

Four hands take two to tango with one passion



Pablo Ziegler (left) and Christopher O'Riley play up a storm with the music of Astor Piazzolla.

Photo: *Edwina Pickles*

Reviewer Jessica Nicholas

January 20, 2006

SYDNEY FESTIVAL REVIEW

PABLO ZIEGLER & CHRISTOPHER O'RILEY: PIAZZOLLA FOR FOUR HANDS

City Recital Hall, Sydney, January 18

Pablo Ziegler was a member of Astor Piazzolla's celebrated tango quintet for 10 years in the 1970s and '80s. So if anyone can claim authority as an exponent and interpreter of Astor Piazzolla's music, it is Ziegler.

But the 61-year-old pianist is not interested in simply reproducing the sounds of the past. Since the death of his former employer in the early 1990s, Ziegler has developed his own distinctive extension of tango nuevo (the name given to Piazzolla's radical re-imagining of traditional tango), along with a substantial body of original work.

Still, for any Piazzolla fan, there's an undeniable thrill in hearing the music of the late Argentinean composer being played by an artist with whom he had such a close association.

On Wednesday night at Sydney's City Recital Hall, Ziegler teamed up with American pianist Christopher O'Riley to perform repertoire written by Piazzolla and arranged by Ziegler for two pianos. The arrangements were premiered in 1997, and Ziegler and O'Riley - who first performed as a duo in '98 - have since come together on numerous occasions to revisit what is clearly a mutually rewarding collaboration.

Not surprisingly, the younger O'Riley is full of respect and admiration for his Argentinean colleague (after the concert, he referred to Ziegler as "my teacher"). But O'Riley's role in this setting is unequivocally as an equal participant rather than an accompanist. Ziegler's ingenious arrangements use the full range of both keyboards to convey the complexity of Piazzolla's music, with melodic and rhythmic leads skipping back and forth between the two pianos.

As a listener who is passionately familiar with Piazzolla's original quintet recordings, I did find my ears searching for missing instruments - particularly the bandoneon and double bass - during the concert's opening minutes.

Continued next page

But I quickly began to revel in the natural clarity and elegance of the two-piano sound, and to marvel at the way Ziegler had captured the sense of interplay and constant movement that is a defining feature of Piazzolla's writing.

Wednesday's program included many of the late composer's best-loved works: *Adios Nonino*, *Libertango*, *Verano Porteno*, *Milonga del Angel* and *La Muerte del Angel*. *Adios Nonino* was especially potent, opening with virtuosic solo interludes by each player and deepening into a rhapsodic mini-suite where the two central themes - one fiercely propulsive, the other achingly tender - were reprised again and again, each repetition more compelling than the last.

Fuga Y Misterio brimmed with wonderfully nimble, Bach-like counterpoint, while *Buenos Aires Zero Hour* evoked a brooding, urban twilight using percussive knocks, slaps and dissonant harmonic clusters.

Throughout, Ziegler's playing resonated with the strong emotional core that gives tango its raw edge, while O'Riley managed to avoid the trap of classical perfection and allowed a hint of grime and grit to creep under his fingers.

The official program concluded with an ebullient rendition of *Tangata* (Piazzolla's fusion of tango and sonata forms), but the enraptured audience kept the pair on stage for three spirited encores - all originals by Ziegler, and all filled with the same passion for life that Piazzolla poured into his own enduring body of work. Superb.