

**CULTURAL COUNTERPOINTS:
Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America**



**Turci-Escobar, John (Washington University of St. Louis):
“Turn-of-the-Century Buenos Aires Viewed from New York: Astor’s
Piazzolla’s setting of Borges’s *“El hombre de la esquina rosada”*”**

Abstract:

Astor Piazzolla, whose music came to define the modern metropolis of Buenos Aires, spent most of his childhood on the lower east side of Manhattan. Growing up in New York in the 1920s and 30s, Piazzolla was exposed to a wide variety of musics. This experience, critics have argued, influenced Piazzolla’s development as a composer, especially, his penchant for crossing generic and stylistic boundaries. Piazzolla returned to New York in the late 1950s. Critical discussions of this period have focused on his financial hardships and artistic concessions and, almost unanimously, have dismissed his efforts to fuse jazz and tango. More recently, Fischermann and Gilbert have called for a reconsideration of Piazzolla’s “jazz-tango,” in particular, his choice of ensemble. The New York quintet, they argue, was the crucial link between the Octeto Buenos Aires of the 1950s and emblematic Quinteto Nuevo Tango of the 1960s. My paper concerns another significant project from Piazzolla’s New York sojourn: the music he composed for a choreography based on *El hombre de la esquina rosada*, a celebrated story by Argentina’s greatest modern writer, Jorge Luis Borges. Set for reciter, voice, and twelve instruments, this substantial work goes further than any of Piazzolla’s previous “classical” works in mixing genres and styles, and thus, foreshadows his later works for the concert stage. Most importantly, to compose the music for a story set in turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires, Piazzolla—who always looked forward—had to look backwards, and thus, view himself and his music from a broader historical perspective.

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Editorial Disclaimer:

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