

Tango and the Jews: In Argentina and Beyond

This course is an overview of Argentine Tango—the poetry and the dance—seeking to observe not only the role played by Jews in its history but also the role Tango itself played in Jewish diasporic existence.

It will cover its origins among immigrants and workers, its rejection by the elite and its final acceptance as a “national emblem” after a successful career in Europe. We will observe the participation of Jews in the formation of Tango as a musical genre, studying the Jewish musicians, composers and singers who were active in the early Tango scene, and how they negotiated the new music with traditionally dialectal Jewish languages. Then we will see how Tango became so popular that another variant was created, the Yiddish Tango, which reached the Jewish diaspora in Europe, being played in Eastern and Central Europe in the 20’s and 30’s, and incorporated to Klezmer and Yiddish theater. Eventually, we will learn about the Ghetto Tango, composed by Jews in European ghettos and concentration camps during World War II.

With attention to the poetry of Tango, we will observe the connections between the Jewish poetics of exile and the Tango lyrics, marked by absence and abandon. We will read poets such as Juan Gelman, who writes Tango lyrics and who, as an exiled man condemned by the Argentine dictatorship, approaches the Jewish textual tradition of exile. In this context, we will discuss how Tango connects with the recent history of military dictatorships in Latin America, a history that we must know in order to understand the Jewish Latin American experience.

Readings:

Savigliano, Marta E.. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*

Cooper, Artemis et al. (Editor). *Tango!: The Dance, the Song, the Story*

Nudler, Julio. *Tango Judío: Del ghetto a la milonga*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1998.

Judkovski, José. *El tango: una historia con judíos*. Buenos Aires: Fundación IWO, 1998.

_____. *Buenos Aires, fervor y ... Tango: una historia con judíos*. Buenos Aires: Fundación IWO, 2003.

Gelman, Juan. *Citas y comentarios*.

Kamenszain, Tamara. *Tango Bar*

Recordings:

Yiddish Tango. Buenos Aires: RGSMusic, 2003.

Ghetto Tango: Wartime Yiddish Theater. New York: Traditional Crossroads, 2000.

Websites:

<http://tangomeydl.hypermart.net>

<http://www.lloicaczackis.com/tangele.htm>