

A tango about a barrio pobre, with the biggest of the "Big Four"

FAROL

By guest reviewer Michael Lavocah.

From the book "Michael Lavocah: Tango Masters, Osvaldo Pugliese. 2016", with kind permission of the author

The Pugliese version (15th of July, 1943)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRscr08Wt4g>

The Troilo version (30th of September, 1943)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-Inlcl3jIM>

For his first recording, Pugliese chose a tango whose subject is the urban poor. Farol transports us back in time to the arrabal, the margins both of the city and of society. The poverty is extreme: the people live in tin shacks (un barrio de lata), but they have their dreams. It is un arrabal humano, a human place, full of life, and it expresses that life through tango.

The gas lamp stands on a "corner of memories" and looks down a dead-end street (una cortada). It has seen many changes, but they are not necessarily for the better: the vitality of the barrio has dimmed. The choice of this tango demonstrates Pugliese's sympathy for the poor and the human. Chanel, with his nasal tones, is absolutely convincing as the narrator: in him we feel the voice of the urban poor. He sings not about them, but as one of them. The recording gives us the opportunity to compare Pugliese's work to that of Troilo, who would record this piece with Fiorentino two months later. Pugliese's is much longer, 3'20" compared to 2'40" for the more up-tempo Troilo version, and yet doesn't drag. This is partly because of the greater use of dynamic – a change in volume – even if this is as yet rather less developed than it would become. Troilo is more rhythmic, but Pugliese makes up for this with the driving force of his marcato: shortly before Chanel enters, we can hear a prototype of la yumba (listen to the recording at around 0'48"). Pugliese's simpler rhythmic treatment and slower pace pushes attention on to the singer, and Chanel is more prominent than Fiorentino.

Whilst this is a typical lyric for Pugliese, it is less so for Troilo. Troilo's interpretation is wonderfully sophisticated, and emphasises the nostalgic aspect of the lyric. Pugliese's interpretation is far from any sentimentality. It sounds modern.

About the faroles themselves: these refer to the old street lamps lit mostly by gas, although sometimes by alcohol or kerosene. At the time of this recording they were already a thing of the past: electricity had been installed, and the last gas lamp was extinguished in 1931. It now stands in a museum. The flickering light of the faroles inspired an affection that no-one feels for electric lamps: tango lyrics mention them variously as sentinels, witnesses, friends, and confidantes.



Osvaldo Pugliese mit Roberto Chanel



Aníbal Troilo mit Francisco Fiorentino