

El Repique wins Tangomusic Contest 'Concurso del Ocho 2011'

By Arnoud de Graaf

Quarteto El Repique from Barcelona won this year's version of the Concurso del Ocho. Their sparkling version of *Cara Sucia* was elected by the jury. El Repique of the Argentines Jorge Blengini, Pablo Martorelli, Gaspar Müller (all guitar) and Lionel Mortola on double bass. Their repertoire consists of works of Piazzolla, Fresedo, Di Sarli, Pugliese, Biagi, Gobbi, Troilo and Salgán. The characteristic feature of El Repique is the absence of typical tango instruments, such as bandoneon and piano. The three guitars and double bass give El Repique a crystal clear sound.



*Illustration
by Gustavo
'Gusi' Bejer.*

Interview

We asked Gaspar Muller some questions about El Repique. Gaspar also announced the forthcoming release of a CD. The illustration by Gustavo Bejer will be on cover of that CD. 'Gusi', the artist's name of Gustavo Bejer, is a cartoonist who works for spanish and argentinian newspapers.

Gaspar, can you explain to me what El Repique stand for?

"The term repique is the name of a drum used in candombe music and it is also the action of playing this drum or any percussion instrument. We chose this name because we understand guitar and contrabass as percussion instruments, and we believe African music is the root of tango rhythm, even if the tango is not played with drums, and probably was never played with them, the black soul still lives inside the music. So for us El Repique means the heart-beat of tango.

The tango, both music and dance, was born inside the poor brothels near the ports of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, decades before the bandoneon arrived from Germany to El Río de La Plata. The ensemble which was mostly used to play in these houses was a trio of flute, violin and guitar. As the only accompanying instrument, the guitar must have been the mother of tango rhythm. Years later the tango came to Europe, became fashionable in the upper class and entered into the big halls where the

guitar was replaced by the piano, and the flute by the bandoneon. Therefore, the guitar was not used anymore in dance music, but instead it became the principal instrument of a new genre: the "tango canción". The ensembles of 3 or 4 guitars were the favourite groups to accomp. the voice of singers such as Carlos Gardel and a new musical style, different from orchestral danceable tango, was developed through the guitar. Since then the orquestas típicas and the guitar ensembles existed separately.

The principal aim of El Repique is to translate the colours of the orquesta típica into our more reduced, but more intimist timbral palette. In other words, we think of our guitar ensemble in an orchestral way, using all the possibilities of the guitar."

How did you get to know about the Concurso del Ocho and what do you think of it?

"We found the Concurso on the internet, and it was a great surprise because it is the only tango music contest, as far as we know. The experience was incredible for us as Argentinians, because it was very nice to find Dutch and European musicians playing tango. It was nice to discover how far tango, not only the dance but also the music, has become an international musical genre played by people from diverse cultures."

How did the members of the band get to know each other?

"As Argentinian tango musicians, it was not hard for us to meet each other in Barcelona. Two of us (Pablo and Gaspar) have also studied together in the conservatory."

Are you professional or semi professional musicians?

"Actually we are still a semiprofessional group since we cannot make a living with our group. But we treat our work in a very serious and professional way, rehearsing every week since we started in 2009, and of course our intention is to make this group our main activity."

Can you tell me something about the Barcelona tango music scene?

"Although Barcelona was called "Tercera patria del Tango" (after Buenos Aires and Paris), and during the 1920s it was very enthusiastic about tango (there were 4 tango magazines at the same time) now the situation is quite different. The only tango music that is really popular in Barcelona now is that of Astor Piazzolla, but it is normally understood as classical music. There are many tango groups in Barcelona, but most of them are formed only by Argentinian musicians."

Which tango musicians have inspired El Repique?

"Since we try to escape from the traditional treatment of the guitar in tango music, our main influences are orchestral directors and arrangers from 1945 to 1955. To name some of them: Troilo, Pugliese, Di Sarli, Demare, Biaggi, Piazzolla, Gobbi."

What did you feel when you played on fridaynite before 400 visitors (when only that morning you were still in Spain)?

"The whole trip was like an odyssey for us. We didn't sleep last night, Pablo had to travel with his leg in a cast (by plain, bus, train and this typical Dutch bike with some kind of sidecar on the front, which name we forgot) and we couldn't take our own instruments with us (Lucien made a big effort to get the guitars for us), so it was a big prize for us to play in that fine hall, for so many tango lovers."



The 'Ocho'

The tango music competition Ocho is a permanent part of the Doble Ocho tango festival since 2008. In that year festival organiser Lucien Lecarne realised his plan to organise a musical contest for tango musicians. Apparently he was not the only one, because almost at the same time another tango music contest was launched in the Netherlands: the Choclo. And to be fair: the Choclo was announced publicly just a little earlier than the

Ocho. The Choclo and the Ocho are by no means competing with each other, because they have each different formats. The Choclo focusses on the Netherlands and Belgium (the distribution area of the Dutch tangomagazine La Cadena, who launched the Choclo), whereas the Ocho works worldwide. And what is more, where the Choclo asks tango musicians to compose a new tango (or valse, milonga, etc.), the Ocho aims at tango musicians who are (re)arranging an already existing tango.

And who knows what the future will bring for the Ocho? Maybe preliminary rounds in other places in the Netherlands (the Rotterdam Conservatory) or other countries of Europe? This year there were already demos from groups from South Africa and Estland and also the other years there were contestants from other countries. Of course there is always a problem of financing a trip to Nijmegen (and unfortunately, some acts had to back out), but we are trying hard to create a solution for this problem.

The reason for organizing the Ocho was El Corte's twentieth birthday in 2008. The Ocho is a joint initiative by El Corte and Kunstburo Lucien Lecarne. The Ocho's goal is to stimulate amateur musicians, conservatory students and semi-professional tango musicians to (re)arrange already existing tangos, but also to function as a cultural platform for tango musicians, festival organizers, podium programmers, record label officials and tangolovers in general.

The Ocho is a yearly event with every year a new assignment. In 2008 the assignment was to rearrange Carel Kraayenhof's specially for El Corte composed *El Corte*. This year's assignment was Francisco Canaro's *Cara Sucia*.

The prize was one thousand euros, but more importantly guaranteed concertss at famous places, such as the tangofestival in Sitges (Spain), cafe Ada (Wuppertal, Germany), De Toonzaal (Den Bosch, Netherlands) and the Berlin Tangofestival.

Cara Sucia, a naughty tango

Cara Sucia was written in 1916 Juan Andres Caruso (lyrics) and Francisco Canaro (music). It is likely that *Cara Sucia* is a rearrangement of a song called *Concha Sucia*, which was a composition by El Negro Casimiro in the prehistory of tango. In those days tango titles and lyrics were often rather vulgar.

Willem Lammertink comments on this in La Cadena (nr 109): "In the earliest day of tango, the so called 'tango-erótico' was a fully accepted phenomenon [...] sung tangos dealt in freet and intimate detail with the female body or the act of love".

For commercial reasons those lyrics were later often 'cleaned'. One can assume that this was also the case by *Cara Sucia*. The title of the original *Concha Sucia* literally means 'dirty shell', but concha is also slang for vagina. With this in mind the lyrics of *Cara Sucia* get an extra dimension and warrant the label 'tango picaresque' (naughty tango).

El Repique's version of Cara Sucia can freely be downloaded via www.dobleocho.com