

OSKAR STROCK (OSCAR STROK) AND EDDIE (ADY) ROSNER: BERLIN IN THEIR LIVES AND MUSIC

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The article is devoted to the Berlin period of creativity of Oskar Strock (1893-1975) and Eddie Rosner (1910-1976), which coincided with the tumultuous years of 1929–33 and was marked by fruitful participation in the Berlin music scene, collaboration with the same colleagues, the emergence of their first hits, and the release of their first records. It explores the common influences and mutual interactions, the characteristics and significance of Strock's new works against the backdrop of the development of tango in Germany and Europe. The focus is on Berlin as a transit point and melting pot, where the music of Strock and Rosner first reached a broad listening audience, the differences between Strock's works, the dramatic or tragic paradigms he proposed and optimistic salon and cabaret tangos, that dominated the European tango scene at the time, when new traditions and vectors were being established, defining the character of tango in several countries and the gradual departure from consumer music towards the emergence of jazz and tango as autonomous musical genres. The article also discusses the emergence of Eddie Rosner as a distinctive jazz musician who maintained an interest in tango throughout his artistic life and career.

Keywords: Oskar Strock (Strok), Eddie Rosner, Eastern European jazz and tango, Berlin, interwar period

Introduction

It is no exaggeration to say that in many ways, the episodes in the Weimar Republic were important in the artistic careers of Oskar Strock (1893, Daugavpils – 1975, Riga) and Eddie Rosner (1910, Berlin – 1976, West Berlin). First and foremost, both names relate to the German capital because of the initial success celebrated there. For Rosner, who was born in Berlin and later lived there continuously, this success was immediate (despite his family's connection to Poland – his father initially and later also his musical connection). For Strock, no less talented, but a slightly older musician, the success was somewhat delayed.

Strock's activities in Germany have hardly been researched. In research and, above all, in perception, there has been almost no reflection regarding the fact that Berlin was also Oskar Strock's first international "starting location". Although he was an alumnus of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, born in the territory of current Republic of Latvia and until mid-1920s, lived only in Russia and Latvia, in-depth studies prove that Strock actually became a tango composer and bandmaster, particularly in Berlin. Strock was almost 20 years older than his colleague Rosner, but his compositional career up to that point had not been very significant or extensive. For Rosner, his success came as a music interpreter: member, a sideman of diverse dance- and jazz-orchestras was particularly important, decisive and spectacular.

Both Rosner and Strock turned out to be either carriers or transporters of Western culture, which they brought to Eastern European soil. Both of them worked at the intersection of genres and in that border area where schlager, also popular song and utility music ends, and real jazz and tango begin. They laid the foundation of tango and swing in Eastern Europe, especially in Russia, leading the way for popular music. However, for various reasons, still an unfair and generally wrong tendency can be observed, namely, in several historical narratives the work by Rosner and Strock falls outside the framework of jazz or tango canons, or is even ignored.¹ In the 1930s, they were persecuted both in Germany, from where they were forced to flee in 1933 from the Nazis, and in the Soviet Union. And here we should not forget about the prohibition to perform their works or to mention their names. Consequently, it led to a certain oblivion. Dictatorial regimes almost managed to erase both names from cultural memory.

This article does not go into all the details of Rosner's early development as a musician and Strock's connections with Berlin, which began in the 1920s and were particularly intense between 1929 and 1933 (in 1932 the composer lived in Berlin hoping to settle here permanently). It looks at the general points that connect Strock and Rosner, as well as their particular status in context of the European jazz and tango community, particularly the Eastern European jazz and tango community. Both musicians were of Jewish descent, both collaborated with the same German colleagues: for example, we can speak about dance orchestra leaders Marek Weber and Efim Schachmeister in Berlin. In some aspects Weber, Schachmeister, conductor Otto Dobrindt and composer Walter Jurmann could be seen as connecting persons or "links" between Strock and Rosner.

Berlin: Transit and starting point, meeting place, crossroads, hit forge

At the time, when Oskar Strock was preparing the recording session of his first tango *Black Eyes* in Berlin and finally made it through the Marek Weber Orchestra (Rec. 1; Rec. 2), Adi Rosner, who would later be called Ady and Eddie, was part of the Marek Weber Orchestra's line-up. It is not proven whether Rosner participated in the recording, but it cannot be ruled out either. We assume that Strock and Rosner often worked with the same session musicians as the boundaries between the main line-ups of the large dance orchestras to a certain extent were fluid. Strock shows constant interest in the works of such authors as Paul Abraham (Pál Ábrahám) and Friedrich Hollaender (Hollander), whose music was performed by the Weintraub Syncopators Ensemble with Eddie Rosner at *Trumpet and Violin*. Moreover, Strock called the German version of the tango *Black Eyes* almost similarly to one of Friedrich Hollaender's songs: *Zwei dunkle Augen* (*Two dark eyes*; Rec. 3), and for another tango he completely borrowed the name

¹ For example, Alexandra Malli does not mention Oskar Strock at all among other composers in her Masters' thesis *The compositional reception of the Tango Argentino* over the years 1910–1940, despite the fact that it provides a fairly comprehensive panorama and statistics for European countries, primarily German-speaking, including Malli's mentioned "directory of all tangos" based on Hofmeister's monthly reports 1910–1940 and the ONB library catalogue (Malli 2013, 36–47, 54–63, 163–332).

from the foxtrot *Wenn wieder Frühling ist (When Spring Comes Again)* by Paul Abraham (Bergmeier 1982, 29) (Rec. 4). The instrumental piece “*Only in Sebastopol*”, by Ernst Steffan, recorded in the *Berliner Singakademie* by the band *Weintraub Syncopators* from 1929 (Rec. 5) shows similar arrangement patterns that can also be seen in the recording of Efim Schachmeister *Wie siehst Du aus? (Novoye bublički)* by Oskar Strock from the same year (Rec. 6).

In August 1930, Oskar Strock worked in Berlin with Walter Jurmann, who was also a singer and would later become a Hollywood composer writing music, for example, for such a film as *His Butler's Sister*. The Strock-Jurmann collaboration is documented by recordings released the same year in the German capital by *Adler Electro* (Rec. 7; Rec. 8). Curiously, one of the recordings was called: *Mein Liebster muss Trompeter sein (My favorite has to be a trumpeter)*; Rec. 7). By the way, it should be noted that at the recording session for “Adler-Electro” Strock fell back on the new and very popular song *Veronika, der Lenz ist da (Veronika, spring is here)* by Jurmann, also two of Friedrich Holländer's songs from the film *The Blue Angel* have been used (Rec. 9; Rec. 10). The band *Weintraub Syncopators* (1924–1933) provided the soundtrack for this film. From December 1932 to February 1933, Jurmann was part of the team as a composer responsible for filming the UFA sound film *Heut' kommt's drauf an (Today's what matters)* with the famous German actor Hans Albers in the leading role. *Weintraub Syncopators* appeared in the film and was one of the few show bands that were constantly commissioned by the film industry (Bergmeier 1982, 29–30). Of the five songs recorded then, Walter Jurmann composed four. They were also recorded in Berlin with the Odeon Artists Orchestra under the direction of Otto Dobrindt. Additionally, there was a tango: *Immer wenn ich glücklich bin, muss ich schrecklich weinen (Whenever I'm happy, I cry terribly)*; Rec. 11). It is interesting that Dobrindt was the one who made the second vocal-with-orchestra- recording of the Strock's tango *Černye glaza / Schwarze Augen (Black Eyes)* in Berlin (Rec. 12).

At the international symposium dedicated to Oskar Strock held in Daugavpils, Latvia in 2007, it was said that particularly “Riga between the two wars – as a more or less comfortable city, with numerous cafes, restaurants, dance halls – became an environment that, in a good sense, provoked Oscar Strock to experiment in the tango genre [..]” (Neminušij 2007, 73). But it is known that Berlin was characterized by much more musical provocation possibilities and much more of an extensive range of leisure activities. Over and beyond, there were many light music orchestras and record companies here. Before the Nazis came to power, the state did not try to interfere, direct or label certain art as degenerate. Berlin was a “melting pot” and a gathering place for many active forces. “The list of bands committed to *Haus Gourmenia* alone reads like an encyclopedia of jazz from around 1930” (Wolfram 1992, 46). “The *Barberina* was one of the first large dance palaces in the west of Berlin in the 1920s.” (Ibid., 59)

Among the best-known locations were also *Barberina* and *Casanova* – Oskar Strock used these names for his commercial projects in Riga. The Berlin *Barberina* program of February 1933 contains information that “Kapelle Widmann with its jazz soloists provides entertainment” and “Nadeschda Feodorova, the beautiful Russian sings to

the dance” (Wolfram 1992, 62). Certainly, Kurt Widmann soon became one of the most accomplished bandleaders in Germany, and the Russian presence was relatively large.

Most dance orchestras that performed before 1933 were led by bandmasters who came from the former Tsarist Russia. Some of them used pseudonyms. Violinist Lev Goltsman began to call himself Dayos Bela, pianist Hermann-Bernhard Leopoldovich Biek, a native of Tallinn, began to be called Ben Berlin, violinist Samuil Baskin took the Nickname Sam Baskini; Violinists Ilya Livshakov and Efim Shachmeister kept their names (cf. e. g. Lotz 2006). In 1930–31, Dayos Bela and Efim Schachmeister were engaged for programs in *Casanova* (Wolfram 1992, 63). All these musicians had great success, regularly captured on records, which were released in large numbers. Almost none of them composed music or had any composer ambitions. All of them managed to leave Germany and thus avoid the Holocaust. Most finally ended up in Argentina. Almost no one retained their former popularity in a new place, and weren’t able to gain fame comparable to that which they had enjoyed in Berlin. They did not become the founder of or the brightest, leading representative of a certain genre, as happened with Strock and Rosner in Latvia, in Poland, in the Soviet Union and more other countries.

While Friedrich Holländer, Walter Jurmann, Paul Abraham, Marek Weber and Efim Schachmeister went towards literally American direction after 1933 (Kühn 1996; Walendowski 2005; Buxbaum 2006; Lotz 2006), whether North or South, Rosner and Strock acted as mediators within the European continent and even became the co-founders of the corresponding traditions of several places. One could say with complete certainty, without speculation, that Rosner and Strock are united not only by their joint work, so to speak, in various locations, first in Berlin and later in the USSR. They have a special role in implanting certain styles and ways of playing on foreign soil.

As for Rosner, the ballrooms of the Weimar Republic and their progress in terms of jazz and revue should be mentioned. Rosner brought this experience to Poland and the USSR (Brodânskij 1940; Bulgak 1961; Il’in 1961; Saul’skij 1990; Dragilev 2011). While Strock was inspired by the culture of Berlin, he created a new type of tango that contrasted with what was previously cultivated in the German capital. This neither went unnoticed nor without consequences. Besides, the performances of Oskar Strock (1935) and the Weintraubs (although without Eddie Rosner, 1937) in Japan, Rosner’s guest appearances in Scandinavia (1938) were as essential as Strock’s influence on development of the Polish tango with the assistance and mediation of Publisher Joseph Altschuler, poet and translator Władysław Szlengel, singer Olga Kamińska and Jerzy Siemionow among others. And we should not forget the Romanian Tango related to the work by Peter Leschenko and the initial ignition of Finnish tango in the 1940s, which was an involuntarily exercised acquaintance of Finns to Russian tango music - genre that essentially formed in its turn under the decisive influence by Strock. The impact by Strock can also be observed in former Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, France and Italy.

Tango or foxtrot? What kind of tango?

The Russian poet Andrei Bely observed Berlin's nightlife of the 1920s and witnessed how foxtrot fever had swept through Germany rather than tango fever. Some of the youth representatives called this capital the "black international of modern Europe". The poet was horrified and concluded: "everyone is dancing in Berlin" – from billionaires to workers and beggars – "from seventy-year-old women to seven-year-old babies." They dance in "plyasulni" (*plâsul'ni*), as Bely dubbed any ballrooms and halls, "decent, semi-decent, completely indecent. Germans and Viennese, Czechoslovakians and Swedes, immigrants from Poland are dancing and China, Tsarist Russia, Japan, England..." (Mierau 1987, 56).

The German musicologist Fred Ritzel notes that around 1923, the tango offered in the German music industry started to decrease and was less than ten years earlier (Ritzel 1988), when the tango boom in Paris was observed. When analytically looking back at the popularity of the genre in comparison to the other dances, a discrepancy emerges between the historical truth and today's image that prevails in the collective memory. This image reveals a distorted overestimation: it is often believed that the tango was in great demand even before 1928. In fact, and contrary to this idea, there are only nine tangos out of a total number of 8 editions of the popular series of music books *Zum 5 Uhr Tee* (*For 5 o'clock tea*), published by the Viennese Boheme Publishing House (Vienna-Berlin-New York, 1925-26, with 18 to 20 songs per booklet). These include *Ein bisschen Feuer* (*A Little Fire*) by Ralph Benatzky and *Märchen, die uns der Wind erzählt* (*Fairy Tales that the Wind Tells Us*) by Bert Silving, two French compositions (e.g. *Tango d'un Solitaire* by R. Lessig-Turin), two Italian ones, one American, two songs focus on Latin American (sic!) cities.

The demand was addressed within relatively modest limits: local titles did not overflow, and true Argentinian productions were not clearly evident. When they were, these were titles such as *Adiós muchachos* dated 1928, in which Argentina is considered a bearer of bad luck. However, this song has been given new, absolutely meaningless and conservative-bucolic German lyrics that fit well into the prevailing misconception of tango (Rec. 13). The bright major key and deceptive, cheerful original interpretations had led to completely wrong conclusions. Amazingly, the tragic, almost blasphemous and "terribly black lyrics" (Riedel 2016, 198) of the Argentinian original by César Vedani correspond to the song by Sergei Rachmaninoff, to words by Fyodor Tyutchev (*Fëdor Tûtčëv*, op. 26, No. 2) *Vsë otnâl u menâ* (*He took everything from me*), paired at the same time with the bitter courage of some Russian gypsy romances.² Everything suggests that foxtrot was the focus of interest in Germany and if, exceptionally, it was about tango, the compositions in the tango rhythm should – contrary to Argentinian practice – not appear depressing, but either ironic or life-affirming.

The constitutive narrative and constructive peculiarities of the then still relatively new Argentine tango canción (the lament of an abandoned man, a tragic love affair,

2 https://notes.tarakanov.net/katalog/ko_mpozitsii/vse-otnyal-y-menya/

which is now more resigned and not crying out for revenge) appeared at the end of the 1920s in Europe and especially not really arrived or wanted in Germany (Malli 2013, 78). The lyricists provided material that left the performers with no choice but to slip into the role of a charmer or a likeable, reasonable and reliable cavalier or to play a father figure. A typical example is the tango by Benatzky – (*Come into my arms, beautiful woman*) dated 1922. Due to the fact that Benatzky is one of the composers who wrote tangos particularly often, this reference is not insignificant (Malli 2013, 57). The lyrical “I”, characterized by lovesickness and personal unhappiness, was by no means the focus (Rec. 14).

There was no highly emotional “settlement” to any dangerous and merciless “man-eating libertines”. If anything, the women were not begged to, but “gently admonished and wisely taught”, with a background knowledge that a lady is normally dependent on a man. Entirely in line with the edifying and entertaining “schlager” energy or strategy, the man should not lament and whine, but be portrayed as full of seductive confidence, so that the audience is not unpleasantly surprised and possibly deterred by an excessive dose of direct melancholy and sentimentality. As with Arthur Schnitzler, the woman could also bear the characteristics of the already established figure of the “sweet girl”, who, as is well known, representing a counterpart to the *femme fatale* and had appeared much more often in the cheerful foxtrots.

190

From a musical point of view, European authors outside of the cabaret stage who dealt with tango alongside other ballroom dances and created new feel-good hits, practiced less intellectually charged, but “precious”, cultivated, operetta-like and serenade-like songs, set in extremely light tones, which basically looked for their origin and model in the Habanera by Sebastián Iradier *La Paloma*. As with almost every hit, love was the focus of attention, but one that seems above all optimistic, hopeful and carefree, which one could possibly sing about in a playfully flirtatious and tongue-in-cheek manner, but above all superficially. Without daring to show subjectivity, philosophical depth and impassioned bitterness, and savoring sharp contrasts, the music and lyrics here contribute a solemn or soothing character; the listener should indulge in beautiful thoughts, whether they be memories or visions of the future (Rec. 15; Rec. 16. Rec. 17; Rec. 18).

These songs show a symptomatic template: they are mostly conceived in the major, in the form verse-refrain (AB). The B-sections (refrain) are always in the major. At that time part A was often called “song” and the refrain was called “tango”. The series of such works is innumerable. The Spanish *Kapellmeister* Juan Llosas, who resided with his tango orchestra in the Berlin dance palace *Femina* (today’s Ellington Hotel of Berlin) and recorded several songs for labels *Grammophone* and *Ultraphone* (both his own and those of other authors) or *Orchestrola* (as Juan Sassoli, in his repertoire showed a celebratory, magnificent major charisma (Rec. 19; Rec. 20). It is no coincidence that Llosas increasingly turned to atypical tango instrumentation and the corresponding sound over time, which no longer had anything to do with tango (Rec. 21; Rec. 22).

Choosing tango

The great Latvian poet Ojārs Vācietis once wrote: „sing the saddest song, but you will be happy“³... The famous Russian poet Oleg Tschukhoncev (*Oleg Čuhoncev*) paraphrased him in an adaptation and made his own conclusion, summarized: “The saddest motive is better than silence” (Vacietis 1990, 39). Strock seemed to have a similar point of view, an analogous approach, having caught and having felt the corresponding thunderous changes in society. After his first Berlin premiere – the foxtrot *Novye publički* (*New Bagels*) and the recording session for *Adler Electro* – he quickly abandoned (and with some exceptions – for example, the shimmy *Polly*) from composing entertaining, up-tempo-numbers or gave up foreign novelty songs on discs, although he advertised them. In Strock’s tangos, there are hardly any show-booth-like, schematic conventions or cabaret alienation effects.

Also, entertaining tasks of international dance- and show-music, in which only an almost gutted rhythm frame for an irrelevant hit remains from the Tango Argentino and the emotional, dramatic, psychological, sometimes bizarre message is degraded or reduced to a secondary, weakened and suppressed quality, did not meet Strock’s requirements. On the other hand, he tries to use the “mood painting”, the “melancholy of disappearance” and the depiction of feelings to bring the legacy of a European “classic”. Thus, the general requirements of an evergreen hit are always met. After all, the tango created by Strock not only appears as an almost objective genre of urban everyday music, but also as the bearer of a new emotional layer.

Strock obviously used the works that were known as the first tangoes or the pieces that played a key role in the genesis of the genre. There is much to suggest that Strock was not oriented towards the preferences of consumers with popular props. Finally, the affinity of the first two bars of *Moë poslednee tango* (“My Last Tango”) with Bizet’s basic motivic pattern, tragic-fatal Catabasis is doubly intertextual and should be understood as a nested and continuing meta metaphor that refers to other predecessors and above all to one primal melody by Iradier, the other melody by the same Iradier as the initial image and basic template (Dragilev, Nowack 2019).

Most of Strock’s works are conceived in the stringent minor, slow, somber and melancholic. Even in the songs, however, which are deceptively bright in character and have radiant major cadences, “wavering” sounds come through: the elements of the minor in the major key, with elegiac raptures. The break with the previous Russian tango cabaret tendencies, as well as with the Berlin tango custom- in which the meaning of the genre shrank to a decorative role or was relatively narrowly specified, the applied utilitarian purposes, the exalted theatrical devices, stylized-cheerful or salon cabaret “guidelines” can be heard. It is neither provoked nor ironic, ambiguously or boldly acted, no exotic story is told, and there is no one-dimensional entertainment either.

3 In Latvian: “Nodziedāt pašu skumjāko, bet būs priecīgi.”

The lyrical “I” comes first as the ultimate, discreetly “equipped” with the message of a “shortened drama of fate”, if one uses Dieter Reichardt’s term (Reichardt 1984, 114), with world pain, which ensures understandable recognition features and comparable effects and the listener into a world of feelings that can be familiar to almost every affine recipient. The lyrical “I” invites the audience to identify using very general emotional expressions. The whole structure – melodically and textually – is characterized by a sublime, cantilena-like, elegiac-lyrical language that shows an inner restlessness from the start, but in contrast to many “gypsy romances”, is stricter and more dominant, only sparingly affected by longing and farewell told. However, we can say that the theme of a failed love is a maneuver to refer to existential threats.

Riga cultural scientist Boris Ravdin already spoke in his broadcasts for the BBC about the thought of finiteness arising in Strock’s Tangos (Archive of the International Oskar Strock and Eddie Rosner Society). This in turn corresponds to the basic gesture of the tango, to an opinion or reading of Enrique Santos Discépolo, according to which a tango represents a “mixture of anger, pain, faith and deprivation” (or to the maxim of the other Argentine poet Ramon Gomez de la Serna: in contrast to other music, the one plays to heal wounds, tango is there “to open the wounds and put your finger in them”) (Reichardt 1984, 147; Birkenstock, Rüegg 1999, 23). In the tango text of *Black Eyes* Strock comes incredibly close to Cortusi’s *La Cumparsita* text: “Those eyes were my luck, I look for them everywhere, but can’t find them anywhere” so says Cortusi (Birkenstock, Rüegg 1999, 127). “Two black eyes fairy tale splendor was all my happiness, they can’t be forgotten anywhere, where are you hiding now, who is the other one close to you?” – is what Strock says when we read the German adaptation by Paul Eplée that was published in Riga from 1930 and a trans linear translation of the original Russian text together or side by side (Archive of the International Oskar Strock and Eddie Rosner Society).

Nevertheless, consciously or unconsciously, Strock went above and beyond the depiction of abandonment, the longing for the beloved or the pain of separation, especially by musical means. He offered something new. This is evident through its following special features. Far from the morbid exoticism of a *Theater Guingol* (among others *Les Apaches* as Art-Figure), far from a more or less schematic exoticism of distant trips to foreign countries—which was typical for the Russian tango before the revolution and in the time of NEP, far from the superficiality of the salon-entertaining German variant or its German cabaret form, but also far from the songwriter-like, direct, sometimes exaggerated and crude accusation of a woman, which *lunfardo* flaunts even more drastically, which was characteristic of *tango canción* in Argentina.

It should not be forgotten that it was only in the 1930s that Gardel’s songs came to light which – as is usually the case in Europe – have an orchestral accompaniment and, like Strock’s, primarily express a memorable cantilena-like melody. Strock created a genre which was, to use the words of Fred Ritzel ostensibly “escapist tango with a negative emotional tendency, can be named, which starts on the basis of the standard situation, but generalizes it in such a way that love story seems to extend symbolically

to life circumstances in general” (Ritzel 1988, 54). Unhappy love appears as a substitute, a representation of everything else, it is extrapolated and functions as an euphemist replacement for a detailed expression. The success of “escapist” as a definition is debatable; after all, it’s less about an ivory tower, loss of reality, and more about fear, homelessness, inner emigration and Aesopian language. The analysis of the musical situation and the entertainment stage of that time gives reason to assume that it was Strock, who turned out to be the instigator and pioneer of the new style. Focusing on melancholic pathos on the verge of despair; they are mostly total minor tangos with melodic parts in a harmonic minor, chromatic steps in melodic phrases and in the accompaniment, which create either a lamenting or lethargic atmosphere.

There are indications that the fame and influence of Strock and the authority of his music after 1929–30 – meaning after the days of its famous premiere of *Black Eyes* (“with Russian chorus singing”, as it said on the label) and Marek Weber as Orchestra-Leader – were relatively rapidly growing, although his name didn’t necessarily became known (Rec. 23). It is very symbolic that the release of the record is dated November 30, 1929 – that is, six days after the start of the stock market crash in the United States, which ended just the day before on Black Tuesday, October 29. We can say that in Germany came the first music reactions – proof and evidence of influence – 1930 together with the so-called response to *Black Eyes* – *You still long for Black Eyes* by Strock own, where, despite the “Russian refrain”, its linguistic affiliation was no longer separately reported (Rec. 24). Furthermore, one must mention *Liebe war es nie* (*Love Was Never*) (1931) by Fred Markusch, which actually came from Hungary, that appeared on records as an alleged “Russian tango”: explicit subtitles or direct names on the label were either intended to simulate the provenance or to symbolize a stylistic affiliation (Rec. 25).

Markusch’s next tango *Ob Du mich lieb hast* (*Whether you love me*) is also one of them and was recorded by Marek Weber (Rec. 26). Actually, one should also include the tango song *Kleine Sehnsucht* (“A Little Longing”) by Friedrich Holländer, which is still very popular today, written in 1930 as part of the incidental music for *Phaea*, a comedy by Fritz von Unruh and recorded by *Weintraub Syncopatos* as “Jazz symphonists under Holländer” (Rec. 27). The A part of this tango, from bar 4 to bar 18 in its strict minor, is so close to the tone and idiom of Oskar Strock that the B part (refrain), which is in the major, but is very timid, delicate and fragile, makes the previous ones melancholic sequences only confirmed.⁴ A similar conveying emotional state and methodology can also be seen in Walter Jurmann’s no less well-known song *Ohne Worte lass uns scheiden* (*Without Words, Let’s Divorce*) from the Austrian film *Ausflug ins Leben* (*Journey into life* (1931; Rec. 28)). We can even exclude the rather parodic song *Play me a Russian tango on the balalaika* by Jurmann’s closest employee Bronislav Kaper from 1931 (Rec. 29).

In Poland, these tendencies reached a culmination in 1936 in the tango *Ta ostatnia niedziela* (*Last Sunday* or *Utomlënnoe solnce* (*Exhausted Sun*) in the Russian version]

4 <https://kulturakademin.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Eine-kleine-Sehnsucht.pdf>

by Jerzy Petersburski, who previously worked with German patterns and set pieces (see *O Donna Clara*). It is certainly not a coincidence that also began in 1930 and that at this time the number of sad Polish tangos, which adopt the Strock's *tango canción* habitus and are composed in the characteristic continuous minor and tone, increasing strongly, rapidly and continuously. The first, which still has traces of the old Apache exoticism, but already has "one foot in the new emotional layer", is the song *Nie odchódź ode mnie* (*Don't Leave Me*) (Artur Gold-A.Włast) from the revue *Uśmiech Warszawy* (*The Smile Of Warsaw*) from 1930 (Rec. 30). Of course, we can consider this situation in the spirit of phenomena developing in parallel, but firstly, a number of facts speak in favor of our hypothesis, and secondly, these processes need to be considered comprehensively and separately.

Weintraub Syncopators and "consorts" as an (alternative) "interface and hot spot"

Let's summarize so far. The time of the above-mentioned developments and phenomena coincides with the breakthrough and successes of Oskar Strock's first tangos, which were recorded in Berlin by Marek Weber and Otto Dobrindt, among others, as well as Eddie Rosner's work with Weber and Weintraub (Bergmeier 1982, 23). Nothing is known about any specific encounters between Strock and Rosner, there is no solid evidence, but it is entirely possible. It was a short and intense period, on the eve of the escape from Berlin. Strock and Rosner were very active people who were not afraid of risk and adventure or exaggeration. It is completely clear that Strock followed the activity of the *Weintraub Syncopators* band, and it is not for nothing that he borrowed two track names from this band's repertoire.

Weintraub recalled in 1979: "Each of us used five music instruments. So we could play pieces like *Rhapsody in Blue*. We just changed instruments during performance."⁵ Playing different instruments was accompanied by playing with props, lighting effects, dressing up, comedy situations. For example, like this: the beam of a spotlight snatched out a musician, depicting a saxophone solo while a flute sounded in the darkness. In the repertoire of the *Weintraub Syncopators*, they creatively mastered and many elements of the then light music – the Charleston – and tango, Latin American rhythms and the new Viennese operetta, French chanson, Chicago jazz and early swing, frivolous lyrics, in which absurdist techniques coexisted with parodies about conservative Prussian morality.

Syncopators amazed the viewer many times divers, as they would say now, an integrated approach to the matter. An important factor in success was entertainment – pantomime and buffoonery (Dragilev 2011; Dümmling 2022). Perhaps the most famous song was the work of Jurmann and Kaper – *My Gorilla Has a Villa in the Zoo*, in which the ensemble not only plays, but also sings in the manner of the very popular vocal group

⁵ Weintraub's recollections are based on Jörg's Süsenbach and Klaus Sander German documentary (Süsenbach, Sander 2000).

Comedian Harmonists (Bergmeier 1982, 29). Later, Rosner would implement the findings of his colleagues in Poland (admiring local critics), and in the Soviet Union (theatrical comic-satirical and parody-humorous six-minute jazz suites *From two to five* and *Black Eyes*), which, however, have only been handed down as audio documents (Rec. 31).

The Weintraub's band was considered a jazz band and often called themselves jazz symphonists. Strock went even further and called his formation Jazz Orchestra at his recording session in Berlin. So positioned Strock himself as the conductor of a jazz orchestra (Rec. 32), in contrast to many others in Berlin, who identified themselves as Leaders of Dance Orchestras (Tanzkapellmeisters). He soon published a sheet music album in Riga called *Russian Jazz*. The next one was Dajos Béla, seen in the 1932 film *Gitta discovers her heart* with the then very successful Hungarian actress and singer Gitta Alpar, who was very popular in Berlin. Dajos Béla's piano was played by Franz Grothe, a later very well-known composer and conductor whose pieces Strock was also happy to mentioned in the publishing announcements, catalogs and reference books of his publishing house (Dragilev 1995). The music for *Gitta discovers her heart* was written by the Hungarian composer of Russian-Jewish descent Nicholas (Miklós) Brodsky. A year earlier he also became known through the release of the tango *O Cara Mia* (Rec. 34).

Oskar Strock chose this name as a reserve title name for his tango *Musen'ka* (*Musenka*), in which he tried to stick to life-affirming operetta-like German or Italian patterns (Archive of the International Oskar Strock and Eddie Rosner Society). And the waltz *What can be as beautiful as your love* from the film *Gitta discovers her heart* was later taken over as the romance *Pis'mo* (*Message*) by the Soviet singer Claudia Schulschenko (*Klavdiâ Šul'ženko*), who also interpreted Strock's works. But in the pieces that Strock named in the same way as Hollaender and Abraham, he suggested his own dramatic alternatives - as if out of defiance towards the ironic, light-hearted and mischievous initial counterparts. Compared to the compositions of Hollaender and especially Abraham, the tango-works of the same name by Strock was painted in disturbing tones, full of vague forebodings or hints of impending or already completed negative changes, contained notes that reflected the mood of a crisis.

Interestingly, Oskar Strock was fascinated by Abraham and found his fate and the circumstances of the escape from Berlin much more terrible than his own. Later, Strock repeatedly recalled how Abraham's operetta *Ball im Savoy* had its acclaimed premiere in Berlin on Christmas Eve 1932 (December 23), and how Paul Abraham was physically attacked by the Nazis at the entrance to the Great Playhaus (today – Friedrichstadtpalast) in February 1933 and was not allowed in. Completely shocked, he fled from the fascists to his Hungarian homeland, in the end, as it soon turned out, only to travel on to New York via Paris and Havana after a few years (Waller 2021; Meesmann 2023). In the early 1930s, Abraham held his famous goulash parties in a rented town house on Fasanenstrasse in Berlin, which was often referred to as a private palace. We can assume, that Strock, who lived nearby at the Pension Radloff Rumland on Kurfürstendamm 226 (Archive of the International Oskar Strock and Eddie Rosner

Society),⁶ was also one of the invited guests, since Abraham was known for his polite and generous manner.

Something about Rosner in relation to tango

The young trumpet player Rosner, one of the most promising musicians of the European jazz scene of the time, in turn, already showed interest in tango. A comparison of some facts, assumptions and statements allows us to come to the conclusion, that he most likely already at that time made his addition to Fred Scher's polish tango *Jak gdyby nigdy nic* (*As if nothing had happened*) (Michalski 2007, 740), which he only recorded in the USSR (Rec. 34). For this song Rosner wrote his own introduction or verses and let it later called *Ostan'sâ* (*Stay with me*) in the Russian version. We noticed that his collaboration with Fred Scher also continued. Shortly after his arrival in Poland, Rosner recorded the tango *Ty i ja* (*You & Me*) by Scher for *Syrena Records* (Rec. 35). However, both songs were typical examples of tango based on German patterns.

The Polish *Band of Eddie Rosner*, touted as an American sensation and revue orchestra, performed at the locale *Alhambra* in Riga for several weeks in October 1938 (*Segodnâ večerom*. No. 235, 13.10.1938). As is well known, Oskar Strock also played here. In 1937, about a year before, Rosner made a remarkable recording of the tango *Dlaczego?* (*For what?*) by Zygmunt Schatz for *Syrena-Electro* in Warsaw (Rec. 36). The arrangement and playing style is completely in the spirit of Argentinean (atypical for Polish tangos and is in the vein of) *Orquesta Típica*.

With regard to the specifics of tango music, which always makes a tango recognizable, we could also fall back on the Argentine term *compás*, for which there is no adequate translation. Michael Lavocah compares it to Puls and places it somewhere in the area of the beat, but admits that it also has to do with agogics and articulation (Lavocah 2015, 6). Just like the feeling of swing in jazz, this is not just about a subjective listening impression of basic beats in every time signature, even if they are not very pronounced and regular, but about a sensorimotor tension, where, for example, overlapping rhythms and speech tone accents are freer. Recitation comes into play. *For what?* is an instrumental tango, at least nobody sings on the recording. It should be noted that, Zygmunt Schatz is the composer, who later, during the war, was to direct the camp orchestra near Lemberg and played the tangos on the death marches (Waitman 2018, 445–471; Zabarko, Müller, Müller 2019).⁷ In 1944, Rosner chose the title name *What for?* for a very successful original composition, in which he, to a certain extent, followed in Strock's footsteps or followed his instinctive example.⁸

6 Interviews with Strock's daughter Vera Strock in 1999 and further researches (Archive of the International Oskar Strock and Eddie Rosner Society).

7 See also: <https://sztetl.org.pl/de/node/3709>, <https://argumentua.com/stati/tango-smerti-muzyka-zakolyuchei-provolokoi-reikha>

8 <http://a-pesni.org/drugije/zatchem.htm>

This particularly succinct tango-song, conceived in a minor key, contains, perhaps like no other, the echoes of Russian folklore through its diatonic and plagal endings. The composition was recorded in two versions: an instrumental version and one with voice performing together with the tenor Georgiy Vinogradov (Rec. 37). The song also had lyrics intended for female vocals. This tango became by far the most popular of all the tangos that Rosner wrote and played. Through surviving original recordings and successful remixes as well as thanks to sheet music published at the end of the 1960s for piano, the tango *For what* remains relatively well-known today. The Moscow recording of Eddie Rosner's tango *Svidanije (Rendezvous)* from 1940 sounds less like a German or Polish dance and jazz orchestra and more like a symphonic, very pathetic and soundtrack-ready Hollywood and André Kostelanetz template.⁹ The only definitive reference here seems to be *Jalousie* by J. Gade was definitely justified, although the motif was not taken over. Also worth mentioning are recordings of the tango songs by his arranger Jerzy (Juriy) Belzatsky (*Rosita* and *Secret Island*; Rec. 38).

Further, the opening figure in its dominant basic idea in the instrumental tango *Rosita* can in turn be associated with Strock. Through the rhythmically concise use of pizzicatos from the strings in the first part of this tango (the opening figure is continued here and, as it were, saved: there is always an eighth note at the front, the overall picture ultimately produces a fifth-fall sequence), Rosner's big band was again in the style of playing of an Argentinean *Orquesta Típica* relatively close (Rec. 39). The second part, which could also be viewed as a refrain, was conceived in major, but reveals a romantic rapture, reinforced by a lyrical trumpet solo by Rosner. Unfortunately, the *Fantasy of Argentine Folk Songs and Melodies* performed by the orchestra¹⁰ has not survived either as an audio document or as a score. However, one can assume that the name of the fantasy corresponded to the euphemistic methods used in the USSR to mask the real thing. It is quite possible that this piece represented a potpourri of the well-known western tangos, which were not necessarily of Argentine origin.

On August 14, 1946, a few months before his arrest, Rosner managed to record another instrumental tango of his own, *Prošaj, ljubov' (Farewell, love)* which leads back to the tango *Golubye glaza (Light blue eyes)* by Oskar Strock. Despite a major part, which is not a refrain, but takes the role of an interlude or intermezzo and the transition, the minor idiom and aesthetics in this tango set the tone (Rec. 40).¹¹ While he was still in the labor camp, Rosner wrote tangos: in 1951 he composed the tango *Rutka* for accordion, dedicated to his wife (Michalski 2007, 772). After his release from prison, Rosner again began to perform tango being one of the first and few of their kind in the country. However, despite general liberalization and an inattention to the political "thaw," tango was not beyond the reach of official criticism. One of the eager critics of the *Oriental Tango* played by the Eddie Rosner Orchestra said that this "obtrusive" composition only aroused and spread longing or melancholy (Zak 1960).

9 <https://music.apple.com/ru/album/1539624738>, <http://kkre-12.narod.ru/rozner/svi.mp3>

10 Concert program (Archive of the International Oskar Strock and Eddie Rosner Society).

11 Eddie Rosner, State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR, Soviet Jazz Legends, Eddie Rosner Vol.1 © Copyright Looks like Music Released in 2017

Since Rosner had a meager discography in the 1950s and 1960s and was always striving to outwit or circumvent repertory commissions that were still active, we can, in the words of Michael Lavocah, “only imagine the riches that perished without recording and are known only to those who heard them live” (Lavocah 2015, 124). How did this *Oriental Tango* sound and what kind of tango was that even called that cannot be determined at the moment and also until recordings and more detailed information are found? With regard to Rosner, the author of the present work has already been able to register several times that despite all the shortcomings of the audio documents that have survived, there remains a glimmer of hope: the recordings gradually appear out of nowhere like a miracle – whether from concerts or from unpublished studio recordings, they improve the evidence. In any case, in 1962 Rosner recorded the tango song *Domani* (*Tomorrow*) by the Italian composer Salve D’Esposito in the original language (Rec. 41).

We will probably never find out how and why Rosner chose this particular piece. In all these years, Rosner has not been allowed to conduct any guest performances or tours abroad. Except for an improvised solo performance in a Karlovy Vary café during the Prague 65 jazz festival, nothing else is documented. Perhaps the decision with the tango *Domani* was simply because Rosner often had an Italian component in his programs in the 1960s. D’Esposito was a regional great in the field of Neapolitan songs. English researcher Michael Lavocah noted a certain compatibility between Neapolitan song and tango and highlighted the possibility of arranging these songs as tangos (Lavocah 2015, 151). The new Rosner Orchestra sounds different than was usual for the formation led by Eddie Rosner in the 1940s. The sound is luscious, massive and heavy on brass, there is also a powerful beat with many phrasings, agogic moments and reverberation effects in the singing, which at the end of the piece achieve the effect of a voice receding.

Around 1969, Eddie Rosner wrote the tango *Slova lûbvi* (*Words of Love*; Rec. 42), which amazingly linked to Oskar Strock’s new tango *Tvoi glaza* (*Your Eyes*, first published in 1975) (Rec. 43), and corresponded melodically. Rosner’s new tango was recorded by the popular Udmurt singer Margarita Suvorova. It is also interesting that texts for both tangos – by Strock and Rosner – were provided by Juri Zeitlin (*Ůrij Cejtlin*), a musician and author who had previously worked intensively with Rosner and even played in his orchestra.

Nothing is known about any contacts between Strock and Rosner dating back to this period, but the very fact of both works being so similar, the approximate coincidence in timing and the same author of the words, may give rise to the assumption of a non-random corresponding echo-elements as dialogue of two masters. Strock in the 1950-70s visited Moscow much more often than Rosner visited Riga. Upon returning to (West-)Berlin in 1973, Eddie Rosner managed to produce a big show program featuring the singer Lev Pilshchik (*Lev Pil’sik*) from Riga, who had already emigrated to the United States at that time and specially came to Berlin to participate in the new show (Kravčinskij, Peredrij 2020, 122). But Rosner’s passing in 1976 ruined all the future plans.

Final considerations

Most probably, the most important genre for Strock was tango, meanwhile, Rosner clearly preferred jazz. If we understand the German word “schlager” as a hit, as the highlight of the program, as a work that claims to become evergreen, the element of hit-ness has always been important for both Rosner and Strock. Strock and Rosner have spoken about this in various ways for various newspapers and magazines at various times (*Rižskoe vzmor'e*, No. 1; 1929; *Sovetskaâ muzyka*, No. 11, 1956). And nevertheless, the elements of the show were brought to the Soviet stage exclusively by Rosner. All of Strock's attempts ended in pre-war Latvia, at the latest when he was expelled from the Union of Composers. They both became Soviet citizens in 1939–40, at approximately the same time – with a difference of less than a year. Despite all the obstacles, Rosner managed to bring to the Soviet musical world not only the show-know-hows and skills of Weintraub Syncopators, but also swing style, which he mastered even better after leaving Germany – in Belgium, France and Poland.

A separate topic would be to compare further vectors of influence and its degrees by Strock and Rosner in the world. After World War II spread Strock's works throughout the world, they were pointwise recorded and performed in different countries. At the same time, they were almost officially removed from musical processes in the USSR. We can only provide sporadic and often barely attributed examples of performances of works from the Rosner Orchestra's repertoire or the appearance of his recordings outside the USSR. Among the most well-known cases were the recordings of two Foxtrots: the *Cowboy song* as an almost anonymous and attributed to Alexander Zfassmann (*Aleksandr Cfasman*) *Riding song* by the Leipzig Dance Orchestra under Kurt Henkels in GDR and the new version of *Paren'-parenek* (*Guy-guy*), recorded as *Cicha Woda* (*Still Water*) in Warsaw by Zbigniew Kurtycz (Michalsky 2007, 762).¹² Rosner brought true swing to the Poland and USSR, this was his real achievement. Strock in turn, was not only groundbreaking tango composer. His “signature” was left behind, noticed at least selectively in tango music of several countries.

¹² See e. g. <https://www.offiziellecharts.de/titel-details-1381843> .

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203

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