Coda section in *Sunny’s Game*. In the last two systems of the Coda section (mm. 130-33), the music goes from blocked chords alternating in both hands to the big ending section, as shown in the figure 52. Piazzolla
had *marcato* accent markings on every note of the last two measures. It is easy for a pianist to get excited in measures 130 and 131; thus, the pianist ends up making an accented sound for the blocked chords. If it happens as stated above, it can make the finale passage sound the same as the phrase before, which weakens the dramatic effect. The techniques of articulation play a big part in presenting the character of the music; therefore, a pianist ought to carefully examine and execute the articulations.


**Fingerings**

Fingering is a very personal thing when playing piano. Claude Debussy (1862-1918) explained why as he stated in the preface of his *Douze Études* (1915): “Logically, an imposed fingering cannot suit different formations of the hand . . . the absence of
fingering is an excellent exercise . . . let us find our own fingering!” Thus, Debussy purposely did not include any fingering in the scores of the etudes for the above reasons.

In the same preface, Debussy also expressed the confidence that composers had in their contemporaries: “Our old masters—I mean ‘our’ admirable harpsichordists—never indicated any fingering, confident, no doubt, of the skill of their contemporaries.”

Piazzolla also did not include any fingering for Three Preludes. This is not surprising, because Piazzolla was a composer who gave his players total freedom when interpreting his music—sharing Debussy’s view of trusting the player’s ability. When Pablo Zinger asked Piazzolla about phrasing in the Leijia’s Game, he answered, “Yes, of course! You know what to do with this.” Piazzolla was a composer who gave total freedom and showed no doubt in a performer’s capabilities.

Although fingering is a very personal thing, there are fundamental rules to follow. For instance, a pianist employs the scale fingerings when possible, as they are designed to make continuous playing work smoothly. In the Three Preludes, the author does not feel that fingering is a significant issue. The pieces themselves are written in such a way that the notes are within the hand’s grasp most of the time. Also, although the pieces are mostly constructed in a linear texture, Piazzolla assigned the left-hand part to the bass clef and the right-hand part to the treble clef and otherwise made indications, like most classical composers. Sometimes both hands will be written in the same clef,

6. Ibid.
7. See interview transcript in appendix B.
but it is easy to see that the hand distributing reference still applies. Taking the begin-
ing of the *Leijia’s Game* as an example, the passage is constructed in one line but
distributed in two hands that are assigned to two bass clef staves. Figure 53 shows the
fingerings that the author suggests for playing this passage; the hand distribution is
evident in the score.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 53. *Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game*, system 1 with added fingerings. From
Astor Piazzolla, *Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, Sunny’s Game*

There is one passage in the *Three Preludes* where the author did not follow the
normal hand distribution scheme as stated above: the Coda section of *Leijia’s Game*. In
the author’s opinion, if one follows the hand distribution written in the score, given that
the tempo is *prestissimo*, the right-hand fingers will make too many turns and may not
be able to attain the necessary speed and fluidity of line. Therefore, the author partially
redistributed the hands to aim for minimal movement between hands, thus ensuring
speed and allowing a continuous line to achieve the desired dramatic effect. The sug-
gested fingerings are also indicated in figure 54.
Parallel intervals can be a challenging technical issue when playing at a fast tempo. Measures 3 and 4 in Sunny’s Game, as mentioned earlier in chapter 3, may pose a problem when performing due to the fast tempo desired, close hand positions that are required, and the series of hand-alternating parallel fourth intervals in the passage. The author suggests the fingerings shown in figure 55 to enable a smooth transition between hands and a continuity of the melody line.
Figure 55. *Three Preludes: Sunny’s Game*, mm. 1-6, with added fingerings in mm. 3-4. From Astor Piazzolla, *Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game, Flora’s Game, Sunny’s Game* (Paris: Editions Henry Lemoine, 1987), 7.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Astor Piazzolla challenged and transformed the music of tango, popularizing it from the cafés of Buenos Aires to the world-renowned Carnegie Hall of New York City. Piazzolla revolutionized tango music by incorporating jazz concepts and complex contrapuntal classical music elements into his compositions. He went a step further by replacing the traditional tango orchestra with his own chamber-like ensembles, many of which experimented with the sounds of nontraditional tango instruments, including the electric guitar, vibraphone, and saxophone. Tango music had indeed been given a unique makeover under Piazzolla’s creative direction.

Piazzolla’s repertoire comprises over one thousand works written for all types of instruments and ensembles. Solo piano music is not his primary genre, despite the fact that he composed everything using the piano. His most famous piano solo work is perhaps the Three Preludes: Leijia’s Game-Tango Prelude, Flora’s Game-Milonga Prelude and Sunny’s Game-Valse Prelude, which Piazzolla composed in 1987 in New York City.

Piazzolla’s Three Preludes were constructed using jazz concepts such as seventh-chord jazz harmony, tango forms and rhythms, classical compositional devices, and contemporary music harmonies. Piazzolla’s signature composition traits can be found in the Three Preludes. Using elements from the tango area, Piazzolla left traces of
Tango/Milonga rhythmic patterns in Leijia’s Game and Flora’s Game. Leijia’s Game was written in the traditional three-part tango form, while Flora’s Game is set in a form that is similar to the Milonga’s A-B-A form. The Valse Prelude and Sunny’s Game fit the tango waltz character, although it is not set in the 6/8 meter of the traditional Valse. Nonetheless, the drive of the 3/4 meter coupled with an Allegro tempo still very much fits the essence of the tango waltz.

Piazzolla was also fond of using jazz elements. For instance, the free and libro musical forms of jazz can be found in Leijia’s Game. Piazzolla also used various types of seventh chords in Flora’s Game, and similar types of chords are featured even more prominently in Sunny’s Game.

Borrowing from classical elements, Piazzolla used contrapuntal textures to mimic the musical style of the Baroque period in Flora’s Game, as well as the other two preludes. Sequential writing, the classical music composition device that is typically associated with sixteenth-century music,¹ was as a major technique that Piazzolla used in all three of the preludes. Additionally, he employed linear melodies in all three of the preludes, thus further linking his compositions to the style of classical music.

Piazzolla applied contemporary composition devices including dissonance, chromaticism, and polytonality. Instead of reverting to the traditional squared tango

rhythm, in *Flora’s Game* Piazzolla used his signature 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern that he
developed especially for his tango music.

Tango music presents certain challenges for non-tango musicians, as the style
itself is difficult to capture. We see this unique style in Piazzolla’s *nuevo tango*, a par-
ticular example of music that has a modern tango face with traditional tango blood. An
idea of how one should articulate Piazzolla’s tango style in performance can be devel-
oped from listening to various recordings, many of which were directed by Piazzolla
himself. Piazzolla’s music gives the performer ample freedom for interpretation and
calls for a great input of personality on the performer's part. By the same token, perhaps
there is no right or wrong way of playing Piazzolla’s *Three Preludes*. It can be per-
formed with varying levels of spirit. In *Three Preludes*, all three pieces require a con-
siderable amount of energy and a confident performer. To quote Piazzolla, “The worst
thing that can happen to a bandoneón player is to be timid. We of the union call it
playing inward. That’s not good. You can’t be afraid. If one makes a mistake, it doesn’t
matter.” The concept in Piazzolla’s quotation, of course, applies to a piano player as
well. The best performance suggestions for *Three Preludes* came from Piazzolla
himself; and as one can hear from his own compositions and performances, “I put my
life in every note.” Those who make the effort to interpret the work of this great artist
should not put in any less than that.

2. Astor Piazzolla, quoted in Gorin, 143.

3. Ibid., 59.


Galliano, Richard. Liner notes to *Astor Piazzolla in Portrait.* Produced by Ferenc van Damme and Jans Petri. BBC and Opus Arte OA 0905 D, 1996. DVD.


APPENDIX A

DISCOGRAPHY
Appendix A: Discography

A complete list of recordings by Astor Piazzolla can be found in the book *Astor Piazzolla: A Memoir*, by Natalio Gorin, translated, annotated, and expanded by Fernando Gonzalez. Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla, by Maria Susana Azzi and Simon Collier, also has a list of Piazzolla’s own recordings, sorted in chronological order. The recordings listed below are ones that specifically contain *Three Preludes* by Piazzolla. However, not every recording includes *Three Preludes* in entirety; two recordings—The Rough Dancer and the Cyclical Night and Phil Woods’s *Astor and Elis*—have only the first prelude, *Leijia’s Game*, included.

*The Rough Dancer and the Cyclical Night (Tango Apasionado)*
Produced by Kip Hanrahan and Astor Piazzolla.
Lineup: Astor Piazzolla (bandoneón), Fernando Suárez Paz (violin), Pablo Zinger (piano), Raquito D’Rivera (alto sax, clarinet), Andy González (bass), Rodolfo Alchourrán (electric guitar).
Track 9: *Leijia’s Game*.

1. Prepared by Lin-San Chou.
2. Gorin, 220.
Aram Khatchaturian, Piano Sonatas, Béla Bartók, Piano Sonata, Astor Piazzolla, Three Preludes
Recorded in Tonhalle St. Gallen, Switzerland and Rail-Studio Konstanz, Germany.
Piano: Peter Waters.
Produced by Wolfram M. Burgert.
Track 6: No. 3, Sunny’s Game: Valse.

Phil Woods: Astor and Elis
Chesky Records J-D 146, 1996.
Recorded in New York.
Lineup: Phil Woods (clarinet and alto sax), Eric Friedlander (Cello), Phil Markowitz (synthesizer), David Finck (bass), Duduka Da Fonseca (drums and percussion), Bill Charlaps (piano).
Produced by Bill Goodwin and David Chesky.
Track 6: Leijia’s Game.

Astor Piazzolla: 3 Preludes pour piano, Grand Tango pour violoncello et piano, 6 Tango Etudes four flute
Mandala MAN 4916; Harmonica Mundi Distribution HMCD 78, 1997.
Lineup: Dominique Lumet (piano), Pierre Champagne (violoncello/cello), Loïc Poulain (flute).
Track 1: Leijia’s Game (tango prelude). Track 2: Flora’s Game (Milonga prelude). Track 3: Sunny’s Game (Valse prelude).

Tango Prelude: Astor Piazzolla Piano Works
Recorded in Japan.
Piano: Aki Kuroda.

Raritie of Piano Music. Live recordings from the 1997 Festival at Schloss vor Husum
Produced in Denmark.
Piano for Astor Piazzolla’s Three Preludes: Kathryn Stott.
Produced by Peter Froundjian and Jesper Buhl.
APPENDIX B

EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH PABLO ZINGER
Appendix B: Email Interview with Pablo Zinger

Pablo Zinger was appointed by Astor Piazzolla as the music director of the production *Tango Apasionado* in 1987. Combining music, theater, and dance into a single, *Tango Apasionado* was based on the stories of Jorge Luis Borges and the music of Piazzolla. It was on stage in the Westbeth Theater Center in New York City in 1987. In the recording *The Rough Dancer and the Cyclical Night (Tango Apasionado)*, produced by Kip Hanrahan and Astor Piazzolla, Zinger played *Leijia’s Game*, one of his *Three Preludes*.²

Zinger was born in Uruguay and has lived in New York City since 1976. He is broadly known as a conductor, pianist, writer, composer, arranger and lecturer.³ The following are Mr. Zinger’s responses to the questions from the author:

**Question:** You were the music director for the production *Tango Apasionado*. How did Piazzolla find you? Before he phoned you, had you ever met Piazzolla in person? In the book *Le Grand Tango* by Maria Susana Azzi and Simon

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3. Ibid., paragraph 1.
Collier, I read that when you received the phone call from Piazzolla, he said he was Astor Piazzolla, and you replied, “And I’m Christopher Columbus!” How long did it take you to realize that he was the real Piazzolla?

**Answer:** I had not met Piazzolla before he called me. I was an admirer of his music, which I had heard as a child on a few LPs that my parents owned, and on the radio and such. I remember hearing his “María de Buenos Aires” around 1969, soon after its premiere, at a friend’s house. I also bought the piano/vocal of the piece in the music store, published by Editorial Lagos.

I believe Piazzolla called the Argentine pianist, composer, and conductor Carlos Franzetti, who lives in NYC. He wasn’t available, but he remembered meeting me, through our common friend Paquito D’Rivera. Carlos had written a Concerto for Paquito, called “Gemini Concerto,” if memory serves. I went to play a rehearsal from a handwritten copy of the piano reduction. It wasn’t easy, and apparently Carlos was well impressed.

I must confess that the quote, “And I’m Christopher Columbus!” is not true. . . . What happens is that when I was interviewed on the phone by the late Simon Collier, I didn’t think it was respectful to quote my real answer, which was much less polite. What I really told him was, “No jodas; ¿quién habla?” which could be translated as “Don’t screw with me” (or even “Don’t f____ with me”), who is speaking?” There was a significant pause, and then he said “No, habla Astor Piazzolla” (“No, it’s Astor Piazzolla speaking”). I am happy to set the record straight right now! I realized it was Piazzolla by the serious tone of his answer. I believe I told the charming Maria Susana Azzi about this when I met her recently in NYC. When I read Collier and Azzi’s book, I saw how many other musicians were quoted, profanity and all, and realized that my desire to “keep it clean” was rather unnecessary.

I remain very thankful to Carlos Franzetti for his recommendation and for other opportunities in which he passed on great gigs to me.

**Question:** What’s the most memorable thing about the production and about Piazzolla when you were working with him?

**Answer:** The most memorable thing about working with Piazzolla was doing the recording and getting to play with him up close—just feeling the energy, the spontaneity, the genius. It certainly wasn’t easy keeping up with him. Other than that, it was working on the music with him, hearing his indications and advice. On one occasion I remember telling him, “The piano and the guitar have the same melody and we are not exactly together,” and he answering
that “this was not chamber music.” The implication was that precision of ensemble wasn’t the point—the point was energy and spontaneity. This wasn’t about playing “clean”—it was about playing “dirty.” This is what many chamber musicians miss when playing this music. This is inspired of music of the bordellos and the cafés. The same when I told him that there was a “wrong note” in one passage, because it didn’t go with the harmony. He said “all notes are right.” Again, this might be seen as hyperbole, but the idea was the same. It’s okay to have “dirty” notes . . .

**Question:** I am assuming that *Leijia’s Game* was used in the production since it was included in the recording, *The Rough Dancer and the Cyclical Night (Tango Apasionado)*. Is that correct? Did Piazzolla ever mention why he composed *Leijia’s Game*? And why was it for solo piano only?

**Answer:** *Leijia’s Game* was not used in the production of *Tango Apasionado* at all. I believe that it was named after the baby daughter of producer Kip Hanrahan, who did the three recordings for *American Clavé (La Camorra, Hora Cero, Tango Apasionado)*. I suppose that the other two pieces were equally named after real people, but I don’t know the specifics.

Piazzolla gave me the handwritten copy of the composition, which was indeed for piano solo. I looked at it, but since it wasn’t used in the production, I didn’t pay much attention. The piece was included in the recording because we were short on time. . . . That was the reason that Piazzolla filled some time in with those bandoneón solo cuts, and also the reason he asked me to play *Leijia’s Game*. This was decided on the second day of taping—let’s say Tuesday (I don’t remember precisely), and on Thursday I had to play the piece, which I had never practiced. I showed the piece to Piazzolla, and I noticed the phrasing in monotonous equal running 8th notes. I told him: “Maestro, you don’t want me to play this as written, do you? I am sure you want me to play this with free tango phrasing.” He answered, “Yes, of course! You know what to do with this.”

**Question:** Again, I read from the book *Le Grand Tango* that when you were recording *Leijia’s Game*, Piazzolla and his wife Laura were in the studio listening to you. Did Piazzolla say anything to you before or after the recording? Did he give you any suggestions about how to interpret the piece? Did you get to improvise anything? How much freedom did you have in interpreting this piece?

**Answer:** As far as I can remember, he did not make any suggestions beyond the initial conversation about using free tango phrasing. I was totally free to do
what I wanted during the recording. He may have said, “Give it another shot just in case,” or something to that effect, but no specific notes.

**Question:** There is only one version of the score in print for these three preludes, which are published by Henry Lemoine. The *Leijia’s Game* you played in the recording is different (shorter) than the score in print now. Was the version you used in the recording written before or after the one which became the published score? Do you know if Piazzolla considered either a more definitive version?

**Answer:** I am aware that the piece was published in a somewhat modified version. I only had the aforementioned manuscript, and unfortunately (I should say tragically and shamefully) I lost or discarded that manuscript.

**Question:** In your opinion, does *Leijia’s Game* have more elements of tango or jazz?

**Answer:** I see very little or nothing in the piece that could be considered jazz. Certainly I see a lot of it that has to do with the phrasing of lyrical tango melodies, like those of the much admired Carlos Gardel, who was a model for Piazzolla. Of course, there are common elements in that phrasing and the phrasing of good old expressive jazz singing of the old school, particularly by African American musicians and those influenced by them. By that I mean the singing of a melody with a great degree of freedom, in which the rhythm is not dictated by note values (8th notes, quarter notes and such) but by the expression of the words and the musical imagination of the interpreter. This “black” phrasing is similar in great tango and jazz singers in their best moments. They are incredibly free in the small notes, and they still know exactly where they are in relation to the harmony and metric of the accompaniment. In this case, however, I was alone, so I could be even freer, practically rhapsodic.

**Question:** What is the most important thing for you when interpreting a tango piece?

**Answer:** The most important issue when playing tango is to have a good knowledge of the performance tradition, which can only come from listening to the best bands and singers. One cannot learn this by looking at written scores, which are usually a very poor reflection of the real music. The same can be said about jazz and just about any other type of music, even Chopin or Mozart.

Tango presents great contrast between the rhythmic aspect and the *rubato* aspect, or free time. Certain things have to have a great rhythmic accuracy and energy (mostly the rhythmic aspects of the accompaniments); and on the other hand, the lyrical melodies have to be extremely free, and float over
those accompaniments, sometimes falling behind, sometimes rushing forward, always being “off the beat.” This often requires ignoring the values written on the page, and this is hard for the classical musician. One has to change one’s mental attitude and become more of an improviser, make up the rhythms, and sometimes even make up some of the notes.

Tango, like jazz, is not academic music—it is music born of the people, and originally the people from the lower classes. This doesn’t make it less worthy, but it does make it more earthy, less inhibited.