



*Tanquito*  
Argentine Tango Academy

# The Love Issue

Selected tango songs with translation



*"Dancing to tango songs  
you understand is like  
stepping into a new world  
of heightened expressivity  
and connexion."*



*Old school milongueros say it's plain impossible to interpret a tango song without knowing the lyrics. It's a bit extreme but there's definite beauty in understanding tango songs, or at least a few... maybe the ones that make you swoon? This is why we've decided to crank up our translation machine and go one step at a time, one song at a time. So, here are some of the most popular tango tunes –mainly love songs, because, after all, it's tango!*

*Have a great read and see you soon on the dancefloor.*

*Bruno and Nathalie from Tanguito*

A media luz	p. 4
A otra cosa, che pebeta	p. 6
Así se baila el tango	p. 8
Esta noche de luna	p. 10
Fuimos	p. 12
Jamás retornarás	p.14
Llorar por una mujer	p.16
Muchacho	p. 18
Nocturno de tango	p. 20
Pinta Brava	p. 22
Pa' que bailen los muchachos	p. 24
Pocas palabras	p. 26
Porteño y bailarín	p. 28
Qué te importa que te llore	p. 30
Recuerdos	p. 32
Siempre es carnaval	p. 34
Sollozo de bandoneón	p. 36
Son cosas del bandoneón	p. 38
Sur	p. 40
Vida mía	p. 42

**Some information from:** wikipedia.com / “Tango, la mezcla milagrosa” by Carlos Mina / todotango.com

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## A media luz

**Music: Edgardo Donato – Lyrics: Carlos Lenzi  
1924**

It's the 1920's. They might be young or not. They have met at a milonga or not. He might be charming, she might be pretty... or not. One sure is certain, if they want to see one another again in a more 'intimate' setting, they'll probably go to his bachelor flat in downtown Buenos Aires.



*A media luz* describes the bachelor flats used for fun and the sex of the period. In these flats, everything was carefully thought of to create a suitable atmosphere: *todo a media luz* ("everything in dimmed light").

The song describes with a lot of humour the measures taken to protect the privacy of these apartments – "there's no concierge and no neighbour", the rugs "muffle sounds" and even the cat keeps quiet: "a cat made of porcelain so that it doesn't mew at love."

These small apartments were decorated with the flourished style of the period. Everything seems to have been bought at the Maple furniture shop, which was very famous at the time and stocked everything from furniture to rugs to decorations, even porcelain cats – the 1920's porteño version of Ikea!

Don't be surprised by the last paragraph: until the beginning of the 1930's, cocaine, morphine and opium had a legal medical usage. Being sold as preparations in pharmacies, these drugs were commonly found in medicine cabinets at home.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-a-media-luz/>

*Corrientes 3, 4, 8,  
segundo piso, ascensor.  
No hay porteros ni vecinos.  
Adentro, cocktail y amor.  
Pisito que puso Maple:  
piano, estera y velador,  
un teléfono que contesta,  
una victrola que llora  
viejos tangos de mi flor  
y un gato de porcelana  
pa' que no maulle al amor.*

*Y todo a media luz,  
que es un brujo el amor,  
a media luz los besos,  
a media luz los dos.  
Y todo a media luz  
crepúsculo interior.  
¡Qué suave terciopelo  
la media luz de amor!*

*Juncal 12, 24  
Telefoné sin temor.  
De tarde, té con masitas;  
de noche, tango y cantar.  
Los domingos, tés danzantes;  
los lunes, desolación,  
Hay de todo en la casita:  
almohadones y divanes;  
como en botica, cocó;  
alfombras que no hacen ruido  
y mesa puesta al amor.*

3, 4, 8 Corrientes Avenue,  
2nd floor with elevator.  
There's no concierge and no neighbour.  
Inside, cocktail and love.  
The little apartment furnished by Maple:  
a piano, a mat, a bedside table,  
a phone that answers,  
a phonograph that weeps  
old tangos from my youth,  
and a cat made of porcelain  
so that it doesn't mew at love.

And everything in dimmed light,  
what a sorcerer love is,  
in dimmed light the kisses,  
in dimmed light the two of them.  
And everything in dimmed light  
a twilight indoors.  
What a soft velvet  
the dimmed light of love is!

12, 24 Juncal avenue,  
don't hesitate to call.  
In the afternoon, tea and pastries;  
at night, tango and songs.  
Sundays, dancing teas;  
Mondays, desolation.  
There's everything in the little house:  
cushions and sofas;  
cocaine like at the pharmacy;  
rugs that muffle sounds  
and a table set for love.

## A Otra Cosa, Che Pebeta

Music: Ricardo Tanturi. Lyrics: Enrique Cadícamo



Composed by Ricardo Tanturi with lyrics written by Enrique Cadícamo, *A Otra Cosa, Che Pebeta* is a song of rejection, with lyrics structured as a dialogue between the poet and his lost love.

Whether this dialogue with his previous lover is real or not, we can't tell, for tango songs contain real dialogues as well as imaginary ones. In tango, dialogues can also be with an imaginary being, with someone real, with the public: there are dialogues with women, whether present or absent, with friends, with God, the neighbourhood, one's mother, with the bandoneón and even with tango itself!

The dialogue of *A otra cosa, che pebeta* illustrates a theme which is central to tango songs: the story of a woman who leaves her life behind for a better one, usually following the promise of more money. Tango portrays many women who are leaving - be it their home, their neighbourhood, their work... In all cases, these travels end up badly: prostitution, madness, bad health or even death. These songs illustrate a shift in the Argentine society as women gain more independence and freedom, hence shaking the foundations of a rather traditional and macho society.

Whether real or not, this dialogue is full of resentment, showing that the break up was unexpected and sudden. It is implied that the subject of the poet's love has now found a better life, even if more futile, dishonest or venal – again a typical reaction in tango to women looking for more independence.

The title of the song is a pun on words. In Spanish, the expression *A otra cosa, mariposa* means “off to other things, butterfly”. The song is *A Otra Cosa, Che Pebeta* (off to other things, you chick), but still refers to the object of the poet's affection as a butterfly, hence making a clear reference to this expression and tying in the song together.

Listen to the song online:

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/a-otra-cosa-che-pebeta/>

*Cuando pases a mi lado,  
no te hagás la que no ves;  
si de sobra vos sabés  
de que yo soy tu paso.*

*En la fábrica soñé  
ser el dueño de tu amor,  
vos en cambio te cansaste  
y dejaste el taller.*

*Mariposa,  
que volás entre las luces  
de una vida color rosa;  
el dinero con su loca tentación  
te ha robado el corazón.*

*¡A otra cosa que yo  
soy el mismo de ayer!  
¡A otra cosa que yo  
soy aquel que esperó  
tu salida al taller!*

*¿A quién vas a engañar?  
¿A quién vas a querer?  
¡A otra cosa che pebeta,  
con el biógrafo que hacés!*

When you walk past me,  
don't pretend you don't see me,  
because you know only too well  
that I am your step.

In the factory, while I was dreaming  
about being the master of your love,  
you grew tired  
and left work.

Butterfly,  
you fly between the lights  
of a life painted in pink;  
cash with its mad temptation  
has stolen your heart.

It's time to flitter away from me,  
I'm the same as yesterday!  
It's time to fly away from me,  
I am the one who waited  
for you at the exit of the factory!

Who are you going to cheat?  
Who are you going to love?  
It's time to fly away, come on, chick,  
you're making such a fuss!

## Así se baila el tango

**Music: Elías Randal – Lyrics: Marvil (Elizardo Martínez Vilas)**

**Famously interpreted by Alberto Castillo.**

**1942**



*Así se baila el tango* (This is how to dance tango) became immensely famous with Castillo's unique and controversial interpretation. As a song symbolising the power struggle between classes, it has a unique place in the history of tango and of the Argentine society.

*Así se baila el tango* is one of the tangos from Tanturi's orchestra which from the early 40's, started to focus on the dancers, e.g. the "milongueros" of the time. *Al compás de un tango*, *El tango es el tango*, *Cuatro compases*, *Canción de tango* are other famous examples of this epoch. These tangos were all sung by Alberto Castillo, but *Así se baila el tango* is the one which became a hit and went down in history.

***Así se baila el tango* starts with these lines:**

*What do they know the dandies, the trendy rich boys with their affected manners!*

*What do they know about tango, what do they know about rhythm!*

On one side, the lyrics can be taken literally: in this song, **the popular class aims to reclaim tango as theirs**. It was a common feeling amongst the people that tango belonged to Buenos Aires' poor neighbourhoods and not to the high society who had come to discover it later.

However, this tango was written at a time when the influence and power of Argentina's work force was growing. *Así se baila el tango* can therefore **be taken more broadly as an act of defiance of the lower class to the upper class**.

*Así se baila el tango* was no doubt immortalised by Castillo's personal and controversial interpretation. **Many things about Castillo were unusual and caused sensation, especially the way he had to start rows**. He used to sing "What do they know the dandies, the trendy rich boys with their affected manners!" with so much passion, that some of the well-off spectators sometimes felt insulted and answered back. In this case, he would not hesitate to step down from the stage, start a fist fight and then carry on singing, apparently indifferent to how messy his outfit had got.

**Quite a song and quite a character, we dare say!**

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-asi-se-baila-el-tango/>

*Que saben los pitucos, lamidos y shusetas!*

What do they know the dandies, the trendy rich boys  
with their affected manners!

*Que saben lo que es tango, que saben de compás!*

What do they know about tango, what do they know  
about rhythm!

*Aquí esta la elegancia. Que pinta! Que silueta!*

This is what elegance is. What a look! What a  
silhouette!

*Que porte! Que arrogancia! Que clase pa' bailar!*

What a bearing! And arrogance! So much style to  
dance!

*Así se baila el tango, mientras dibujo el ocho;*

This is how to dance tango, while I draw the figure  
eight;

*para estas filigranas yo soy como un pintor.*

for all these intricate moves, I am like a painter.

*Ahora una corrida, una vuelta, una sentada...*

Now some side steps, a pivot, a stop...

*Así se baila el tango, un tango de mi flor!*

This is how to dance tango, a tango of my own!

*Así se baila el tango,*

This is how to dance tango,

*sintiendo en la cara*

feeling on your face,

*la sangre que sube*

blood that rises

*a cada compás,*

at each beat,

*mientras el brazo,*

while your arm,

*como una serpiente,*

like a snake,

*se enrosca en el talle*

coils itself around the waist

*que se va a quebrar.*

that is about to break.

*Así se baila el tango,*

This is how to dance tango,

*mezclando el aliento,*

breaths mix,

*cerrando los ojos*

eyes are closed

*pa' escuchar mejor*

to listen better

*como los violines*

to the violins

*le cuentan a los fueyes*

telling the bandoneons

*por que desde esa noche*

why from tonight

*Malena no cantó...*

Malena no longer sings...

*Así se baila el tango, mientras dibujo el ocho;*

This is how to dance tango, while I draw the figure  
eight;

*para estas filigranas yo soy como un pintor.*

for all these intricate moves, I am like a painter.

*Ahora una corrida, una vuelta, una sentada...*

Now some side steps, a pivot, a stop...

*Así se baila el tango, un tango de mi flor!*

This is how to dance tango, a tango of my own!

## Esta noche de luna

Music: José García / Graciano Gómez – Lyrics: Héctor Marcó  
1943



*Esta Noche de Luna* (A moonlit night), composed by José García and Graciano Gómez with lyrics of Héctor Marcó is an exceedingly sensual love song, which portrays the vulnerable yet intense longing for another person in a very poetic and dramatic manner.

The song uses various images of nature, hence **conveying strong emotions such as longing and despair in a way that makes us feel close to the poet's personal drama**: the sky has been used to express how minuscule the poet feels to the world and to love, and the sea to communicate his feeling of being swept off his feet with no control. These are beautiful and universal images to express the sorrow caused by love.

**Witchcraft and spells** are referred to throughout the song, expressing the idea that love is out of this world, that it can be magical when it goes right or witchcraft when it doesn't.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-esta-noche-de-luna/>

(image: <http://thebluegrassspecial.com/archive/2010/october10/imagesoct10/moonlit-night2.jpg>)

*Acercate a mí  
y oirás mi corazón  
contento latir  
como un brujo reloj.  
La noche es azul,  
convida a soñar,  
ya el cielo ha encendido  
su faro mejor.  
Si un beso te doy,  
pecado no ha de ser;  
culpable es la noche  
que incita a querer.  
Me tienta el amor,  
acércate ya,  
que el credo de un sueño  
nos revivirá.*

*Corre, corre barcarola,  
por mi río de ilusión.  
Que en el canto de las olas  
surgirá mi confesión.*

*Soy una estrella en el mar  
que hoy detiene su andar  
para hundirse en tus ojos.  
Y en el embrujo  
de tus labios muy rojos,  
por llegar a tu alma  
mi destino daré.  
Soy una estrella en el mar  
que hoy se pierde al azar  
sin amor ni fortuna.  
Y en los abismos  
de esta noche de luna,  
sólo quiero vivir,  
de rodilla a tus pies,  
para amarte y morir.*

*Acércate a mí  
y oirás mi corazón  
contento latir  
como un brujo reloj.  
Mi voz te dirá  
Palabras de miel  
que harán de tu pecho  
fuego encender.  
El canto del mar  
repite en su rumor  
qué noche de luna,  
qué noche de amor.  
Dichoso de aquel  
que pueda decir,  
yo tengo un cariño  
qué dulce es vivir.*

*Corre, corre barcarola,  
que la luna se escondió.*

Come close to me  
and you'll hear  
my heart beating happily,  
like a witch's clock.  
The blue night  
is an invitation to dream,  
the sky has already lit up  
its brightest beacon.  
If I give you a kiss,  
it won't be a sin;  
the culprit is the night  
that inspires love.  
Love is so tempting.  
Come close now,  
believing in a dream  
will bring us back to life.

Run, run, barcarolle\*  
on the river of my illusion.  
In the melody of the waves,  
my confession will emerge.

I am a star at sea,  
which today stopped in its tracks  
to sink in your eyes.  
And under the spell  
of your scarlet lips,  
for touching your soul,  
my destiny I will give.  
I am a star at sea  
which today loses itself at random,  
with no love and no fortune.  
In the depths  
of this moonlit night,  
I only want to live,  
kneeling at your feet,  
to love you and to die.

Come close to me,  
and you'll hear  
my heart beating happily  
like a witch's clock.  
My voice will tell you  
words of honey,  
that will inflame,  
your heart.  
The melody of the sea  
repeats in its rumour,  
what a moonlit night,  
what a night of love.  
Fortunate is the one  
who can say,  
I have love.  
How sweet it is to live.

Run, run, barcarolle\*,  
The moon hid away.

*\*a song traditionally sung by Venetian gondoliers.*

## Fuimos

**Music: José Dames - Lyrics: Homero Manzi  
1945**

Lost love, so omnipresent in tango lyrics in fact reflects a drastic change in the Argentine society at the end of the 19th century, as women begin to gain more independence and become freer to choose a partner. Through tango songs, poets expressed the reaction of men, at a loss in terms of how to best negotiate this change, and lost love became the common expression of their helplessness.

Some songs are expressing men's feelings as they try and explain why the woman they loved left them, some focus on the pain of being abandoned, while others are vaguer and in a way more sentimental. There's one last type of song which places the man at the centre of the love story as the one who made it end.



*Fuimos* is one of these love songs, which dwells on an impossible love, somehow doomed and brought to its end by a man in an attempt to protect the woman he loved at the expense of his own happiness.

As you read on, you'll realise that *Fuimos* is rather poetic and abstract, and that its lyrics are quite complex and rich.

*Fuimos* has been interpreted by many orchestras, including Osvaldo Pugliese's.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-fuimos/>

(image: <http://countrycowgirlup.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/countryside-road.jpg>)

*Fui como una lluvia de cenizas y fatigas  
en las horas resignadas de tu vida...  
Gota de vinagre derramada,  
fatalmente derramada, sobre todas tus heridas.  
Fuiste por mi culpa golondrina entre la nieve  
rosa marchitada por la nube que no llueve.  
Fuimos la esperanza que no llega, que no alcanza  
que no puede vislumbrar su tarde mansa.  
Fuimos el viajero que no implora, que no reza,  
que no llora, que se echó a morir.*

*¡Vete...!  
¿No comprendes que te estás matando?  
¿No comprendes que te estoy llamando?  
¡Vete...!  
No me beses que te estoy llorando  
¡Y quisiera no llorarte más!  
¿No ves?,  
es mejor que mi dolor  
quede tirado con tu amor  
librado de mi amor final.  
¡Vete...!,  
¿No comprendes que te estoy salvando?  
¿No comprendes que te estoy amando?  
¡No me sigas, ni me llames, ni me beses  
ni me llores, ni me quieras más!*

*Fuimos abrazados a la angustia de un presagio  
por la noche de un camino sin salidas,  
pálidos despojos de un naufragio  
sacudidos por las olas del amor y de la vida.  
Fuimos empujados en un viento desolado...  
sombras de una sombra que tornaba del pasado.  
Fuimos la esperanza que no llega, que no alcanza,  
que no puede vislumbrar su tarde mansa.  
Fuimos el viajero que no implora, que no reza,  
que no llora, que se echó a morir.*

I was like a rainfall of ashes and weariness  
in the resigned hours of your life ...  
A drop of vinegar spilled,  
fatally spilled on all your wounds.  
You were, by my fault, a sparrow in the snow,  
a rose withered by rainless clouds.  
We were the hope that doesn't come, that doesn't  
arrive  
that cannot catch a glimpse of its quiet evening.  
We were the traveller who does not beg, who does not  
pray, who does not cry, who lies down to die.

Go away ...!  
Don't you understand you're killing yourself?  
Don't you understand I'm calling you?  
Go away...!  
Don't kiss me for I'm crying.  
And I want to stop crying for you!  
Can't you see?  
It's better than my pain  
remains squandered with your love,  
freed from my final love.  
Go away ...!  
Don't you understand I'm saving you?  
Don't you understand I'm in love with you?  
Don't follow me, or call me, or kiss me,  
or cry for me, or love me anymore!

We were embraced by the anguish of a premonition  
by the night of a road with no end,  
pale remains of a shipwreck,  
tossed by the waves of love and life.  
We were thrust into a desolate wind ...  
shadows of a shadow coming from the past.  
We were the hope that doesn't come, that doesn't  
arrive,  
that cannot catch a glimpse of its quiet evening.  
We were the traveller who does not beg, who does not  
pray, who does not cry, who lies down to die.

## Jamás retornarás

Music and lyrics: Osmar Maderna / Miguel Caló  
1942



*Jamás retornarás, you'll never come back* focuses on a theme that reflects the tragedy of Buenos Aires immigrants – you guessed it, **love**. At the turn of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Buenos Aires was the centre of successive immigration waves mainly composed of men trying to make a fortune for the family they had left behind. This shaped the profile of the city by creating a massive gender imbalance.

The scarcity of women might be one of the factors that contributed to making Argentine tango so special, so much about love and about putting lady dancers first.

***Jamás retornarás* is about love, but not any type of love... *Jamás retornarás* is perhaps tango at its best when it comes to lost love and lost hope – the story of a man who waits for his lover to come back, to no avail.**

*Jamás retornarás* and *Qué te importa que te lllore*, both recorded with the voice of Raúl Berón are two exquisite songs born from the collaboration between Miguel Caló and the pianist Osmar Maderna.

Caló, who throughout his career supported young unknown musicians, discovered and trained the singer Raúl Berón in the art and style of his orchestra. One can say that he had an eye (or an ear!) for unusual talent. Soon after recording of *Al Compás del corazón*, radio broadcasting officials who didn't like Berón asked Caló to dismiss him, but the record was such a success that they later apologised and congratulated Caló for his flair.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-jamas-retornaras/>

*Cuando dijo adiós, quise llorar...  
Luego sin su amor, quise gritar...  
Todos los ensueños que albergó mi corazón  
(toda mi ilusión),  
cayeron a pedazos.  
Pronto volveré, dijo al partir.  
Loco la esperé... ¡Pobre de mí!  
Y hoy, que tanto tiempo ha transcurrido sin volver,  
siento que he perdido su querer.*

*“Jamás retornarás...”  
lo dice el alma mía,  
y en esta soledad  
te nombro noche y día.  
¿Por qué, por qué te fuiste de mi lado  
y tan cruel has destrozado  
mi corazón?  
“Jamás retornarás...”  
lo dice el alma mía  
y, aunque muriendo está,  
te espera sin cesar.*

*Cuánto le imploré: vuelve, mi amor...  
Cuánto la besé, ¡con qué fervor!  
Algo me decía que jamás iba a volver,  
que el anochecer  
en mi alma se anidaba.  
“Pronto volveré”, dijo al partir.  
Mucho la esperé... ¡Pobre de mí!  
Y hoy, que al fin comprendo  
la penosa y cruel verdad,  
siento que la vida se me va.*

When she said goodbye, I wanted to cry...  
Left without her love, I wanted to scream...  
All the fantasies harboured in my heart  
(all my illusion),  
fell to pieces.  
“I’ll soon be back”, she said when she left.  
Mad I waited... Poor me!  
And today, now that so much time has passed without  
her coming back,  
I feel I’ve lost her love.

“You’ll never come back...”  
that’s what my soul says,  
and in this loneliness  
I say your name night and day.  
Why, why did you leave my side  
and so cruel, did you break  
my heart?  
“You’ll never come back...”  
that’s what my soul says,  
my dying soul,  
which can’t stop waiting for you.

How much did I beg her: come back, my love...  
How much did I kiss her, with so much fervour!  
Something was telling me she would never come back,  
and that dusk,  
in my soul would dwell.  
“I’ll soon be back”, she said when she left.  
A long time I waited... Poor me!  
And today that in the end I understand  
the truth, terrible and cruel,  
I feel that life is leaving me.

## Llorar por una mujer

**Music: Enrique Rodríguez – Lyrics: Enrique Cadícamo**

Enrique Rodríguez was a skillful bandoneon player, a talented composer and innovative band leader who followed Donato and D'Arienzo's traditional rhythmical style. At the same time, his style was a breakthrough: he played all music genres, introduced new instruments to tango and his repertoire consisted only of merry or romantic tunes. Dancers liked his style and the variety he brought to the dance floor, and his orchestra enjoyed a great popularity in the 40's and 50's.



*Llorar por una mujer* (to cry for a woman), with lyrics by Enrique Cadícamo is a fine example of Rodríguez's talent as a composer.

With love being one of the most prevalent tango themes, it's fair to say it's been envisaged from every possible angle! Most tango songs either express the emotions of a heartbroken man: sadness, denial, anger, resentment, or try and explain why his lover left.

*Llorar por una mujer* is a little different in the sense that it gives a voice to a faithful friend who doesn't focus on their friend's love story, but rather gives advice to anyone in love. For this reason, the song feels very personal and easy to relate to: we all have been comforted by someone or have consoled a love-struck friend at some point in our lives...

Listen to the song online:

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/llorar-por-una-mujer/>

*Conozco muchos que  
después de criticar  
se fueron a clavar en un cariño  
y esos, después de reír,  
los he visto sufrir  
y llorar como niños...  
Ahí nadie puede guapear  
porque he visto aflojar  
hasta el más sobrador.  
Si no querés pifiar  
tendrás que caminar  
con cuidado en el amor.*

*Llorar,  
llorar por una mujer  
es quererla  
y no tenerla.  
Llorar,  
Llorar por una mujer  
es muy hondo padecer.  
Vos, que pa'l amor  
fuiste retobao,  
hoy tu pena es fuerte  
y te tiene arrinconcao,  
y hoy que no la ves  
y que la querés  
se te achica el alma,  
y recién sabés  
lo que es:  
Llorar,  
llorar por una mujer.*

*Muchachos, ya lo ven,  
al potro del amor  
no hay gaucho domador que lo domine.  
Cuando nos entra a tallar  
una pena de amar,  
el varón se define...  
Ahí comprobamos lo que es  
ese fiero revés  
que nos hace llorar...  
Conozca muchos que  
después de criticar  
los he ido a consolar.*

I know many who  
after having their fair share of criticising  
got themselves stuck in a love story  
and those, after the laughing was over,  
I saw them suffer  
and cry like children...  
There, no-one can swagger,  
I've seen turn weak  
even the most conceited.  
If you don't want to mess it up,  
you'll have to tread carefully  
in matters of love.

To cry,  
to cry for a woman  
is to love her  
and not have her.  
To cry,  
to cry for a woman  
is a suffering that hits you deep.  
You, who for love,  
were all cagey,  
today, your pain is so strong  
that it has you cornered,  
and today that you don't see her  
and that you love her,  
your soul shrinks  
and now you know  
what it is:  
To cry,  
to cry for a woman.

Guys, now you see,  
no horse-breaking gaucho can tame  
the colt of love.  
When a love pain  
starts to take shape,  
a man shows his true self.  
There, we understand what is  
this cruel backhand slap  
that brings us to tears...  
I know many who  
after they'd had their fair share of criticising,  
I had to go to console them.

## Muchacho

Music: Edgardo Donato – Lyrics: Celedonio Flores  
1926



Tango originated in Buenos Aires poor neighbourhoods – la Boca, the harbour and the suburbs, las ‘arrabales’. It came about as a way for immigrants to express their longing for everything and everyone they had left behind. Tango is also synonymous with immigrants’ widespread disarray when they realised that the harsh reality of Argentina couldn’t be any further from their dreams of ‘making it big’ in the Americas.

Tango, the music, the lyrics, the dancing is the expression of their personal and collective suffering. No doubt they saw it as their most treasured ‘possession’.

In the early 1900’s, the ‘rich boys’ from Buenos Aires high society, after despising tango, adopted it like there was no tomorrow. It is quite easy to picture the resentment towards this new generation of tango dancers. As they started to flock to the dancefloor, with their money and good manners, no doubt their every action was scrutinised and criticised.

There are quite a few songs on the theme of the rich boy who ‘buys’ his way into tango, but understands nothing of its essence and its feelings. *Muchacho* is one of these. Another song, famous for its lyrics and its flamboyant interpretation by Castillo is *Así se baila el tango*.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-muchacho/>

*Muchacho que porque la suerte quiso  
vivís en un primer piso  
de un palacete central,  
que pa' vicios y placeres,  
para farras y mujeres  
disponés de un capital.*

*Muchacho  
que no sabés el encanto  
de haber derramado llanto  
sobre un pecho de mujer;  
y no sabés qué es secarse  
en una timba y armarse  
para volverse a meter;*

*Que decís que un tango rante  
no te hace perder la calma  
y que no te llora el alma  
cuando gime un bandoneón;  
que si tenés sentimiento  
lo tenés adormecido  
pues todo lo has conseguido  
pagando como un chabón.  
Decime  
si en tu vida pelandruna,  
bajo la luz de la Luna  
o si no bajo un farol,  
no te has sentido poeta  
y le has dicho a una pebeta  
que ella es más linda que el Sol.*

*Decime  
si conocés la armonía,  
la dulce policromía  
de las tardes de arrabal,  
cuando van las fabriqueras  
tentadoras y diqueras  
bajo el sonoro percal...*

Boy, you are so lucky  
to live on the desired 1st floor  
of a little palace in town,  
you, who for vice and pleasures,  
for parties and women  
have lots of cash to splash.

Boy,  
you don't know the charm  
of spilling tears  
on a woman's chest;  
and you don't know what it's like to dry out  
at a gambling hall and then pluck up  
the courage to start betting again.

Can you say that a shameless tango  
doesn't make you lose your cool,  
and that your soul doesn't secretly cry  
when a bandoneon wails...  
If you have any feelings,  
they're well numbed,  
because everything you've achieved,  
you've bought like a twit.  
Tell me  
if in your miserable life,  
you've ever stood under the moonlight  
or a street lamp,  
and feeling like a poet,  
haven't told a chick,  
that she was prettier than the sun.

Tell me  
if you know the harmony  
of the sweet multi-coloured  
evenings in the suburbs,  
when the factory girls pass by,  
tempting and vain  
in their rustling skirts...

## Nocturno de tango

**Music: José García – Lyrics: Julio Jorge Nelson**

*Nocturno de tango*, Nocturne of tango was composed by José Garcia with lyrics from J.J. Nelson. Like all nocturnes, *Nocturno de tango* is a musical composition that is inspired by the night. The song draws an implicit contrast between day time, dedicated to all things ‘normal’, and **night time, when tango reigns and the milonguero within us takes life.**



Night time is what is celebrated in this nocturne, as is the place tango plays in Buenos Aires night life: tango was and is still danced in Buenos Aires, from late evening (when the sun goes away, and the moon appears in all its glory, as the lyrics of the song go) until early morning (just in time for coffee and media luna, the local croissants).

**Although very short, the lyrics capture beautifully the melancholy and romantic essence of tango and assert its origins in Buenos Aires poor neighbourhoods.** However modest at its beginnings, tango and its truthful stories of a people travelled beyond time and borders (in the song, tango whistling is referred to as ‘the local spokesman of our song’). We, who today listen to *Nocturno de tango* in London are a testament of tango’s timelessness.

The song was performed by Orquesta de Jose Garcia y Los Zorros Grises with the incredible Alfredo Bermudez on vocals.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/nocturno-de-tango/>

*Cuando el sol se va  
y la luna su fulgor asoma  
dos sombras a su conjuro se dibujan.  
Ella y él, nocturno de nuestro suburbio*

When the sun goes away,  
and the moon appears in all its glory,  
two shadows appear to be drawn under its spell.  
she and he, the nocturne of our suburbs.

*Silbidos de tangos  
pregoneros porteños de nuestra canción.  
Nocturno de tango,  
mezcla de risa y dolor,  
chapaleando fango.  
Y en esa esquina un amor.*

The whistling of tangos,  
the local spokesmen of our song.  
Nocturne of tango,  
mix of laughter and pain  
splashing in the dirt.  
And in this corner; love.

*Nocturno de tango.  
Triste compadre, lloró.  
Musiquita de los pobres.  
Congojas de un bandoneón.*

Nocturne of tango.  
The sad tears of a friend.  
The little song of the poor.  
The distress of a bandoneon.

## Pinta Brava

**Pinta Brava – Canaro, Battistella, Charlo  
1912**

**Pinta Brava. Fiery, sexy, arrogant, in your face. A volcano, an earthquake. A real *latin* girl who will haunt your nights and won't be forgotten that easily. Hold your breath...**



**Pinta Brava is a young girl with big dreams.** She quits being a maid, leaves her family and moves to downtown Buenos Aires. There, she hopes to earn a better living and escape the poverty that she's known since childhood. Once in Buenos Aires, she soon becomes a regular at milongas where she mingles with the poor, the thugs and the 'Niños Bien', the wealthy sons of society families. She hopes that in a milonga, she'll meet people, get an opportunity to escape her fate and gain some independence. How she ends up marrying a wannabe thug, a good for nothing, nobody knows, but she sure lives to regret her choice.

Pinta Brava is most likely one of the first tangos composed by Francisco Canaro, violinist, leader and composer (Nov. 26, 1888 – Dec. 14, 1964). Canaro's orchestra is one of the most prolific and famous orchestras in the history of tango. A legend.

Who knows, Pinta Brava might have existed or the song might have been inspired by several girls. One thing is certain though, it is based on real facts – it doesn't say: a cop, but the cop, a dead end, but the dead end and a crazy guy but the crazy guy. What makes this tango fascinating is its use of 'lunfardo' words, the slang born in Buenos Aires, and of other colourful expressions. 'Mas pelada que Alvear' is a reference to Argentina's president, Alvear who was mocked for his baldness. 'Meter la mula' is a humorous way to say 'to play tricks', and comes from certain merchants who, in an attempt to overcharge for their goods, cunningly placed the leg of their mule on the scale.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-pinta-brava/>

*Quién te juna, quién te embroca,  
Pinta brava presumida,  
pa' largarte por Florida  
como un Ford a patinar.  
No manyás, che pelandruna,  
que te vende desde lejos  
esa piel de zorro viejo  
más pelada que Alvear.*

*Despitá, no seas chitrua,  
que te está enfocando el cana  
no vengas buscando lana  
con la raza que tenés.  
Se te manya el expediente,  
hasta el modo en que patinas,  
vos podrás vender sardinas  
pero amor, jni lo soñes!*

*Pinta brava,  
no te olvides del pasado  
cuando ibas al mercado  
a comprar el stokafish.  
Engrupida,  
te saliste de sirvienta  
para ser, al fin de cuenta,  
Pinta Brava una infeliz.*

*El dorima que te echaste,  
con un feite en el escracho,  
cada vez que está borracho  
la presume de matón;  
y es un ñorse tan amargo  
que una noche, en la cortada,  
lo achicó con la parada  
hasta el loco Napoleón.  
No podés meter la mula,  
son al cuete tantas mañas,  
lechuceando a las arañas  
te empacaste, iya lo ves!*

*Pa' de seda, pa' de alhajas...  
Mucho viento en la sesera  
y en tu cuarto la catrera  
que rezonga tu vejez*

Who's watching you, who's keeping an eye on you,  
Feisty Pinta Brava,  
off the leash on Florida street,  
parading the streets like a Ford.  
Don't you realise, you silly girl,  
everyone can see from a mile off,  
that you're an old fox,  
with skin so worn, it's bolder than  
Alvear's head.

Get out of here, don't be stupid,  
The cop is watching you,  
don't come looking for dough  
with that face of yours.  
People can see what you're like  
even from the way you walk,  
They think you can sell sardines,  
Love, not in your dreams!

Pinta brava,  
don't forget the past  
when you were going to the market  
to buy stockfish.  
You're full of yourself,  
you quit being a maid,  
to be in the end,  
Pinta brava, a poor wretch.

This husband you took,  
with his scarred face,  
every time he's drunk,  
he likes to think of himself as a thug;  
he's such a pussy,  
that one night in the dead end,  
even the crazy guy standing there  
scared the hell out of him.

You can't pull a fast one,  
all these talents of yours are useless,  
watching the crooks closely,  
you were completely obsessed,  
I can see that!

by the silk, by the jewels...  
You've got so little between your ears,  
and in your room, the moaning bed  
shows your old age.

## Pa' que bailen los muchachos

**Music: Aníbal Troilo – Lyrics: Enrique Cadícamo  
1942**

Anibal Troilo was an Argentine bandoneon player, arranger and bandleader, whose work still keeps us dancing at milongas around the world. He also was an inspired composer, creator of pieces made to last forever. *Pa' que bailen los muchachos*, So that the lads dance is one of his masterpieces.



*Pa' que bailen los muchachos* draws numerous analogies between milonga and life, between tango and love. As the chorus puts it: *¡La vida es una milonga!*, life is a milonga. *Pa' que bailen los muchachos* tells the story of a man who plays the bandoneon, so that all his friends can dance all night, losing themselves in the tango embrace and rhythm.

He also plays to forget that his love is now taken with someone else. He refuses to give in to jealousy and still plays, knowing that by doing so, he'll give her a chance to dance with her new lover. The sentence: "those who suffer from jealousy show how much they care" shows his dilemma.

Listen to the song online:

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/pa-que-bailen-los-muchachos/>

*Pa' que bailen los muchachos  
vi'a' tocarle, bandoneón.  
¡La vida es una milonga!  
Bailen todos, compañeros,  
porque el baile es un abrazo:  
Bailen todos, compañeros,  
que este tango lleva el paso.  
Entre el lento ir y venir  
del tango va  
la frase dulce.  
Y ella baila en otros brazos,  
prendida, rendida,  
por otro amor.*

*No te quejes, bandoneón,  
que me duele el corazón.  
Quien por celos va sufriendo  
su cariño va diciendo.*

*No te quejes, bandoneón,  
que esta noche toco yo.  
Pa' que bailen los muchachos  
hoy te toco, bandoneón.  
¡La vida es una milonga!*

*Ella fue como una madre,  
ella fue mi gran cariño...  
nos abrimos y no sabe  
que hoy la lloro como un niño...  
Quién la va a saber querer  
con tanto amor,  
como la quise.  
Pobre amiga, pobre piba,  
¡qué ganas más locas  
de irte a buscar!*

*Pa' que bailen los muchachos  
vi'a' tocarle, bandoneón.  
¡La vida es una milonga!*

So that the lads dance,  
I'm gonna play you, bandoneon.  
Life is a milonga!  
Come on, dance, friends,  
because the dance is an embrace:  
Come on, dance, friends,  
step on the beat of this tango.  
Between the slow coming and going  
of tango goes  
the sweet phrase.  
And she dances in other arms,  
hooked, captivated,  
by another love.

Don't complain, bandoneon,  
my heart is in pain.  
Those who suffer from jealousy  
show how much they care.

Don't complain, bandoneon,  
tonight, I am the one playing.  
So that the lads dance,  
today, I play you, bandoneon.  
Life is a milonga.

She was like a mother,  
she was my great affection...  
We opened up to one another, and you don't know  
that today I cry for her like a child...  
Who will know how to love her  
with as much love,  
as I did.  
Poor friend, poor girl,  
there are no wishes crazier than  
to go and look for you!

So that the lads dance,  
I'm gonna play you, bandoneon.  
Life is a milonga!

## Pocas palabras

**Music: Ricardo Tanturi - Lyrics: Enrique Cadícamo  
1941**

**Pocas palabras** (“Few words”) is amongst the tango tunes that will stay in your head long after they are finished: a love story like those only found in tango. Listening to *Pocas Palabras*, you will feel all the melancholy of tango and its poets, but also a reminiscence of time lost...



**Tango is a music style and a dance born at the turn of the 20th century when massive waves of immigrants from Europe and Argentina countryside** left their birthplace to settle down in Buenos Aires. As they gradually came to grips with what the city really had in store for them – which was far less promising than their dreams of *hacerse la América*, of making it big in the Americas, most of them were engulfed by a longing for what they had left behind and would probably never see again – their home, their family, their loved ones.

Because tango, as an art form, emerged as a way for them to give vent to their anguish and express their loss, **tango lyrics generally delve into what one has lost, not what one still has.**

**Love is a typical example** – tango lyrics usually are about lost loves rather than happy ones. The topic of lost love also reflects a drastic change in the Argentine society of the time, as women began to gain more power and independence and were therefore freer to choose a partner.

Through tango songs, poets expressed the reaction of men, at a loss in terms of how to best negotiate this change, and **lost love became the common expression of their helplessness.** Some songs try and explain why the woman they loved left them, some focus on the consequences of them being abandoned, while others are vaguer and in a way more sentimental.

*Pocas Palabras* is one of these love songs; it is the story of a man who at last finds his old love, and while he harbours no hope, would like her to admit that their love is still alive. The poet gives no explanations about what happened to them or why she had left him, which makes the song even more melancholy.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-pocas-palabras/>

*No pretendo remover las cenizas del ayer,  
de ese ayer inolvidable.*

*Solo quiero hacerte ver,  
que aunque no lo quieras ver,  
hay amores imborrables.*

*Después de tanto vuelvo a hallarte  
y que emoción siento al mirarte,  
siento un loco palpitar  
en mi viejo corazón,  
y es que al fin te vuelvo a hallar.*

*Pocas palabras, vieja amiga  
pocas palabras es mejor  
ya ves, el mundo sigue igual  
sin nuestra unión sentimental.*

*Pocas palabras de lo de antes,  
no conversemos más de amor,  
de aquel amor que ya pasó  
pero que aun no murió.*

I am not trying to stir the ashes of yesterday,  
of this unforgettable yesterday.

I just want you to see,  
although you don't want to see it,  
that certain loves can't be erased.

After so long, I find you again,  
I feel so much emotion as I look at you,  
I feel my heart pounding  
like crazy,  
it's that at last I've found you again.

Few words, old friend.  
Few words are better.  
You see, the world remains the same  
without us being together.

Few words about what happened before  
let's not talk about love anymore,  
about that love that has already passed,  
but that still is not dead.

## Porteño y bailarín

**Music: Carlos Di Sarli – Lyrics: Héctor Marcó  
1945**

Picture a milonguero from the Golden Age, dressed to impress: suit, hat, tie, shining shoes... Imagine the countless sleepless nights he spends dancing until the small hours, the sleepless nights he spends absorbed in 'milonguear' (touring milongas), as one says in Buenos Aires. Now try to empathise with him as he realises that what he took for a love embrace, merely was a tango embrace.



With its numerous references to themes commonly found in tango songs, *Porteño y bailarín* is as poetic, romantic and bittersweet as its hero. 'Casita melancólica' is an allusion to a small rundown house from one of the poor suburbs that surround Buenos Aires, the 'arrabales', another frequent tango theme. Its melancholy aspect comes from its being beyond reclaim. 'Mis cuerdas', which literally translates as 'my cords' is an implicit reference to guitar strings, which often appear as protagonists in tango songs, in folklore songs and poems.

Di Sarli composed *Porteño y bailarín* in 1945, at the height of his career.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-porteno-y-bailarin/>

*Porteño y bailarín, me hiciste tango, como soy:*

*Romántico y dulzón...*

*Me inspira tu violín, me arrastra el alma de tu compás,*

*me arrulla el bandoneón...*

*Melancólica casita, suspirando amor,*

*le di en tus puertas mi querer,*

*y en tu criolla ventanita recostada al sol,*

*rompió mis cuerdas el ayer.*

*Todo mi drama está en tu voz,*

*manos en adiós,*

*labios en carmín...*

*Por ella y por su amor me hiciste tango, como soy:*

*¡Porteño y bailarín!*

*Qué importa el sueño,  
que a mis pupilas roban,  
las mentidas horas  
de bailar sin calma.*

*¡Qué importa el miedo  
de dar la vida!*

*Si encontrara el beso,  
que me pide el alma.*

*Hoy sé que fueron  
tangos, amor y copas,  
golondrinas locas,  
en mi corazón.*

*Porteño y bailarín, resuena tango... que en tu voz  
hoy vivo un novelón.*

*Su aliento vuelve a mi como esa noche que abracé,  
su tierno corazón...*

*Melancólica casita de cristal y azul,  
si a preguntar vuelve una vez,  
en tu criolla ventanita transformada en cruz,*

*decile cuánto la lloré.*

*Una guitarra, un bordonear,  
sueños y cantar...*

*¡Todo se llevó!*

*Porteño y bailarín, me hiciste tango, como soy,*

*romántico y dulzón...*

A porteño(1) and a dancer, you made me, tango, the way I am:

Romantic and sweet...

Your violin inspires me, the soul of your beat draws me,

the bandoneon lulls me...

Melancholic little house, longing for love,

at your doors, I gave her my love,

and at your small traditional window leaning against the sun,

the past broke the strings of my guitar.

All my drama is in your voice,

hands in good byes,

lips in red...

Because of her and because of her love, you made me,

tango, the way I am:

a porteño and a dancer!

What does it matter

the sleep stolen

by the deceptive hours

of dancing without resting.

What does it matter the fear

of giving our life!

If I had found the kiss,

that my soul demands.

Today I know these are no more,

tangos, love and drinks,

crazy swallows,

in my heart.

A porteño and a dancer, resound tango... so that in your voice, today I live an epic novel.

Her breath comes back to me

just as it was on that night

when I held her tender heart...

Melancholic little house of crystal and blue,

if she ever comes back to ask,

at your small traditional window now turned into a cross,

tell her how much I cried for her.

A guitar, playing strings,

dreams and singing...

Everything is gone!

A porteño and a dancer, you made me, tango, the way I am:

romantic and sweet...

(1) *Porteño: an inhabitant of Buenos Aires. The word comes from 'puerto', 'port' and means 'people from the port'. From the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century, the port of Buenos Aires was a major commercial hub and employment centre and played an important role in the economic activity of the city and the country.*

## Qué te importa que te llore

Music and lyrics: Osmar Maderna / Miguel Caló  
1942



**Qué te importa que te llore is not another love song, it's one with a twist – a song of lost milonguero love and... alcohol. It also is a favourite at milongas around the world.**

'No puede ser esa esperanza que me ahoga', 'it can't be this hope that makes me drawn' is a reference to alcohol. Unfulfilled love, passionate nightlife and alcohol often come together in tango songs...

*Los Mareados*, played beautifully by Troilo's orchestra is another example of how alcohol is featured in tango songs. So next time you listen to a tango song, watch for the word 'champán', the Spanish word for champagne...

*Jamás retornarás* and *Qué te importa que te llore*, both recorded with the voice of Raúl Berón are two exquisite songs born from the collaboration between Miguel Caló and the pianist Osmar Maderna.

Caló, who throughout his career supported young unknown musicians, discovered and trained the singer Raúl Berón in the art and style of his orchestra. One can say that he had an eye (or an ear!) for unusual talent. Soon after recording of 'Al Compás del corazón', radio broadcasting officials who didn't like Berón asked Caló to dismiss him, but the record was such a success that they later apologised and congratulated Caló for his flair.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-que-te-importa-que-te-llore/>

*Déjame mentir que volverás  
que volverás con el ayer,  
con el ayer de nuestro sueño.  
Déjame esperarte, inada más!,  
ya que comprendo que esperar  
es un pedazo de recuerdo,  
sé que este dolor, es el dolor de  
comprender  
que no puede ser esa esperanza  
que me ahoga.  
Déjame llorar, siempre llorar,  
y recordarte y esperar  
al comprender que no volverás.*

*Qué te importa que te llore,  
qué te importa que me mienta  
si ha quedado roto mi castillo del ayer,  
déjame hacer un dios con sus pedazos.  
Qué te importa lo que sufro,  
qué te importa lo que lloro...  
si no puede ser aquel ayer de la ilusión,  
déjame así llorando nuestro amor.  
Mucho te esperé sin comprender,  
sin comprender por qué razón  
te has alejado y no volviste.*

*Mucho te esperé; fatal dolor  
de consumir la soledad  
en el calor de lo que fuiste.  
Debes indicarme qué camino continuar  
ya que es imposible que se junten nuestras vidas.  
Déjame llorar, siempre llorar,  
no ves que ya ni sé qué hablar,  
ni qué mentir, ni qué esperar.*

Let me lie that you'll come back  
that you'll come back with the bygone days,  
with the bygone days we dreamt together.  
Let me wait for you, nothing else!  
now that I understand that my longing  
is a recollection,  
I know that my suffering is the suffering of understanding  
that  
it can't be this hope  
that makes me drawn.  
Let me cry, cry endlessly,  
and remember you and wait,  
now that I understand that you will not come back.

What does it matter to you that I cry for you,  
what does it matter to you that I lie to myself  
if my castle from the bygone days is now in pieces,  
let me use these pieces to create an altar.  
What does it matter to you how much I suffer,  
What does it matter to you how much I cry...  
if those bygone days of illusion cannot be,  
leave me like that, crying for our love.  
Long did I wait for you without understanding,  
without understanding the reason why  
you had gone away forever.

Long did I wait for you; the fatal pain  
of being alone  
in the warmth of what had been.  
You have to tell me which way forward  
now that our lives can't be united.  
Let me cry, cry endlessly,  
don't you see that I am running out of words, out of lies  
and out of hope.

## Recuerdos

### Music and lyrics: Alfredo Pelaia Vals

The vals *Recuerdos* is the first hit recorded by Alberto Castillo and Tanturi's legendary orchestra in 1941. It is a vals, and of course, it is a love song. Women and love have always been a theme central to tango songs. However, the way they are depicted drastically evolved over time –from ruthless individuals to angelic beings!



In the early days of tango, from 1917 to 1929, most love songs picture callous women who abandon their lover. During these years, a massive shift is happening in Argentine society; women begin to gain more power and independence and are therefore freer to choose a partner. Tango songs express the reaction of men, and lost love becomes the common expression of the helplessness they might have felt.

Until 1935, women are depicted as more 'normal' with a broad range of feelings, who are not always to blame for ending love relationships. This marks a shift in machismo values and the acceptance of women's new role in society.

Then, from 1935 to about 1940, women are pictured with exaltation as extraordinary, idealised beings, involved in love stories that are absolutely perfect... but somehow impossible and lost in the past.

*Recuerdos* is a typical example of this last type of tango love songs and death is what made the perfect love story end. A beautiful, sentimental love song...

Listen to the song online:

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-recuerdos/>

*Murió mi compañera idolatrada  
la mujer que jamás olvidaré,  
y que tengo en el alma reflejada,  
como tiene en su seno la alborada  
la estrella del callado amanecer.*

*En la noche callada y misteriosa  
su recuerdo me inunda el corazón  
y su nombre dulcísimo reboza  
de mis labios temblando de pasión.  
Ella fue la esperanza de mi vida,  
mi consuelo, mi dicha y mi sentir;  
la adorada mujer, que no se olvida  
y que se lleva en el alma hasta morir.  
Yo la amaba con ciega idolatría  
ella fue la ventura para mí  
porque puso en mí vida tan sombría  
con su dulce cariño, la alegría  
que consuela la angustia del vivir.*

*En la noche callada y misteriosa  
para llevarla al suspirado cielo,  
ha bajado un ángel del Señor,  
ella se fue y mi vida sin consuelo.*

*Lloro por siempre jamás, su eterno duelo  
¡Oh cruel destino en dónde está mi amor!*

She died, the partner I idolised  
the woman I will never forget,  
whom I hold as a reflection in my soul,  
as she holds within herself the dawn,  
the star of the silent dawn.

In the silent, mysterious night  
her memory floods my heart  
and her sweet name coats  
my lips trembling with passion.  
She was the hope of my life,  
my comfort, my joy and my feelings;  
beloved woman, you won't be forgotten  
and I'll carry you in my soul until I die.  
I loved her with blind idolatry  
she brought me good fortune  
and with her sweet love  
put in my gloomy life, the joy  
that soothes the anguish of life.

In the silent, mysterious night  
to take her up to the longing Heaven,  
came down an angel of the Lord,  
she is gone and my life is left without consolation.  
I'll cry for ever and ever, in eternal sorrow.  
Oh, cruel fate, where is my love!

## Siempre es Carnaval

Music: Osvaldo Fresedo - Lyrics: Emilio Fresedo  
1937

The lively *Siempre es carnaval* (It's always carnival) is one of Osvaldo (and Emilio) Fresedo's most reknown tangos. To understand its origin and its real depth, it's necessary to look at Fresedo's life itself...



Being born in Buenos Aires to a wealthy family definitely influenced Fresedo's art: his orchestra, refined and aristocratic, was the favourite of upper circles. However, the neighbourhood he grew up in equally had a bearing on him – when he was ten, his family surprisingly decided to move to La Paternal, a humble suburban neighbourhood. There he started playing the bandoneon and became acquainted with tango.

During his career, the longest one in tango history (over 1,250 recordings over 63 years), Fresedo was known as **El pibe de La Paternal**, the kid from La Paternal.

Despite its cheerful music and its definite carnival-like atmosphere, *Siempre es carnaval* is a condemnation of modern consumerist society, which compares consumers to carnival goers, and the lies they use to dodge paying their bills to carnival masks. While it starts with a general take on society, the song also seems to target one individual in particular, as shown by the end verse: 'how many pesos do you owe me?'

Listen to the song online:

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-siempre-es-carnaval/>

(image: <http://s5.favim.com/orig/51/girl-carnival-mask-face-Favim.com-485659.jpg>)

*¡Cuántos viven disfrazados  
sin saber que así quedaron!  
¡Cuántos se oyen sin reír!  
Este mundo es escenario  
de un gran cine continuado  
que nos hace consumir.  
Cuánto, al fin, se macanea,  
ya que nunca es todo cierto,  
y es un juego el acertar:  
“La señora está indispueta”  
o “ha salido hace un momento”;  
y el esposo se hace el muerto  
si es que vienen a cobrar.*

*Y siempre es carnaval.  
Van cayendo serpentinas,  
unas gruesas y otras finas  
que nos hacen tambalear.  
Y cuando en tu disfraz  
la careta queda ausente  
en tu cara de inocente,  
todo el año es carnaval.  
¡Y viva el carnaval!  
Vos ves siempre lucecitas.  
Sos la eterna mascarita  
que gozás con engañar.  
Y cuando en tu disfraz  
la careta queda ausente  
en tu cara de inocente,  
todo el año es carnaval.*

*¡Qué tuviste una fortuna!  
¡Qué de oro fue tu cuna!  
Que esto cuesta: ¡Qué se yo!  
Las mujeres y los hombres  
por tu amor tocan la luna  
y otras cosas más por vos...  
¡Y si hablás de tu familia!...  
tu pretérito imperfecto  
lo pasaste como un rey.  
Yo quisiera que me digas,  
y dejando un poco de esto,  
si la cuenta vos has hecho  
¿cuántos pesos me debés?*

How many live in fancy dress,  
without realising they'll remain like that!  
How many listen to themselves without laughing!  
This world is the stage  
of a big non-stop cinema  
that makes us shop.  
How much ends up being lies,  
nothing is certain at all,  
and guessing correctly is a gamble:  
“the lady is not available”  
or “she left a minute ago”;  
and the husband pretends to be dead  
if anyone comes asking him to pay the bills.

And it's always carnival.  
Streamers fall,  
some thick, some thin,  
they make us wobble.  
And when in fancy dress,  
you wear no mask  
on your innocent face,  
all year round it's carnival.  
Long live the carnival!  
You always see glimmers.  
You wear an eternal mask  
and you find pleasure in being deceitful.  
And when in fancy dress  
you wear no mask  
on your innocent face,  
all year round it's carnival.

How fortunate you've been!  
With your cradle made of gold!  
What does it cost... How would I know!  
Women and men  
reach out to the moon out of love for you  
and do so many other things, all for you...  
And if you talk about your family...,  
you use the past tense  
like a king!  
I'd like you to tell me,  
and I'll take a little bit off,  
if you've done the maths:  
how many pesos do you owe me?

## Sollozo de Bandoneón

Music: Ricardo Tanturi - Lyrics: Enrique Cadícamo



Most tango songs either express the emotions of the heartbroken poet or try and explain why he's been abandoned. Some songs are quite direct, others use metaphors to express the poet's emotions. *Sollozo de bandoneon* does both: the poet expresses his own emotions directly ("Tonight I have to tell you that I am love sick from losing you") and also lets the bandoneon express some of his personal feelings.

The very particular and sometimes strident sound of the bandoneon explains why it plays such a central role in tango music and universe: "Groaning like our hearts, the bandoneons cry their pain, the same as I sob theirs." It is true that bandoneons sometimes sound like they're crying – at least in melodramatic tango love songs.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/sollozo-de-bandoneon/>

*Ven a bailar que quiero hablarte  
aparte de tus amigas.  
Quiero que escuches mi fracaso  
y que en mis brazos el tango sigas.  
Después de un año vuelvo a hablarte  
y al verte me pongo triste.  
Porque esta noche he de contarte  
que por perderte sufro de amor.*

*Quien sufre por amor comprende este dolor,  
este dolor que nos embarga.  
Quien sufre por amor comprenderá el dolor  
que viene a herir como una daga.  
Te tuve y te perdí,  
y yo que soy sin ti.  
Quien sufre por amor comprenderá mejor  
por qué solloza el bandoneón.*

*Con su gemir de corazones,  
los bandoneones lloran su pena,  
igual que yo sollozan ellos.  
Porque en sus notas hay amores  
y por amores hoy sufro yo.*

Come and dance, I want to talk to you  
away from your girlfriends,  
I want you to listen to how I have failed,  
and to stay in my arms for a tango.  
It's been a year since we last spoke,  
and seeing you makes me sad.  
Tonight I have to tell you  
that I am love sick from losing you.

Whoever suffers for love understand this pain,  
this pain that overwhelms us.  
Whoever suffers for love will understand the pain  
that hurts like a dagger.  
I had you and I lost you,  
who am I without you?  
Whoever suffers for love will understand better  
why the bandoneon sobs.

Groaning like hearts do,  
bandoneons cry their pain,  
like me, they're sobbing too.  
Because in their notes, there are loves,  
and because of love, today, I suffer too.

## Son cosas del bandoneón

Music: Enrique Rodríguez – Lyrics: Enrique Cadícamo



Rodriguez and Cadicamo's *Son cosas del bandoneón* (Just Like A Bandoneon) illustrates just how central to tango bandoneons are. In this song, the bandoneon is not a mere instrument, it is personified and the poet gave him dark, sad emotions.

As with every song, there are endless ways to decode the lyrics, but here is our take on it...

One way to look at it is to say that **the instrument conveys the poet's own emotions**, hence giving him the safety net of claiming he is independent from it all – it is merely a song about a bandoneon. As the poet defiantly claims 'I have no sadness to claim, no pain to dig up', we guess this is far from the truth.

Another interpretation is that the narrator, used to covering up his emotions, simply can't hold them anymore when the distinctive bandoneon sound resonates at a milonga. **The song is therefore directed at the bandoneon, pleading it to stop** as it's making it challenging to hide; the laughter and partying is proving hard enough already.

Last, **the bandoneon could be interpreted as a person at the party**, perhaps someone not managing to keep their emotions in check, hence making it harder for the narrator to carry on. The song's response is a comfort to them, letting them know that they are not alone, "like you, I suffer too, brother bandoneon, don't cry anymore".

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-son-cosas-del-bandoneon/>

*Son cosas del bandoneón  
que se ha puesto a rezongar,  
no son más las tristezas  
de esta noche de champán...  
No tengo que ocultar  
ningún amor de ayer  
ni tengo penas que desenterrar.  
Si algún dolor está  
flotando sin querer  
sépanlo todos, compañeros, que...  
son cosas del bandoneón,  
que por gusto, nada más,  
esta noche de verbena,  
se le ha dado por llorar.*

*Bandoneón de triste rezongar:  
tu lamento me hace mal,  
bandoneón, tu funeral compás  
es un réquiem compadrón...  
Hay que reír...  
Hay que cantar...  
Mejor será mentir  
nuestro penar...  
Yo, como vos...  
sufro también,  
hermano bandoneón,  
no llores más...*

*Muchachos, quiero brindar:  
"Por la vida que se va"...  
Levantemos esta copa  
burbujeante de champán...  
La risa lucirá  
su alegre cascabel  
y en nuestras bocas colgará un reír.  
Y si el sollozo está  
flotando sin querer,  
no se preocupen compañeros, que...  
Son cosas del bandoneón  
que, por gusto nada más,  
en la fiesta de esta noche  
se le ha dado por llorar.*

The bandoneon has got  
its own reasons to growl;  
during this night of champagne,  
I have no sadness to claim...  
I don't have to hide  
any love from the past.  
No pain to dig up.  
If by any chance,  
pain floats about,  
I want my friends, all to know...  
that whilst everyone was out  
tonight,  
being its old self, the bandoneon,  
did something too;  
for the sake of it, nothing more,  
it started to cry, out of the blue.

Bandoneon, you're sadly growling,  
I can feel pain, through hearing your howling,  
Bandoneon, your funeral rhythm,  
is one for a brave requiem...  
One must laugh...  
One must sing...  
It's better to lie  
our suffering...  
Me, like you,  
I suffer too,  
Brother bandoneon,  
don't cry anymore.

Friends, I'd like to toast,  
"to life passing us here" ...  
Let's raise a glass  
fizzing with champagne...  
Laughter flaunts its cheer  
like a happy little bell,  
this same laughter,  
that chokes in our mouths.  
And if by any chance sobbing floats about,  
don't worry, my friends...  
because tonight, whilst everyone was partying,  
being its old self, the bandoneon,  
did something too;  
for the sake of it, nothing more,  
it started to cry, out of the blue.

## Sur

**Music: Aníbal Troilo - Lyrics: Homero Manzi**  
**1948**



Troilo's collaboration with Manzi yielded several hits during the 1940s, including Barrio de Tango and the waltz Romance de Barrio, but **none achieved the universal recognition of Sur (South), perhaps the tango most loved by Argentines, and one of the most conspicuously recorded.**

Argentine author Ernesto Sabato said that he'd give away all he's written for the privilege of being the author of Sur.

The South of Argentina is a physical and imaginative frontier that defined the nation. This spatial and temporal frontier, which evolved over time, illustrates divisions not only between the urban and rural worlds but also between modernity and past.

Sur is an elegy for a lost love, framed in the landmarks of Boedo and Pompeya, in the South of Buenos Aires. Sur describes a physical trip South of Buenos Aires and at the same time, an imaginary trip into the past, and laments both the end of a love story and changes in the barrio.

The thick wall described in the song not only marks the division between the end of the city and the beginning of the countryside, it also represents a before and an after, and is coloured by the bitterness of lost love.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-sur/>

*San Juan y Boedo antigua y todo el cielo,*

*Pompeya y, mas allá, la inundación,  
tu melena de novia en el recuerdo,*

*y tu nombre flotando en el adiós...  
La esquina del herrero barro y pampa,  
tu casa, tu vereda y el zanjón  
y un perfume de yuyos y de alfalfa  
que me llena de nuevo el corazón.*

*Sur... paredón y después...*

*Sur... una luz de almacén...*

*Ya nunca me veras como me vieras,  
recostado en la vidriera  
y esperándote,  
ya nunca alumbrare con las estrellas  
nuestra marcha sin querellas  
por las noches de Pompeya.  
Las calles y las lunas suburbanas  
y mi amor en tu ventana  
todo ha muerto, ya lo se.*

*San Juan y Boedo antigua, cielo perdido,  
Pompeya y, al llegar al terraplén,  
tus veinte años temblando de cariño  
bajo el beso que entonces te robe.  
Nostalgia de las cosas que han pasado,  
arena que la vida se llevó,  
pesadumbre del barrio que ha cambiado  
y amargura del sueño que murió.*

Old San Juan Street and Boedo district and the entire sky,

Pompeya neighbourhood and beyond, the swampland,  
In my memory, the long hair you had when we were together,

and your name floating in our goodbye...  
The blacksmith corner, mud and pampa,  
your house, your pavement, and the ditch  
and a smell of weeds and alfalfa  
that fills my heart all over again.

South... a thick wall and then...

South... the light of a grocery store...

You will never see me again like you used to,  
leaning against the shop window,  
and waiting for you,  
and never again I'll illuminate with the stars  
our peaceful walk  
under the nights of Pompeya.  
The streets and moons in the suburbs,  
and my love in your window,  
everything has died, that, I already know.

Ancient San Juan and Boedo, the lost sky,  
Pompeya and towards the embankment,  
your twenties, trembling with affection,  
from the kiss I then stole from you.  
Nostalgia of things that have passed,  
sand swept away by life,  
sorrow for the suburb that has changed,  
and bitterness of the dream that has died.

## Vida mía

**Music: Osvaldo Fresedo – Lyrics: Emilio Pacheco  
1933**

A love song by Fresedo, and a beautiful one, filled with melancholy and hope. One that will make your winter evenings warm and cosy.

**The melodious Vida mía (You're my life) is amongst Osvaldo (and Emilio) Fresedo's most famous tangos. A beautiful love song.**

Being born in Buenos Aires to a wealthy family definitely influenced Fresedo's art: his orchestra, refined and aristocratic, was the favourite of upper circles. However, the neighbourhood he grew up in equally had a bearing on him – when he was ten, his family surprisingly decided to move to La Paternal, a humble suburban neighbourhood. There he started playing the bandoneon and became acquainted with tango.

During his career, the longest one in tango history (over 1,250 recordings over 63 years), Fresedo was known as El pibe de La Paternal, the kid from La Paternal.



**Contrary to some of his other songs such as Arrabalero, which deal with the struggle of life in the Arrabales, the poor neighbourhoods surrounding Buenos Aires, Vida Mia is a love song.** It tells the story of two lovers who've been apart and his journey as he walks back to see her again. Unlike most tango songs, it is not a tale of lost love, but a hopeful story of thriving love.

**Listen to the song online:**

<http://www.tanguito.co.uk/tango-culture/tango-lyrics/tango-lyrics-vida-mi/>

*Siempre igual es el camino  
que ilumina y dora el sol...  
Si parece que el destino  
más lo alarga  
para mi dolor.*

*Y este verde suelo,  
donde crece el cardo  
lejos toca el cielo  
cerca de mi amor...  
Y de cuando en cuando un nido  
para que lo envidie yo.*

*Vida mía,  
lejos mas te quiero.  
Vida mía,  
piensa en mi regreso.  
Se que el oro  
no tendrá tus besos,  
y es por eso que te quiero más.  
Vida mía,  
hasta apuro el aliento  
acercando el momento  
de acariciar  
felicidad.  
Sos mi vida  
y quisiera llevarte  
a mi lado prendida  
y así ahogar mi soledad.*

*Ya parece que la huella  
va perdiendo su color  
y saliendo las estrellas  
dan al cielo  
todo su esplendor.  
Y de poco a poco  
luces que titilan  
dan severo tono  
mientras huye el sol.  
De esas luces que yo veo  
ella una la encendió.*

Always the same is the path  
gilded in sunshine...  
But it feels that fate  
stretches it further  
because of my sorrow.

And this green land,  
where thistles grow  
tall, reaching towards the sky  
where my love is...  
And from time to time a nest  
so that I envy it.

My life,  
from afar I love you even more,  
My life,  
think about me coming back.  
I know that gold  
will not have your kisses,  
and for that, I love you more.  
My life,  
I even breathe faster  
as I get closer to the time  
to stroke  
happiness.  
You are my life  
and I'd love to have you  
pinned by my side,  
to drown my loneliness.

It looks like the track  
is already fading  
and as they come out, the stars  
give the sky  
all its splendour.  
And little by little  
the twinkling lights  
give a harsh tone  
while the sun escapes.  
Of all the lights I see,  
there's one she lit.



Tango classes in London: [www.tanguito.co.uk](http://www.tanguito.co.uk)

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