

THE MUSICAL BOX**In Performance: Pablo Ziegler Quartet with Stefon Harris**

By Walter Tunis | 3.16.2014

Nearly every piece performed last night by the Pablo Ziegler Quartet at the Norton Center for the Arts' Weisiger Theatre in Danville played out like a suite. A central theme or mood would introduce most tunes. But from then on, the music was like a car chase, bounding around numerous shifts in tempo and temperament – some of which were quite abrupt – before arriving home again. It was then that you appreciated how exhilarating the journey was.

Ziegler is widely seen today as the torchbearer of “nuevo tango,” the jazz-like, small combo variation of tango music formulated decades ago by Argentine composer Astor Piazzolla. Ziegler served as Piazzolla's pianist for over decade. Such insight manifested last night in a program split evenly between original compositions and works by Piazzolla.



The sharp, clipped but beautifully exact melodies of Piazzolla were echoed in the spare, mischievous playing of Hector del Curto on bandoneon, the Argentine version of the button accordion that was also the composer's signature instrument. But that was only part of the fun. With the help of American vibraphonist Stefon Harris, a guest for roughly 2/3 of the concert, Ziegler used the bandoneon colors as guideposts for tunes that were in constant emotive motion.

During the Ziegler composition *Bajo Caro*, the ensemble mood became almost elegiac before left hand piano rolls opened out into a gleeful lyrical stride. The music became more fragmented on Piazzolla's *Chin Chin* through band skirmishes that included a brief four mallet run on the vibes from Harris that affirmed the tune's inherent cool along with sleek, punctuated rhythm by Ziegler, bassist Pedro Giraudo and guitarist Claudio Ragazzi.

At the core of these exchanges was a sense of playfulness that triggered the giddy melodic jabs of *La Rayuela*. Such instances recalled the animated piano/vibes duets of Chick Corea and Gary Burton as much the great Piazzolla.

There were other stylistic joyrides, as well, including the classically inclined *Fuga Y Misterio* and the darker, more spacious *Blues Porteno*. But it was *Buenos Aires Report* that best displayed the template for all of the genre-jumping – a boldly colored, effortlessly executed piano blast that balanced Piazzolla's compositional elegance and Ziegler's boundless musical ingenuity.