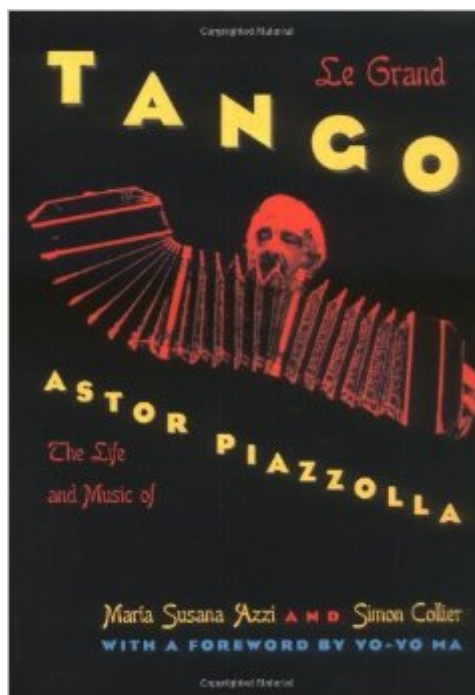


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# Le Grand Tango: The Life And Music Of Astor Piazzolla



## Synopsis

Astor Piazzolla was a musical genius, a man who used the national dance of Argentina as raw material for a whole new musical genre. In *Le Grand Tango*, MarÃ- a Susana Azzi and Simon Collier vividly capture the life of this extraordinary musician--a visionary who won worldwide acclaim, but sparked bitter controversy in his native land. Azzi and Collier trace Piazzolla's early life from his birth in Argentina in 1921 to his childhood years on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where he first developed a talent for the bandoneon, the accordion-like instrument central to the tango. They describe his return to Argentina at age 16 and his rapid rise in the intoxicating world of tango, where he quickly earned a place with the leading dance band, and then formed his own group. But at the height of his success, Piazzolla decided to take tango music to a new level and studied composition with the legendary Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Combining deft musical analysis and intriguing personal insight, Azzi and Collier show how he created a dramatically new style of tango music influenced by jazz and classical pieces--a tango music meant for listening, not dancing. But they also show that, in the birthplace of the tango, he met fierce resistance. He eventually left Argentina for Europe, where he emerged as an international celebrity. Since Piazzolla's death in 1992, his influence has only grown. Jazz giants such as Gary Burton and Al Di Meola--and classical stars Yo-Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, and Daniel Barenboim--have all recorded albums of his works. Now Azzi and Collier have given us the first biography of this astonishingly gifted musician.

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## Customer Reviews

Astor Piazzolla's music is nothing if not controversial. Among the Argentines themselves, there

seems to be two opinions. One was voiced to me some years ago by an Argentine tanguera whose artistic views I always listen to, when she said that "Tango is tango, and Piazzolla is not!" The other is stated just as militantly in favor of Piazzolla's efforts. Wildly so. Piazzolla died in 1992. But the debate still rages, and there's little middle ground. The reason for it is that Piazzolla remade the Argentine tango in ways that had never been imagined possible before him. He's one of those composers who takes a regional musical impulse and refashions it into a new statement of world-wide interest. Controversial he is, to be sure. But with the possible exception of the legendary singer Carlos Gardel, no one has expanded the consciousness of the world more with regard to the tango than Astor Piazzolla. *Le Grand Tango* is the first complete biography of Piazzolla. Born in Buenos Aires in 1921, he spent eleven years of his childhood in New York City, in the East Village. Radio interviews with him reveal that he spoke fluent English with a Lower East Side accent. Even as a child, Astor's talent on the bandoneón, the large concertina-like instrument that is considered by most to be the soul of the tango, was noted. But he was not playing the tango at that time. The boy preferred classical music and jazz, Bach and Gershwin. His father Vicente, a barber and woodworker, pushed Astor to make himself into a true tango musician. But it was only when, at the age of thirteen, Astor met and was befriended by Carlos Gardel himself, that he began his serious studies in the tango.

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