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MARCH 2016: Contacto Tango | NEOS PABD 11319

By RAY PICOT

<http://www.ilams.org.uk/march-2016-contacto-tango.htm>

This high-resolution-sound Blue-ray audio disc was issued in 2013 on the Neos label and, as such, represents a departure from normal CD listening. However, because it is such an interesting and musically rich album I feel that despite the play-back limitation it is worth exploring.

A different sound world to what we expect to hear in the tango repertoire is presented here by two German-based musicians, Julia Rebekka Adler, viola, who is partnered by the pianist José Gallardo. This interesting combination has been critically well received, and together they introduce world premiere recordings of works by Gustavo Beytelmann, Luis Borda, Pablo Aguirre and Miguel Varvello together with a collection of works of Astor Piazzolla. I shall begin towards the end of the album with the rarely-played *Dos piezas breves* for viola and piano, written in 1949 before Piazzolla's studies with Nadia Boulanger. These show the composer blending his innate instinct for the tango gained from his ensemble playing, into a classical mould. Despite an austere opening the music has much charm and shows that before his visit to Paris he knew his musical strengths, and certainly was no longer in the shadow of Ginastera, with whom he had studied 8 years earlier. On this recording these two musicians deliver a performance of great vigour and sensitivity handling the technical demands with great security.

These pieces make an interesting comparison with the stylistic assurance and technical demands of the *Seis estudios tanguísticos* of 1987. I have heard recordings of the flute version of these tango etudes but this arrangement for viola was a revelation and gave the pieces a depth that I'd not really heard before. Ms Adler really gets to the emotional heart of these demanding pieces with their Bachian overtones, balancing the melodic and rhythmic elements with great success. Listening to the better known *Le grand tango* arranged for viola and piano, her versatility is amply demonstrated, partnered with characterful but balanced contributions from the pianist José Gallardo. The switch from more familiar cello to viola works very well as the instrument is also able to convey the singing lines to good effect. This is a version that I have returned to over the past year with great affection.

The other major work on this disc was new to me, namely Gustavo Beytelmann's *Cinco piezas* which quickly conveyed the composer's clear affection for Piazzolla, as he played the piano in the older composer's European tour in 1977, following which he has cemented his reputation in Europe as a foremost authority on the tango. These pieces, written in 1997, are no pale imitations but highly inventive and distinctively styled pieces, which match the two instruments in a mesmerising display. The music is delivered here in a performance that would be hard to better and it is a pity this work has not found its way into more concert programmes.

The remaining shorter pieces are of lighter fare, but no less enjoyable, and effectively balance the programme between the works of Beytelmann and Piazzolla.

To conclude, this is an excellent disc that demonstrates that over a span of nearly 65 years the tango remains a powerful attraction to composers, particularly in the hands of these two versatile and expressive performers.