

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

THE NEW York-based Zvi Migdal Tango Group features three guitarists: Adam Tully, David Nadal and Dan Lippel with Argentinian singer and actor, Pablo 'The Pulpo' Pereyra. Founded five years ago by Tully and Pereyra, the group has recently been attracting notice from major New York publications, like the *New York Daily News*, for showcasing their tight, in-the-pocket musical form dashed with an entertainingly edgy nightclubbish noire.

Tully, who is originally from Washington D.C., studied guitar at Oberlin College and earned his masters degree in guitar performance from the Mannes College of Music in Manhattan. He studied tango with Anibal Arias in Buenos Aires and later, while teaching at the La Peña del Sur Cultural Center in San Francisco, he worked with the Argentinean folk group La Huella and expanded his repertoire to Cuban and Mexican music. Tully also studied flamenco guitar with Dennis Koster at the American Institute of Guitar.

'When I returned to New York, I hung around the tango scene here, which happens to be dance-oriented. There are many professional dancers who come here from Argentina not just to teach couples who are interested in the dance style but also for training Broadway dancers in the art form.

'I found myself playing a couple of gigs with these dancers and this is how I met Pulpo, an actor and singer who played the lead in the production *All That Tango*. We started doing gigs together. At this point in my career I was looking to focus on a specific musical concept, and Pulpo was looking to do a multimedia show based on tango. What's great about working with him is the collaborative aspect we have - it's never just "I'm the singer and you're the guitarist" - we both bring our ideas together. While I was considering the idea of a guitar-based tango group, Pulpo added the dimension of creating guitar-based, good old fashioned tango but with a punk rock attitude of in-your-face music.'

They named themselves the Zvi Migdal Tango Group. The term Zvi Migdal being an infamous Polish prostitution ring which had institutionalised itself within Argentina during the 1880s through to the early 1930s. This ring kidnapped or imported women from Europe, often passing through London and onward to Argentinean brothels under the ruse of false promises of marriage or, in some cases, merely taking advantage of those who hoped to escape their present lives of despair. Given the band's emphasis on the lower-class origins of tango,



Left to right: Dan Lippel, Adam Tully, singer Pablo 'Pulpo' Pereyra, David Nadal.

PHOTO: JULIA CROWE

their name adequately conjures up the grittier flavour of tango along with the darker spirit that pervades the dance form's inherent sexuality.

'Tango is a rich tradition and our niche, artistically, hopes to shed light on the other side of tango,' Tully says. 'Most people know of Astor Piazzolla, who contributed so much to the genre - but this is only one side of the story. The group is interested in the genre which reflects the humour, politics and essence of the regional working class of Argentina where the dance craze had started. Pulpo sings lyrics steeped in the local idiom, called *lunfardo*, which is full of double-meanings. It's like the Argentinian version of hip-hop - very underground and marginalised but merged with the beautiful style of tango, old-fashioned guitar and electric guitar which is consistent with the spirit. What we play is based on traditional tango but you will not find it in the mainstream. It's off the radar.'

And like any band aspiring to a rock attitude, they've adopted a symbolic coat-of-arms for themselves of a hilted dagger, which Pulpo describes as 'philosophically encompassing both the brutality and nobility of the Old World,' befitting their style and approach to the tango form. Their website includes a photo of the dagger designed for them by John Poythress along with a pithy quote from Jorge Luis Borges which speaks philosophically on the life, purpose and function bestowed upon such an inanimate object. The correlation here is that the band hopes to restore the tango from present, antiquated collector's quaintness of a bygone era and breathe new life into it as a cutting, urban style of entertainment for modern audiences.

The group first created and directed a multimedia project entitled, *Tango Concert*

Buenos Ayres, Tangos from Heaven and Hell. [Video clips can be viewed online at: <http://thezvimigdal.com/media/videos.html>]. The band is now fully consolidated with the addition of guitarists Daniel Lippel and David Nadal. Lippel has a doctoral degree from the Manhattan School of Music and is actively involved with new music chamber groups such as ICE (International Contemporary Ensemble) and Flexible Music. Gramophone included his recording of Bach's BWV 998, 1003, 1010 under their 'Best New Releases from North America' in their May 2006 issue.

Nadal, a native New Yorker, is a graduate of both Yale and the Manhattan School of Music who is known not only for his nine published volumes of classical guitar transcriptions and arrangements with Dover Publications but for his recent performance work on both electric and classical guitar at the Other Minds Festival in San Francisco, the New York Guitar Festival and New York's longtime enclave for the avant-garde, Kitchen. Nadal also tutored actor Peter Saarsgard to play a bit of classical guitar for a scene in the Zach Braff film, *Garden State*.

Their typical performance includes *milongas* written by E. de la Cruz and C. de la Pua, Rodolfo Biagi, A. Balbin, J. Ogivieki and Alberto Gomez with *tangos* by H. Expósito, H. Stamponi, J. C. Cobian, E. Cadicamo, Azucena Maizani, just to name a few. With his dramatic gestures, long black hair and louche posturing, singer Pulpo will interject an intense, often comedic monologue

between the songs with a running commentary on the music, the double-meaning of slang, Argentinean politics and, of course, tango as it relates to gender politics and affairs of the heart. He effectively plays the role of a tango lounge lizard frontman, offset by a dash of self-effacing charm as he leads audiences into a musical underworld like Dante's guide to a South American version of *The Inferno*, complete with high-heeled, flame-skirted tango dancers sweeping across the stage to a searing set of amplified acoustic and electric guitar.

The group started out performing a handful of bookings on the Lower East Side of New York at various clubs until they established a regular weekly Sunday evening slot for the past four years at the wine cellar room of an East Greenwich Village restaurant called Via Della Pace. They also built a name for itself performing benefit concerts within the local Argentinean community, eventually landing summer gigs in the Hamptons and more recently, as guest performers at the Raritan River Music Festival, St. Bartholomew's Concert Series, Hofstra University, Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Tango Festival, the 2005 GFA at Oberlin College and Carnegie's Weill Hall. This past December, they performed at The Mantis Club in Buenos Aires.

Their forthcoming debut CD, *Zvi Migdal Live at St. Bart's*, will be available on amazon.com later on this year. For more information and concert tour updates: www.thezvimigdal.com