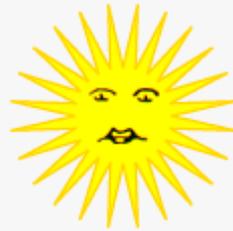


GCSE Music Composing



The Tango



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20th Century Dance Music—The Tango

The Tango is a dance from Argentina. It developed in the city of Buenos Aires around the 'red light' areas of the city, around the docks. For a time, it was discouraged by the Argentine government because it was associated with crime, poverty and prostitution and therefore gave a poor image of Argentinian culture. Now it is a national obsession in Argentina, with street performers dancing and singing the Tango, and special theatres where Tango shows take place daily.

The dance features quick jerky movements in response to the fast moving notes of the dance. The two dancers are usually very close with a very serious expression. Eye contact with dance partner is important in the Tango.

Practical task

Look at the features of the tango in the examples on the attached sheet. You may need some help from a music reader to understand some of the rhythms which can be complicated.

In groups of 3 or 4, use instruments (sensitively and without disturbing neighbouring groups) to explore the melodies, rhythms and harmony of the tango. Combine these ideas to make your own short ideas. The aim of this task is NOT to come up with a fully finished composition, but to make up short ideas which are in a Tango style.

It is very important you have an opportunity to explore the bass, melody and rhythm of the tango by playing the examples and making up your own. This is the best way for you to understand the tango, by playing it.



Tango rhythms—played by bass and percussion



Tango melodies

Melodies usually have chromatic notes. They can have smoothly moving notes above the dotted rhythm of the bass and sometimes they move with the bass. Note that Tangos usually start in a MINOR KEY, reflecting the seriousness of the dance.



Tango Bass parts and harmony

The harmony is usually simple, since most of the interest is in the chromatic melody. Usually, the chords I, IV, V7 and VI are used (in A minor these are the chords of A minor, D minor E7 and F).

Bass parts have this kind of character :



Composing a Tango

Step 1 : Identify the main chords

Tangos generally are in a minor key and use chords I IV V7 and VI
The notes can be arranged in many different ways, but here they appear in an easy to play form. Try playing these chords to get used to the sound of them

I(Am) IV(Dm) V(E7) VI(F)

Step 2 : Get a chord sequence and bass part

On a guitar or keyboard, sketch out an 8 bar chord sequence using Am E7 and Dm and F chords. Am and E7 are the most important so use lots of these. The others are optional.

Here are some examples :

Example 1 Am | Am | E7 | E7 | E7 | E7 | Am | Am |

Example 2 Am | Dm | E7 | Am | Am | Dm | F | E7 |

Using your software (Sibelius), record your first 8 bars and think of a suitable bass part using some of the ideas on the previous page. Just keep it to two staves for now. Don't think about what instruments you want just for now

Piano

I V7 V7 I

5

Pno

I IV V7 I

Step 3 : Making the tune fancy

Now that you have a skeleton, you can add link notes between each of these skeleton notes. Tangos often have lots of chromatic notes, so don't be scared of putting in lots of sharp and flat notes.

Here is an example of how to make our tune a little more complicated

The musical score shows two systems of piano accompaniment and melody. The first system consists of four measures. The piano part has chords I, V7, V7, and I. The melody part has chromatic link notes between the skeleton notes. The second system starts at measure 5 and consists of four measures. The piano part has chords I, IV, V7, and I. The melody part has chromatic link notes between the skeleton notes.

Listen to Example 2

Step 4 : Compose a further 8 bars

The next 8 bars could introduce a more rhythmic section. Still use any chords from I IV or V and keep the chromatic idea going. Again, you could compose a skeleton score before you add the chromaticism.

See the next page for an example of a further 8 bars

Your **form** should now look like this

SECTION A (8 BARS)

SECTION B (8 BARS)

Listen to Example 3

Step 5 : A change of key

At the end of your 16th bar, you could change key into the *Relative major*. If we started in A minor, the relative major is C major. Here are some chords you could use in this section.

This section could last just 8 bars or 16 bars if you like.

C F Dm G7 Am Em

When you have finished this section, your *form* should look like this :

SECTION A (8 BARS) SECTION B (8 BARS) SECTION C (8/16 BARS)

Each section can be repeated if you like. After this, you should return to your A section to make the music end in the key you started.

Step 6 : The finishing touches

This is where you decide if you are going to have more than one melody instrument. You could, for example have a 2nd instrument that 'answers' the first instrument. See over the page for an example of this

Flute

Sax

Piano

4

Fl.

Sax

Pno

Listen to Example 4

Re-arranging your Tango

The examples you've looked at so far are all for piano and one or two melody instruments. Using Sibelius, it is fairly easy to re-arrange to suit many different instruments.

In the example over the page, the Tango is arranged for four brass instruments. The bass part is played by the Eb tuba, the top trumpet part plays the melody, the 2nd trumpet plays a harmony to go with it. The two inner parts play the right hand of the piano part. In Sibelius, you can play both of these inner parts at once on the keyboard then use the filter function to separate them into different parts. Ask your teacher how to do this if you aren't sure.

Listen to Example 5

Trumpet 1 in Bb

Trumpet 2 in Bb

Baritone Bb

Trombone Bb

Bass Eb

4

Tpt 1

Tpt 2

Bar.

Tbn.

Bass Eb

7

Tpt 1

Tpt 2

Bar.

Tbn.

Bass Eb