

South Bay Angle (A Twisted Tango)
Robert Greenberg
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Titles, like mold-scum atop month-old cottage cheese, can take on a life of their own.

South Bay Angle was originally composed in 1991 during an Astor Piazzolla-inspired fit of tango-madness. While a more appropriate title for the piece would have been something on the lines of “I Can Write One of Those!” or “This Gringo’s Token Tango”, circumstances conspired in another titular direction.

The piece was originally intended for performance on a program produced by Composers, Inc., a new-music collective in which I was (and remain) an artistic director. Composers Inc. was then in its seventh season. In those days when newspapers still mattered, Composers, Inc. sought to receive as many print reviews as possible. To that end, the organization invited Paul Hertelendy - who was then the music critic for the San Jose Mercury News - to cover its concerts. He said he would do so provided that there was some sort of “south-bay angle” which addressed the specific needs of his south-bay readership. Thinking myself clever, I thus entitled the piece “South Bay Angle”. Hertelendy would get his “angle” and Composers, Inc. would get its coverage.

It didn’t work out that way. The piece was never performed; Hertelendy never got his “angle”; and Composers, Inc. never received a review from the San Jose Mercury News. Instead, twenty years later, I returned to South Bay Angle and rewrote it from the ground up.

The piece is cast as a large-scale “A-B-A” form. The violin is a willing participant in the tango during the “A” sections, but a rather reluctant tangoista in the “B” section, during which it tries mightily to turn the music into a waltz. It does not succeed, and the piece ends as it began, in a blaze of rhythmic fury.