

"It is not without reason that it is popularly referred to as tango de ruptura — the tango of rupture"

## PREVIEW

# You ain't heard nothing like it

Tango revolutionaries Astillero are coming to town. MICHAL BONCZA looks them up

**Astillero**

Royal Northern College of Music,  
Manchester, April 9, 2011  
Barbican, London EC2, April 10

ASTILLERO — shipyard in Spanish — are children of their epoch and by implication fearless mould-breakers who have to be understood in the wider context of political change in Latin America. The rampaging energy of the deluging and incisive sound is homage to dissent, to anger, to rebellion. Indeed, it is dissent, anger and revolution.

This septet is catharsis personified. The breathtaking and sophisticated Astillero's tango is deliberately being returned to its rightful and original place — popular culture.

This is political. It is a forceful and unequivocal display of contempt for the bourgeois, voyeur-

istic and fake passion merchandised around Buenos Aires and elsewhere as part and parcel of vacuous, cosmopolitan consumerism. It is the replacement of it by honest, heart-felt emotions and a popular, unsuppressed pain and passion borne out of a society deeply ruptured by capitalism.

They will have seen the humiliation of their own people reduced — at one time in vast numbers — to rummaging for discarded food through the bins of one of the most beautiful cities on the planet. They will not have forgotten the armoured trucks used by foreign robber bankers to take the nation's savings secretly out of the country. But equally the memory of the effective popular resistance that followed will have been an edifying and inspiring antidote.

Astillero are the first tango ensemble in history to feature two bandoneons — a type of concertina — a violin, cello, double bass and piano. The

combination enriches their sound and allows to maintain cohesion and clarity through ruptures and staccatos. The fact that their repertoire is made up uniquely of their own compositions is another important statement of intent. It is not without reason that it is popularly referred to as tango de ruptura — the tango of rupture.

The individual members are steeped in the tradition of tango and were leading members of the Maquina Tanguera — tango machine — movement in Buenos Aires, aiming at returning tango to its popular progressive roots. So they all had priors before coming together as Astillero in 2005.

As part of their commitment to social causes, three years ago they created the Orlando Goni School in the work-in-class district of Avellaneda where young musicians can hone their craft.

Tango rebels revere Goni who died at 31 in 1945. A pianist of unsurpassed, jazz-influenced

technique, he never used the pedals and had "an informal attitude with his low-register left hand connecting phrases." His close beat and legato chords were submitted to tempo rubato — stolen time — a sudden speeding up or slowing down of the tempo, augmented by his fondness of syncopation. The spirit of Goni is omnipresent in Astillero's social attitudes, stagecraft and astonishing musicianship.

Tango originated around 1880 in the poor working-class areas of Buenos Aires and, although Astillero are unlikely to follow in the footsteps of such dear old classics as El Choclo — the corn cob, a phallic symbol — it is worth remembering that it was in those neighbourhoods that the working class was organised by communists, socialists and anarchists. Astillero have not forgotten this and hence this celebrated return to their roots.

## ALBUM ROUND-UP

**Mogwai**

Hardcore Will Never Die,  
But You Will (Rock Action)

IT'S ALWAYS an exciting moment when Mogwai release a new album, generally because they are widely regarded as the kings of post-rock — riff-heavy, largely instrumental music. For those unfamiliar with sub-categorisation.

The dark witicism of said album's title comes as no surprise when their oeuvre consists of other cheerily named albums Come On Die Young, Kicking A Dead Pig, Mr Beast and The Hawk Is Howling, although 2003's Happy Songs For Happy People was an exception to the rule.

Hardcore Will Never Die... is basically more good old-fashioned Mogwai, the group at their best



but not particularly their most surprising or inventive. Due to a marked lack of any vocals — like with a lot of post-rock — it's all about the riff. Rano Pano is a highlight with its catchy melodic theme while Mexican Grand Prix is unusual in it being the only track with lyrics. But these days there are other post-rock bands out there doing it better.

WILL STONE

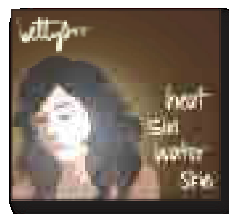
**Betty Soo**

Heat Sin Water Skin  
(Self Release)

FEMALE singer-songwriters aren't exactly a rarity today so what is the USP (unique selling point) of Betty Soo? Well, she's an Asian-American singing country songs and, as she says, that ain't so common. And, unfortunately, that's about it. She can't be that bad as this is her third album, so someone somewhere has faith in her.

In places her producers make her sound a bit like Lucinda Williams but the songs aren't strong enough and lack any real insight. By the time she gets into gear the album is effectively over.

I'm sure Soo is a charming



and delightful individual but maybe these are not the best credentials if you want success as a singer-songwriter.

The music business is capricious and it is frustrating when artists like this continue to contentedly bob along the surface delivering nothing of any true worth while many far more talented artists sink.

RICHARD HILTON

**Watch Clad**

Radio Babel (Piranha)

MARSEILLE is one of France's most cosmopolitan and politically radical cities and this musical offering demonstrates how that's expressed by a new generation.

Watcha Clan — like their Andalusian counterparts Radio Tarifa — mine the seemingly inexhaustible seams of French, Mediterranean and Maghrebian music sampling hip-hop, chanson, tango and Gypsy music en route.

Much of the album is buttressed by mesmerising Maghreb-style percussion which gives the sound an unrelenting, dynamic edge.

The polyglot lyrics of French, Arabic, Spanish and English predominate which dovetails with



the insurrectionary times just across the sea in north Africa.

The stand-out track is Wall Or Without The Wall, referencing the Israeli barrier in occupied Palestine and as a bonus track — and what a bonus it is — there's a spine-chilling rendition of the anti-Franco classic El Quinto Regimiento.

Very well worth a listen.

SINEAD MCINTYRE