

The prostitute, victim and culprit **ESCLAVAS BLANCAS**

This tango was written by Horacio Pettorossi in 1928. Esclavas blancas means "white slaves", and it's about prostitutes who are exploited (and trafficking young women was a big criminal business in those times in Buenos Aires). But there is an irritating ambiguity in the lyrics: It's a moral imperative to the "fallen woman" that she should leave the seducing life of "tango y champán", in the name of the child she might have had and given away.

"Almitas torturadas, pobres esclavas blancas
Del tango y la milonga,
Mujeres infecundas, autómatas del vicio
Sin alma y sin amor.

...

No sigas por la senda de fáciles placeres
De tangos y champán.
Pensá cinco minutos en esa criatura
De manecitas blancas, que en este mismo instante
Tal vez a unos extraños, les llamará mamá!"

Here you find the lyrics with a translation by Paul Bottomer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPLHzVMIBBs>

ESCLAVAS BLANCAS

Tango

Letra y música de Horacio Pettorossi



This song became rather popular after having been recorded by Carlos Gardel in 1931. "After this the work entered the standard repertoire of the bands working in the milongas and cabarets. One night a cabaret girl committed suicide after hearing the lyrics at her workplace, and after this the work was informally banned." (Michael Lavocah, *Tango Masters: Juan D'Arienzo*, Milonga Press 2018, p. 144)

These are the versions I want to present:

Francisco Canaro with Agustín Irusta, 4th of May, 1932

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPLHzVMIBBs>

Juan D'Arienzo with Alberto Reynal, 12th of December, 1940

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jk1mR4WWMRk>

Francisco Rotundo with Floreal Ruiz, 29th of December, 1950

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2rFm7oy8KE>

Canaro's version:

Canaro plays with his typical strong, regular beat. We have tutti in the A part, and dialogues between the instrumental groups in the B part. Agustín Irusta sings gently the first verse, in dialogue with a bandoneon. After the singing the orchestra plays with extra strong rhythm, lead by the left hand of the piano. And in the end the muted trumpet plays a melancholic solo.

D'Arienzo's version:

This was recorded with D'Arienzo's new orchestra which doesn't sound as fresh as in the thirties, but more heavy. We hear the strong piano of the young Fulvio Salamanca, and the violin solo on the lowest string played by Cayetano Puglisi, and the virtuous and precise bandoneon section led by Héctor Varela. Alberto Reynal sings with a pathetic tone the part of the lyrics that accuses the woman, accompanied by the solo violin (that sometimes, I cannot help, sounds like a wasp). After the singing each section comes to shine again.

Rotundo's version:

The orchestra starts gently with piano and violins, and then in the repetition of the A part the bandoneons come in with crescendoing drama. Floreal Ruiz sings the complete lyrics with his wonderful timbre, expressing the emotional contents of every phrase of the lyrics, between tenderness and accusation. The orchestra accompanies him playing solemnly in low registers. Between the two parts of the singing the bandoneons play a wonderful variation, virtuososo and melancholic.



Francisco Canaro and his orchestra



Juan D'Arienzo with Alberto Reynal



Francisco Rotundo's orchestra