

ANGELS & DEVILS

8:00 PM

SATURDAY 11 OCTOBER 2025

REARDON THEATRE



Astor PIAZZOLLA (1921 – 1992)
***Libertango* (arr. Crabb)**

James Crabb, *Classical Accordion*
Zoë Black, *Violin*
Jenny Khafagi, *Violin*
Caroline Henbest, *Viola*
Timo-Veikko Valve, *Cello*
Rohan Dasika, *Double Bass*
Stefan Cassomenos, *Piano*

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685 – 1750)
Concerto for Two Keyboards in C minor, BWV 1060
(arr. Crabb)

1. *Allegro*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Allegro*

Elena KATS-CHERNIN (b. 1957)
Take Me Along

Monica Curro, *Violin*
Francesco Celata, *Clarinet*
Jonathan Békés, *Cello*
Stefan Cassomenos, *Piano*

1. *Claritango*
2. *Tango Insistente*
3. *Tango Mysterioso*
4. *Tango Chase*
5. *My Little Song*
6. *Contrapatango*

Antonio AGRI (1932 – 1998) /
José “Pepe” CARLI (1929 – 2020)
***Desde adentro* (arr. Crabb)**

James Crabb, *Classical Accordion*
Zoë Black, *Violin*
Jenny Khafagi, *Violin*
Caroline Henbest, *Viola*
Timo-Veikko Valve, *Cello*
Rohan Dasika, *Double Bass*
Stefan Cassomenos, *Piano*

Astor PIAZZOLLA (1921 – 1992)
***Angels and Devils Suite* (arr. Crabb)**

1. *Milonga del ángel (Milonga of the Angel)*
2. *Vayamos al diablo (Let's Go to the Devil)*
3. *Romance del diablo (Romance of the Devil)*
4. *La muerte del ángel (The Death of the Angel)*

Astor PIAZZOLLA (1921 – 1992)
***Oblivion* (arr. Crabb)**

Astor PIAZZOLLA (1921 – 1992)

***Libertango* (arr. Crabb)**

Legendary tango composer, bandleader and virtuoso of the bandoneon (button accordion), Astor Piazzolla is renowned for his trailblazing reinvention of the tango, combining elements of classical, jazz, rock, electronica, and Argentine folk music. Despite the outrage of purists and conservatives in his homeland, Piazzolla brought tango to the world stage, and from the dance hall to the concert hall.

One of his most iconic works, *Libertango* was written around April 1974, right after Piazzolla had made the big move from Buenos Aires to Rome. For the previous eight years, his native Argentina had been in the grip of military rule, leaving little breathing room for a progressive artist such as himself. Amid this oppressive economic and cultural climate and personal difficulties at home, Piazzolla suffered a heart attack in October of '73 – the offer of a lucrative Italian recording deal a few months later was just what the doctor ordered.

Libertango was described by Piazzolla as a “song to liberty”, a celebration of being in a new place with new ideas. A sort of manifesto work – the emblem of a new, liberated tango – its pumping, rock-inflected rhythm and rawer, leaner texture marked a change in Piazzolla’s creative development and turbocharged his international reputation. For tonight’s concert, we hear James Crabb’s arrangement for string quintet, piano and classical accordion.

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685 – 1750)

Concerto for Two Keyboards in C minor, BWV 1060 (arr. Crabb)

1. *Allegro*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Allegro*

While tango lies at the heart of Piazzolla’s music, it was his intensive study of the Baroque masters, especially Bach, that put a lot of the “nuevo” in his *nuevo tango* style – the brilliant counterpoint, the motoric but structural basslines, and the virtuosic, quasi-improvisatory writing. This evening’s performance also turns to Bach, whose Concerto for Two Keyboards embodies the contrapuntal invention and formal perfection that were such an enduring inspiration for the Argentine composer.

As with so much of Bach’s music, the true origins of this concerto are lost in the sands of time, but it probably springs from the years 1717 – 23, when Bach was kapellmeister under Prince Leopold, the cultured and enlightened ruler of Anhalt-Köthen, who was himself a skilled player of the gamba, violin and harpsichord. Köthen was a small Calvinist court that had little need for elaborate church music, so during his tenure there Bach was free to focus on secular instrumental composition, yielding such works as the Brandenburg Concertos, the first book of the Well-Tempered Clavier, and most likely the Cello Suites and Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin.

Scholars are virtually unanimous that this concerto in C minor was originally conceived for two different solo instruments, inferred to be oboe and violin. However, the manuscript for this original version has been lost, with the music surviving only in an arrangement Bach subsequently made of the work for two harpsichords. Tonight, we hear it afresh in James Crabb’s rendition for keyboard and classical accordion.

Elena KATS-CHERNIN (born 1957)

Take Me Along

1. *Claritango*
2. *Tango Insistente*
3. *Tango Mysterioso*
4. *Tango Chase*
5. *My Little Song*
6. *Contrapatango*

One of Australia's foremost contemporary composers, Elena Kats-Chernin's vibrant and distinctive music has reached millions worldwide, featuring at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, the 2003 Rugby World Cup and 2018 Commonwealth Games. Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, she has been the recipient of numerous prizes, including Helpmann, Limelight, Sounds Australian and Sydney Theatre Awards, the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award, and the 2022 Australian Women in Music Award for Artistic Excellence.

Kats-Chernin writes for ballet, opera, theatre, television and the concert hall, with her music performed by all the major Australian symphony orchestras, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Brandenburg Orchestra and World Orchestra, and a multitude of international orchestras and opera houses. Her music is published exclusively by Boosey & Hawkes, appearing on labels such as Deutsche Grammophon, Universal Music, ABC Classics, and Move, among others.

Of *Take Me Along*, the composer writes, "*Take Me Along* was commissioned in 2020 by Chris Arnold AM and Margot Costanzo – wonderful, generous, music-loving people. The idea was to write a piece in tribute to the 100 years of tango and to write it for the stunning trio PLEXUS, plus one (that is, clarinet, violin, piano and cello). The piece is in six movements of various flavours and degrees of tango-ness. All four instruments are treated equally, with each having the main melodic material at times and being part of the textural tapestry in others.

1. *Claritango*. The opening movement starts out with very sparse material in G minor. It emerges as if from a distant memory, growing into a sweet melody with subtle tango undertones and rhythms.

2. *Tango Insistente*. As the title suggests, this is quite a motoric, vigorosity-driven energetic movement, saying, "Here I am." There is an abundance of playfulness and sense of fun here also.

3. *Tango Mysterioso*. In this, the darkest of the movements, I was inspired by the music of the grandmaster of tango, Astor Piazzolla, especially the way he sometimes shifts chords just a millimetre, only a semitone up or down. In the middle of the piece, there is material resembling a Puccini aria from one of his great operas – this is a discreet nod to Margot and Chris's love for and knowledge of opera.

4. *Tango Chase*. There is a double meaning to the word 'chase' in the title of this movement. The relentless rhythmic changes between 7 and 6 quavers to a bar and the speed of the piece create a sense of chasing, perhaps after a sausage dog – Margot and Chris thought it sounded like that, and for a while this was the provisional title for the movement! It is also a chase for the tango itself, as, strictly speaking, this movement is not really a tango, though it tries to be. After a while the 'chase' moves into a section in which the pianist (Stefan) has the greatest workout across the whole keyboard, playing flourishing chords to the contrasting romantic melody in the strings and later clarinet.

5. *My Little Song*. This quiet movement starts with a yearning melody in G minor for solo violin, which very soon finds contentment in a melody for the cello in G major.

6. *Contrapatango*. There is more edge to this finale than in any of the preceding movements. The title is a play on the word 'contrapuntal', as the movement has fugal elements and contains much interwovenness between motives and instruments. Finally, a short cadenza-like passage leads to a frenetic ending, with the recapitulation of the melody from the first movement appearing in the clarinet just before the very end. The piece ends in B major."

Antonio AGRI (1932 – 1998) / José “Pepe” CARLI (1929 – 2020)

***Desde adentro* (arr. Crabb)**

Antonio Agri was an Argentine violinist, composer and conductor, whose career also bridged the worlds of tango and classical music. His nearly 15 years with Piazzolla's Nuevo Tango Quintet cemented his reputation as one of the foremost tango violinists in the world, and by the 1970s he was forging his own path as a performer and composer. When he left the quintet in '76, Piazzolla was furious. But even while raging at Agri during a radio interview, Piazzolla did not hesitate to call him a “genius of the violin”. *Desde adentro* (*From Within*) was written in collaboration with fellow Argentine violinist-composer José Carli for a 1989 tour of Japan by Agri and his Orquesta Sinfónica de Tango. Conceived like a mini-concerto for violin, *Desde* is, as the title suggests, an intimate, heartfelt rhapsody that basks in the glow of nostalgia.

Astor PIAZZOLLA (1921 – 1992)

***Angels and Devils Suite* (arr. Crabb)**

1. *Milonga del ángel* (*Milonga of the Angel*)
2. *Vayamos al diablo* (*Let's Go to the Devil*)
3. *Romance del diablo* (*Romance of the Devil*)
4. *La muerte del ángel* (*The Death of the Angel*)

The following four works put together by James Crabb all hail from the mid-1960s, by which time Piazzolla's radical quest to reinvent the tango was in full flight. Only 10 years earlier, however, Piazzolla was on the verge of giving up tango altogether, convinced his true destiny was to become a ‘serious’ composer. In 1954, he travelled to Paris to take composition lessons from the great Nadia Boulanger, but initially he hid his past from her – “I thought my music was garbage because I played tangos in a cabaret...” Eventually Boulanger pressed him about his background, and when he finally admitted that he wrote tangos, she asked him to play one. After only a few bars, she stopped him, took him by the hands, and said, “Never abandon this. This is your music. Here is Piazzolla.”

Piazzolla returned to Argentina the following year a new man, with an unshakeable sense of artistic purpose and a broader, sharper compositional technique. Ready for a “great tango revolution”, as he called it, he set about pushing the envelope of what a tango could be, incorporating elements of jazz music and classical styles as diverse as Bach, Ravel and Stravinsky. In 1960, he formed the Nuevo Tango Quintet, the most famous and most foundational of his many ensembles. It remained a part of his musical life till the end, and became the vehicle for many of his greatest works, including all four pieces in this *Angels and Devils Suite*.

The opening and closing ‘angelic’ works were composed in 1962 for a stage play called *El tango del ángel* (*The Tango of the Angel*) by Argentine playwright and theatre director Alberto Rodríguez Muñoz. Cast in the form of a *milonga* (a lighter, gentler precursor of the tango), the opening *Milonga del ángel* is a slow, intimate dance that exudes sensuous longing and wistfulness. The two ‘diabolic’ pieces were written for a 1965 concert in Philharmonic Hall, New York. Whereas *Vayamos al diablo* creeps into being and builds to an infernal, off-kilter dance in 7/4 time, the ensuing *Romance* unfolds as a sultry, languorous love song. The suite ends with the climactic *Muerte del ángel*, a quasi-fugal rumble whose implacable, riotous outer sections frame a sort of warm, consolatory reminiscence. For tonight's concert, we hear James Crabb's arrangements of these works for string quintet, piano and classical accordion.

Astor PIAZZOLLA (1921 – 1992)

***Oblivion* (arr. Crabb)**

Between 1949 and 1987, Piazzolla composed music for more than 40 films. Film music was never a commercial sideline for Piazzolla; rather, he treated it as another creative avenue, a laboratory to experiment with things like orchestration and dramatic pacing. In 1982 he was commissioned to write the music for Bellochio's film adaption of *Enrico IV* (originally a 1922 play by Pirandello). Its signature theme, *Oblivion*, is a slow, haunting *milonga* that evokes the memory of lost love. Upon the film's release, it became an instant hit and has remained one of Piazzolla's best-known and most beloved compositions.