

El Muro Tango's *Recuerdo* – a love letter to Argentine tango

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ENGLISH

A break-out sensation since emerging in 2016, El Muro Tango should be on tour, playing to packed venues across Europe. Instead, along with the rest of us, they are in isolation – but far from idle. Unable to perform live, the group has just released an extraordinary love letter to tango, the city of Berlin and their many fans. A gift for these dark times in the shape of a film set to their own mould-breaking interpretation of Pugliese's *Recuerdo* (*A memory*).

Drawing inspiration from tango's origins in the working-class *barrios* of Buenos Aires, the film builds new connections between the unbridled desire of the milongas and the rough edges of Berlin, one of the world's great contemporary melting pots, a city of refuge for the queer community and a mecca for performers, musicians and artists.

In every movement, Argentine dancers Juampy Ramirez and Dani Arroyo convey the desire to dance, to flourish, to experience life with an intensity which nothing delivers quite like tango. Their movements are relaxed, their pauses less attention-seeking than in classical tango, as they tell a story of the triumphant pursuit of freedom of expression.

Musically and visually, it's the story of a quest for identity, a journey across traditional boundaries of genre and gender in pursuit of a sound that represents tango's true nature. Here, the clichés of so many contemporary recordings are blown away by a performance which acknowledges tango as something more than just a dance. El Muro Tango play it like they're

on a mission – to dive deep into tango’s origins and establish themselves as the defining influence on its still fluid identity in alternative Berlin.

Their deep knowledge and technical virtuosity are audible in every note. Not surprising given that the pianist, Juan Pablo de Lucca, is the grandson of legendary singer and actor Alberto Castillo. The musical accomplishments of his bandmates are hardly less impressive. Together, they seek to make tango transgressive, flamboyant, and dangerous again. As their instrumental interpretation of *Recuerdo* accompanies the dancers – reflecting on what’s been lost and what remains, hiding in plain sight on the margins, in the beauty of empty urban spaces, in the transformation of two dancers into living emblems of defiant hope – snatches of the lyrics hover like ghosts between the notes:

Yesterday poets sang... / In those soft nights of pleasure... / Bohemian and fragile youth...

/ Dying in a bar in a southern hood... / Death of illusions... / Dying of his song...

The result is a film which moves and connects with great intensity – and one which speaks to our current moment, as it becomes clear that even if COVID-19 doesn’t discriminate, the impact of the virus still corresponds to the inequalities in society. Those on the margins are once again among the most vulnerable – and courageous. Like Dani and Juampy, they still apply their make-up, put on their high heels, and dance.

If any contemporary band has the ambition and ability to reinvent tango and bring it to a wider audience, it’s surely El Muro Tango. With this film, they take a major step in that direction.