

Italian-Australian Musicians, ‘Argentino’ Tango Bands and the Australian Tango Band Era

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For more than two decades from the commencement of Italian mass migration to Australia post-World War II, Italian-Australian affinity with Hispanic music was dynamically expressed through the immense popularity of Latin-American inflected dance music within the Italian communities, and the formation of numerous ‘Italian-Latin’ bands with names like Duo Moreno, El Bajon, El Combo Tropicale, Estrellita, Mambo, Los Amigos, Los Muchachos, Mokambo, Sombrero, Tequila and so forth. For venue proprietors wanting to offer live ‘Latin-American’ music, the obvious choice was to hire an Italian band. Even today, if one attends an Italian community gala night or club dinner-dance, the first or second dance number is likely to be a cha-cha-cha, mambo, tango, or else a Latinised Italian hit song played and sung in a way that is unmistakably Italian-Latin—to a packed dance floor.

This article is the fifteenth in a series of publications relating to a major monograph project, *The Tango Touch: ‘Latin’ and ‘Continental’ Influences on Music and Dance before Australian ‘Multiculturalism.’*¹ The present article explains how the Italian affinity for Hispanic music was first manifested in Australian popular culture in the form of Italian-led ‘Argentino tango,’ ‘gaucho-tango,’ ‘Gypsy-tango,’ ‘rumba,’ ‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘all-nations’ bands, and through individual talented and entrepreneurial Italian-Australians who were noted for their expertise in Hispanic and related musics. It describes how a real or perceived Italian affinity with Hispanic and other so-called ‘tango band music’ opened a gateway to professional opportunity for various Italian-Australians, piano accordionists in particular. The article also

¹ For a complete list of related articles and details of *The Tango Touch* project, see [www.ausmdr.com, ‘Publications.’](http://www.ausmdr.com/Publications/)

traces some social and professional connections between the early 'Argentino' tango bands and later 'tango,' 'gaucho,' 'Gypsy' and 'rumba' bands. *The Tango Touch* project as a whole is interpreted through a specially-conceived theoretical framework and an array of concepts and interpretative 'tools,' such as 'assimilated ethnicity,' 'retained ethnicity' or 'hyper-ethnicity,' which are explained in previous writings.² The present article is primarily an informed historical account of a significant but overlooked phenomenon in early Italian-Australian and Australian popular and light music.

Italians in Earlier Popular Music

The broader narrative of Italian-Australians in popular music begins with specific events in colonial era history. One example is establishment of a Swiss-Italian community of around three thousand people in the Daylesford area in the mid-nineteenth century, which was serviced by various Swiss-Italian-operated hotels for entertainment-starved gold miners and one Carlo Traversi, who ran his own dance-hall and orchestra.³ Colonial-era Australia attracted many other individuals of Italian heritage who wrote, performed or conducted music for the popular stage, or wrote parlour songs and dance music.⁴ The late nineteenth century saw a benign micro-invasion of Italian street musicians, mostly from Viggiano in the Southern Italian region of Basilicata. These musicians operated in small groups—typically comprising harp, violin or viola, flute or clarinet and triangle—and became an entertaining but officially frowned-upon feature of colonial street life.⁵ Many of these musicians settled around the Melbourne suburb of Carlton and contributed much to early twentieth-century musical life. By World War I, Italian bands and orchestras for hire in Melbourne alone included Di Gilio's, Alberti's, Allietti's, Labb's (Labataglia's), Ricco's, Briglia's, Curcio's and Cerbasi's.⁶ Several of their leaders or personnel, along with later arrivals, became highly regarded conductors or instrumentalists for, among other things, silent cinema, live theatre, radio, variety act ensembles, palais and palm court or symphony orchestras, with combinations that included a family chamber ensemble (The Briglia Quartette), an *estudiantina* orchestra and a Hawaiian orchestra (both led by the Italian-Australian mandolin and guitar virtuoso Oreste Manzoni).⁷ There were also novelty 'Italian Jazz Bands' in 1920s vaudeville and radio broadcasting.⁸

² See, for example, John Whiteoak, 'Kookaburra Samba: Mainstream and Non-mainstream Interpretations of Hispanic Music and Dance in Pre-multicultural Australia: 1850s–1970s,' *Stuck in the Middle: The Mainstream and its Discontents: Selected Proceedings of the 2008 IASPM-ANZ Conference*, ed. Catherine Strong and Michelle Phillipov ([Hobart]: UTAS e-Prints, 2009) 13–15.

³ Bridget Carlson, *Immigrant Placemaking in Colonial Australia: The Italian-speaking Settlers of Daylesford*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1997, 306.

⁴ Roslyn Maguire and Aline Scott-Maxwell, 'Italian Music,' *The Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, ed. John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell (Sydney: Currency House, 2003): 357–68.

⁵ See, for example, 'Street Music,' *Mercury* [Hobart], 22 Apr. 1868: 2; *Argus*, 18 Jan. 1888: 7.

⁶ Bette Maiuto, 'The Leane and Pascale Families,' *Newsletter of the Italian Historical Society* 6.1 (1989): 8; Alison Rabinovici, 'A Web of Connections: The Orchestral Ledger in the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library,' *University of Melbourne Collections* 3 (Dec. 2008): 37–40.

⁷ For Manzoni, see 'Manzoni's Hawaiian Band,' *Australasian Band and Orchestra News*, 26 June 1928: 29.

⁸ Examples of Italian jazz bands include Piccini's Italian Jazz Band (also known as The Popular Four), see 'The Popular Four,' *The Register* [Adelaide], 17 Sep. 1927: 12; Miglietti's Italian Jazz Band, see 'The "Joy Bells" will be at Boobarowie next Saturday Night,' *Burra Record* [South Australia], 21 Sep. 1927: 3; for Patrucco's Jazz Band, see Julia Church, *Per L'Australia: The Story of Italian Migration to Australia* (Melbourne, Miegunyah Press, 2005): 177.

More than 23,000 Italians migrated to Australia from the late 1910s to 1928 (including all members of the first Argentino Tango Band). Those wishing to become established as professional musicians in the mainstream Australian musical entertainment industry often faced xenophobia and language and other barriers. The most significant of these barriers was the Professional Musicians Union's policy of keeping orchestras British.⁹ Ways around this included naturalisation, which could take years and was not easy,¹⁰ or engagements that somehow circumvented the problem. These included solo engagements, Italian club or cabaret-restaurant work, forming an all-Italian (or all migrant) ensemble, or finding mainstream entertainment niches in which Italian ethnicity was perceived as a professional asset, such as piano accordion acts, 'Italian Jazz Bands,' Neapolitan ensembles or tango, rumba, 'Gypsy' gaucho, 'cosmopolitan,' 'continental' or 'all-nations' bands—labels that became fairly interchangeable by the end of the 1930s.

Hispanic and Related Influences in Early Mainstream Australian Entertainment

Australian engagement with representations of Hispanic music, dance and cultural markers may be traced back to, among other things, exotic Spanish *escuela bolera*, or 'castanet dance,' presented on the popular stage with appropriate musical accompaniment from the late 1830s.¹¹ The talented adventuress Anna Bishop popularised Mexican songs in costume during her goldrush-era tours, and the success of numerous productions of *Carmen* as exotic Spanish-themed music-theatre from 1879 made the tango-like rhythm of the *habanera*, a noted feature of the music from *Carmen*, familiar to audiences across Australia.¹² The end of the following decade brought the famous *Estudiantina Espanola* guitar and mandolin orchestra (with Spanish dancers) from Europe. This ensemble was still touring in the 1890s¹³ and local *estudiantina* ensembles were also formed. The *maxixe*, or 'Brazilian tango,' was introduced to the popular stage before the 1910s,¹⁴ and was followed on the eve of World War I by a vogue for the tango as a social dance. Tango Teas became the rage in the capital cities and Australian musicians began to compose tangos suitable for the ballroom, popular stage and parlour piano.¹⁵

'Public' enthusiasm for tango dancing and music waned considerably in Australia until the late 1920s, when a new genre of tango song, Hispanic-themed songs with tango rhythm, was introduced and the dance-style known as the 'Parisian' or 'French' tango gained popularity following its success with London society. The early 1930s saw a big increase in public demand for tango song, tango dance music and tango ballroom dancing in conjunction with a new fad in popular music and stage and social dance, 'the rumba' (rumba). The rumba craze was

⁹ Rule 4: Objects, Clause T: To ... prohibit the admission of coloured races as members. Clause Va: To Keep Orchestras British. Clause Vb: To insure that orchestras not include a greater proportion of foreigners than ten per cent. *Musicians' Union of Australia Rules* (Melbourne: P.E. Hambly [printer], 1929): 14.

¹⁰ See the fourteen-page application file of Vittorio de Bortoli. National Archives of Australia (NAA) A1, 1935/7462, 'V. De Bortoli. Naturalisation Certificate' [1935–36].

¹¹ 'Royal Victoria Theatre,' *Sydney Gazette*, 11 Oct. 1838: 12.

¹² 'Coppin's Olympic Madame Anna Bishop,' *Courier* [Hobart], 21 May 1856: 2 (Bishop); 'The Town-Hall Organ,' *Argus*, 4 July 1879: 7 (*Carmen*).

¹³ 'Estudiantina Espanole Concerts,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 Aug. 1892: 6.

¹⁴ 'Theatre Royal,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 Dec. 1905: 2.

¹⁵ For digitised examples in *Music Australia*, search under 'tango' at www.musicaustralia.org.

driven by Hollywood musicals such as *Flying Down To Rio* (1933), which depicted this excitingly polyrhythmic ‘tropical’ music and dance and gaily-costumed Latin-American dance bands in exotic tropical locations. Yet, from the first tango era to the 1930s, not one fully dedicated ‘tango band’ seems to have been formed in Australia, despite their earlier successful formation in London, a city to which Australian entrepreneurs often looked for the latest successful form of entertainment.

British-Australian popular taste in music—having passed through the jazz mania of the pre-Depression 1920s—began to take on a racialised or ethnic dimension from the beginning of the 1930s that advantaged resident, visiting and, increasingly, refugee European musicians. Live radio programs of Jewish folk and traditional music, Spanish, Russian and Hungarian ‘Gypsy’ music, Neapolitan song and such-like became very popular from around 1932. This shift in taste is particularly apparent in 1930s radio programming and articles about new programs in radio journals such as the Melbourne-published *Listener In*. The music industry journal, *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News* (which commenced in 1932), reflected admiration for ‘Continental music’ and internationally famous European bands and artists such as the Dela Bajos, Jack Bund, Marek Weber and Weintraubs orchestras and the Comedy Harmonists.¹⁶ An Australian mail order distributor for continental band scores, the Continental Orchestra Club, was established in 1934 and the Weintraubs and Harmonists were imported to tour in the late 1930s.¹⁷

While Australian professional dance musicians were anxiously coming to terms with the rhythmic vagaries of ‘tropical’ music in the ultimately justified fear of their jobs being taken by ‘foreign’ Hispanic music experts,¹⁸ there was a closely related public demand from 1934 for costumed ‘tango bands’: ‘gaucho tango,’ ‘Gypsy-tango’ or ‘Tzigani’ bands similar to those already popular in London, such as Alfredo’s (Alfred Gill’s), Geraldo’s (Gerald Bright’s) and Mantovani’s (a ‘real’ Italian).¹⁹ Unlike the outdated ecstatic ‘hot’ jazz concept of the 1920s, tango music was ‘sweet,’ mellow, romantic, rhythmic and mildly exotic or ‘foreign’ to Anglo sensibilities. It was a perfect fit for the ABC’s light music broadcasting policy and also for a growing number of continental-style venues requiring so-called ‘continental’ music (tango, ‘Gypsy’ or ‘Tzigani’ music).²⁰ Many people today would automatically associate tango music with Argentina and, possibly, its early development with the Spanish Rom of Andalusia, or in Havana, Cuba. However, by the 1930s, Russia, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Germany and other European countries were evolving their own interpretations of this very popular genre

¹⁶ See, for example, ‘Music in Germany,’ *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Feb. 1935: 31–32.

¹⁷ For further discussion of these developments, see Margaret Kartomi, John Whiteoak and Kay Dreyfus, ‘From Berlin to Bondi: the Flight of the Weintraub Syncopators,’ *Heat* 8 [new series] (2004): 22–23.

¹⁸ See, for example, ‘Change Over at Regent Theatre,’ *Australasian Dance and Brass Band News*, 26 Nov. 1938: 12 and ‘Ructions at the Regent,’ *Australasian Dance and Brass Band News*, 24 Dec. 1938: 5.

¹⁹ ‘Will Tango Bands become Popular in Australia’ (editorial), *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Dec. 1934: 39.

²⁰ The Australian Broadcasting Company, or A.B.C., became the Australian Broadcasting Commission, or ABC, in 1932. ‘ABC’ is used here for both to avoid confusion. For discussion of the ‘Gypsy’ element in ‘continental music,’ see John Whiteoak, “Play to Me Gypsy”: Australian Imaginings of “Gypsies” in Popular Music and Dance Before Multiculturalism and World Music,’ *Whose Popular Music? Industry, Performers, Fans: Selected Proceedings from the 2006 Australia/New Zealand IASPM Conference*, ed. Ian Collinson and Mark Evans (Sydney: Perfect Beat Publications / IASPM, 2008): 16–25.

and making the tango their own.²¹ In Fascist Italy, Mussolini especially liked and promoted the tango as suitable for his country. Just as pre-Holocaust Poland had its 'Yiddish tango,' in Italy Fascist lyrics were set to tango rhythm, exploiting a generalised Italian fondness for tango music and dance. Because tango music was widely perceived to be associated with Rom music and because many European countries had their own Rom populations, tango music became identified with the stereotype of the soft, romantic music of the 'old world' Gypsy cafés and restaurant orchestras of 'Old Vienna,' Budapest, Moscow, Paris and other iconic European cities.²²

Tango band music as presented in Australia could draw on the Hispanic model (the 'Spanish Gypsy,' Argentine tango or Gaucho band, for example) or the European café orchestra model (the 'Hungarian Gypsy' or *Tzigani* model, for example) or else conflate these for more flexibility and variety. The program theme of the most popular radio tango band of the 1930s, the Hispanic-costumed Harry Bloom Tango Band, was the romantic tango-song classic, 'Play to Me Gypsy,' played expressively in the Gypsy café style by the lead fiddler.²³ In 1939 Bloom named his nationally broadcast program 'Caravans and Castanets.'²⁴ Tango music programmed for radio or Continental venues was generally popular pan-continental café music repertoire, and included Argentinian tangos, European tango songs, rumbas, beguines, boleros, light classics and operetta music on Gypsy themes, Viennese waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, *paso-dobles*, current continental hits, and folk tunes or evergreens of various European nationalities or regions. In fact, almost any repertoire became 'tango music' when arranged and played by a tango band in the Gypsy-café manner.²⁵

This was not the case with the earliest all-Italian 'Argentino' bands, which mostly played Hispanic repertoire. Two factors that advantaged Italian-Australian musicians in this new field of entertainment (apart from their obvious credentials of foreignness, Europeanness, and 'Latinness') were their perceived cultural affinity with stringed instruments and especially with accordions. The accordion was associated with the global spread of tango music as a convenient substitute for the sound of the bandoneon, an instrument that relatively few musicians outside Argentina owned or could play. In Australia, this association became especially intense with the accordion, the fiddle and the Spanish guitar being the prime metaphor for tango or Gypsy tango music: the defining instrumental sounds of tango band music as it developed, and also the most exotic and expressive sonic elements of this music.²⁶

The 'Italian Accordion'

Piano accordions were featured in Australian vaudeville just before World War I by the touring Italian-American virtuosi, Santo Santucci, Eugenio Rellimi, the Boudini Brothers and 'Perona,'

²¹ Examples of European tango music in my own collection include the long-playing record *Russian Songs and Tangos* (Pyotr Lestchenko: 'The King of Russian Tango), vo1s 1&2 (New York: Kismet Records, [n.d.]) and the compact disc *Polskie Tango 1929–1939 Old World Tangos Vol. 3* (Berlin Oriente Musik CD 55, 2007).

²² Whiteoak, "'Play to Me Gypsy",' 18–19.

²³ 'Harry Bloom's Tango Band Makes Air Debut,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 July 1937: 6.

²⁴ 'Broadcasting,' *Advocate* [Burnie, Tas.], 27 July 1939: 12.

²⁵ This 'manner' is explained in Whiteoak, "'Play to Me Gypsy",' 21–23.

²⁶ The itinerant Italian bands for hire mentioned above were essentially stringed orchestras and typically included a harp.

and were generally known as 'Italian accordions' until the late 1920s, when they began to be marketed as the 'melopiano'.²⁷ The Italian-Australian accordion virtuosi, Peter Piccini (Pietro Piccinino) and Laurie (Lorenzo) Pensini, discussed below in relation to tango bands, were pioneers of the popularisation of this instrument in Australia. Piccini migrated to Australia in 1922 and soon began touring Queensland vaudeville circuits as Count Pizzinini: 'Direct from Naples, Italy's Champion Accordeon Player'.²⁸ He later teamed up with Australian-born Pensini in an all-Italian jazz age combo called the Popular Four and eventually became known in the music industry as Australia's 'Daddy of the Accordion'.²⁹ By the late 1930s the accordion had become a standard dance band instrument, the popularity of the accordion as a solo instrument had reached craze proportions, and large accordion orchestras were being formed, such as (Laurie) Pensini's Gypsy Accordion Band in Sydney.³⁰ Throughout the 'Golden Age' of the accordion in Australia (from the mid-1930s to the 1950s) the majority of widely recognised accordion virtuosi were seen to be of Italian descent.³¹ Tangos, rumbas, sambas, boleros, *la fiestas*, beguines and *paso-dobles*, among other Hispanic genres, came to be characteristic, much-loved, expected, and particularly effective features of solo piano accordion repertoire. Unlike many other instrumentalists, professional accordionists using the so-called 'Stradella' bass and chord button system had to have an affinity for Latin music and the specialist knowledge required to produce a range of Latin accompaniment rhythms with the left hand.³² Australia accordion virtuosi like Piccini, Pensini, Lou Campara, Lou and Enzo Toppiano, Egidio Bortoli and various others became recognised nationally as masters of the Latin-American, 'Gypsy' and other 'continental' repertoire that was closely associated with this instrument.³³

Italian-Latin Affinities

The profound affinity of Italians with Latin-American music and dance can be traced back to the mass migration of over two million Italians to Argentina by 1914, the very significant contribution of Italians to the development of tango music in Argentina, and the popularisation and further Italianisation of the genre with the return of emigrants to Italy.³⁴ The style of Argentinian tango dancing known as *tango liscio* (smooth tango) was developed in Argentina by Italians and the tango remains a core element of Italian-Australian traditional ballroom dancing, or so-called *liscio* or *ballo liscio* (smooth dance). The music library of the Melbourne tango band leader, Angelo Candela, contains many tangos arranged or composed in Italy and published by

²⁷ The full history of the accordion in Australia lies outside the scope of this article, but see John Whiteoak, 'Fisarmonica italiana: The Accordion in Italian-Australian Professional Music-Making and Culture,' *Italy in Australia's Musical Landscape*, ed. Marcello Sorce Kellor and Linda Barwick (Melbourne: Lyrebird Press, forthcoming).

²⁸ 'Theatre Stanley,' *Townsville Daily*, 28 Jan. 1924: 3.

²⁹ 'Peter Piccini "Daddy" of the Accordeon,' *Tempo*, May-June 1938: 8.

³⁰ 'Permanent Place in Modern Bands for Piano Accordions,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Dec. 1935: 12.

³¹ See, for example, 'Australia's Virtuoso Accordionists,' *Tempo*, April 1949: 7, 10, 12.

³² See Gerald Crossman, *Latin-American Rhythms for Accordionists and Others* (London: Hohner Concessionaires, 1952).

³³ All the recorded tracks listed for Egidio Bortoli at the Australian Film and Sound Archive (plus several LPs in my collection not listed there) are Latin-American, Spanish or Italian.

³⁴ See Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999): 54 ('Table 7').

Italian music houses, including orchestrations with bandoneon parts.³⁵ Furthermore, Italians can understand, appreciate and, in the case of the musical, sing Spanish song lyrics without difficulty.³⁶ When, then, did the Italianisation of Hispanic music begin in Australia? And how did the very obvious association of the sound of the accordion with tango music, the first and arguably most lastingly influential of all Hispanic genres from Latin-America, come about in the Australian context?

The story of the Italianisation of Hispanic music in Australia appears to begin in Melbourne with the notable early congregation of Italian-Australian musicians and ensembles around Carlton and nearby suburbs.³⁷ Many Melbournians were introduced to tango music and dancing when Di Gilio's Orchestra played for the Tango Exhibition and Grand Opening of the (original) St Kilda Palais de Danse in December 1913.³⁸ Tangos can also be found in remnants of Italian-Australian orchestra libraries from the 1910s and 1920s.³⁹ Such examples take on less significance when it is considered that most theatre-music libraries would have held, along with other dance music genres of the day, various examples of Spanish music (including tangos) to accompany Spanish-themed variety acts and Spanish or Mexican silent film and stage scenes. Some possibly more significant examples can be traced from the end of the 1920s.

Guido Deiro, the most famous accordionist in the world in the 1920s, toured Australia in 1928 at the same time as the Australian screening of the silent film *The Gaucho*. Deiro was featured, together with tango dancers and other artists, in an ambitious live cinema prologue to the film called *Argentina Nights*.⁴⁰ In late 1930, the Melbourne radio station 3LO broadcast a live program called 'Music of Spain: A Painting of Spanish Life in Music, Song and Story,' featuring the violinist Edouard Lambert and two Italian-Australian musicians, Tomaso Cerbasi on harp and Oreste Manzoni on mandolin.⁴¹ An ongoing Italo-Hispanic association probably did not commence until early the following year, when accordionist Peter Piccini teamed up with Giovanni Cera, the Melbourne guitar and mandolin player, to form a variety act known as The Neapolitan Duo.⁴² A letter from ABC management dated 22 May 1931 confirms that the duo was booked to appear on 3AR as a 'novelty' melopiano and Spanish guitar virtuosi act later that month.⁴³ The duo's vaudeville and radio repertoire increasingly included tangos and Spanish items. An undated (1932 or 1933) description of their act describes them as:

an Italian duo ... their melopiano and guitar recall memories to the traveller of Spain and Argentina. They have played Spanish tangos and rhythmic arrangements in many countries ... bringing the delightful atmosphere of foreign cabarets.⁴⁴

³⁵ The music library portion of the *Museo Italiano* Historical Society's Candela Family Archive is held in the Rare Books Collection, Matheson Library, Monash University.

³⁶ Dan Bendrups, 'Melbourne's Latin-American Music Scene,' *Perfect Beat: the Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Music* 5.2 (Jan. 2001): 19–29.

³⁷ Mark Donato, 'Little Lon.,' *Italian Historical Society Journal* 2.1 (June 1994): 20–21.

³⁸ "'Palais De Danse" Opened: Tango Exhibition,' *Argus*, 22 Dec. 1913: 8.

³⁹ For example, in the privately-owned remnants of libraries of the Alberti, Allietti and Briglia orchestras I have accessed.

⁴⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald* (advertisement), 8 June 1928: 2.

⁴¹ *The Listener In*, 20 Sep. 1930, 20.

⁴² *Giovanni Cera Scrapbook*, held by the *Museo Italiano* Historical Society, Carlton, Melbourne (unpaginated).

⁴³ *Giovanni Cera Scrapbook*.

⁴⁴ Untitled, undated clipping ascribed to J.L. Davidge. *Giovanni Cera Scrapbook*.

'Piccini and Cera' appeared on the interstate Tivoli and State Theatre circuits, at a tango exhibition, at various Italian-Australian functions, and numerous times on ABC radio in Melbourne and Sydney. They often included Neapolitan songs in their programs.

The ArgentinoTango Bands

Domenico Giovanni Mario Caffaro

One likely reason why no fully-dedicated tango band was apparently formed in Australia before the 1930s was the absence of a musician with the first-hand knowledge and Hispanic-related credentials to form one. An important exception was the handsome and ubiquitous pianist, bandoneon player, composer, arranger, theatre conductor, operetta entrepreneur and cake manufacturer, Domenico Giovanni Mario Caffaro.⁴⁵ Caffaro had, in fact, spent some time in Buenos Aires in the mid-1920s, where he played tango music and became involved with the Asociación Argentina De Autores Compositores de Musica Buenos Aires (Argentina Authors and Composers Association). His daughter, Toni (Antonietta) Koller, retains an inscribed memento from this organisation.⁴⁶ One of his rumbas, 'La Biscacha' (Creole rumba), was published by Allan's music house, Melbourne, in 1935, and promoted nationally as a rumba dance band arrangement (see Figure 1). It was also arranged for vocalist and piano.⁴⁷

Figure 1. Cover of Domenico Caffaro's 'La Biscacha,' Allan's Music Publishers, 1935. Whiteoak Collection.



⁴⁵ For further biographical detail see Tony de Bolfo's, *In Search of Kings: What Became of the Passengers of the Re D'Italia* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2002) 98–108.

⁴⁶ De Bolfo, *In Search of Kings*, 105–07. I have a curious personal connection with Caffaro through Toni, who married Ernest Koller, an Austrian who was stranded in Australia during World War II as a member of the Vienna Boys' Choir. I worked with Ernest as a fourteen-year-old trainee and he convinced me to travel overseas where I found my vocation in music.

⁴⁷ *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 May 1935: 13; 1 July 1935: 37.

Caffaro was born in the picturesque town of Ivrea in the province of Turin in 1904 and arrived in Melbourne in 1927 on the *Re d'Italia* (King of Italy) with Antonietta's mother, Maria Carbonetta, with whom he had begun a romance on the voyage. For whatever reason, this very gifted and experienced musician is described on the passenger list as a 'farm labourer.'⁴⁸ Soon after his arrival in Australia, he was employed by J.C. Williamson for several months as a stage assistant. He then worked in a cake factory until late 1930, when he took over an old bakery in Collingwood and established a successful block cake manufacturing business.⁴⁹ He also began working as a conductor for J.C. Williamson and formed his own Toti Grand Opera Company that gave a performance of *La Traviata* in June 1932 at the Princess Theatre.⁵⁰ At the same time he was about to premier his tango band.⁵¹

The Dom Caffaro Argentino Tango Band

In August 1932, *The Listener In* (Melbourne) announced that on the 27th of that month 3LO would relay to 2BL Sydney:

"Rio Nights", consisting of sixty minutes of South American airs, featuring Domeni[c]o Caffaro and his genuine Argentine Tango Band ... [who] will transport listeners to Rio de Janerio, where the laughter and gaiety of this South American city will be captured, together with delightful Argentine music, to be played by Argentine artists.⁵²

The 'Argentine artists' were in fact Caffaro on piano, Piccini, Cera, and violinists, Angelo Candela and Ezio Gianniacini. Piccini was from Casorzo in Piedmonte. Cera, who made his own traditional stringed instruments, was from Campoverve in the province of Vicenza and had arrived in 1924 with 105 other Italians from the same district. Candela, who arrived in 1920, was from Viggiano. His father, Vincenzo, a talented professional travel photographer and clarinetist had worked as a seasonal musician in Sao Paulo, Brazil, but Angelo had in fact been taught in Melbourne by one of the Di Gilio brothers.⁵³ Gianniacini, a former opera musician and conductor, was from Rome and became stranded in Australia during World War I with the Gonzales Italian Opera Company.⁵⁴ Extant photographs such as Figure 2 show the band in dinner suits, not Argentine tango band or Spanish costumes, and Cera is pictured with a lyre-shaped Italian traditional guitar and mandolin of his own making.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ De Bolfo, *In Search of Kings*, 350.

⁴⁹ For a 29-page digitised file detailing Caffaro's business, professional, personal and financial affairs, see NAA 741, V/8705, 'Dominico [sic] Caffaro.'

⁵⁰ NAA 741, V/8705:101; 'Stage Asides,' *Townville Daily Bulletin*, 1 June 1932: 11; Caffaro advertisement for opera singers, *Argus*, 3 May 1932: 14.

⁵¹ I have located a 1932 reference to the S.S. Koolinda's 'Valentino Tango Band,' but this was possibly a 'tango band' in name only for a special society cabaret night, *Sunday Times* [Perth], 5 June 1932: 1.

⁵² 'Rio Nights,' *The Listener In*, 27 Aug. 1932, 13.

⁵³ Transcript of Romilda Lauricella's interview with Angelo Candela, 7 Jan. 1985, Candela Family documents, CO.AS.IT. (Italian Historical Society) AB-001.

⁵⁴ 'Seven Piece Ork (sic) at Foy & Gibsons,' *Australasian Dance and Brass Band News*, 26 Aug. 1939: 4.

⁵⁵ Museum Victoria holds a Mandolin made by Giovanni Cera during the 1930s. See <http://museumvictoria.com.au/collections/themes/2639/giovanni-cera-italian-migrant-mandolin-maker-musician>.

Figure 2. Domenico Caffaro's Argentino Tango Band in the 3LO Melbourne Studio in 1932. From left: Giovanni Cera, Domenico Caffaro, Pietro Piccini, Ezio Giannaccini and Angelo Candela. Reproduced with permission of CO.AS.IT. (Italian Historical Society).



A detailed illustrated program for Caffaro's 14 October broadcast, called 'Tangos by Caffaro's Argentino Tango Band,' shows that performed items were alternated with recordings of Spanish and Mexican vocal items.⁵⁶ The band's Hispanic music program included two works by Caffaro but only one tango, Gerardo Rodriquez's famous 'La Cumparsita.' For the following program on 3 December, the Argentino band alternated with a vocalist/comedian, Fred Champion, and a Neapolitan Duo (Giovanni Cera plus a mandolin or fiddle player) performing Italian and Spanish items. This time the program included three tangos, 'Esy Es El Mundo,' 'A Media Luz,' 'Primavera' and Spanish items.⁵⁷

The Angelo Candela Argentino Tango Band

By December 1933, Angelo Candela was leading a costumed Argentino Tango Band broadcasting over 3LO and 3AR: 'conjur[ing] up the blue skies, pavement cafes 'neath leafy trees, and the sparkle and the color of life in Argentine.'⁵⁸ The band comprised Candela and M.[?] Gagliardi on fiddles, Ray Crow on cello, Paul Morra on piano, Cera on guitar and twenty-year-old Australian-born Lou Campara—of sensational later national fame—on accordion (see Figure 3).⁵⁹ The repertoire remained similar to the first broadcasts under Caffaro: mostly

⁵⁶ *The Listener In*, 8 Oct. 1932: 41. The full program was *Paso-doble* 'Currito de la Cruz' (Vigo); *Baile* [song] 'Zapateado Brazilerio' (Guttierrez); tango 'Cumparsita' (Rodriguez); Creole polka 'Mendoza' (Saltarez); Creole waltz 'Clavelles' (Sartorio); Argentine intermezzo 'Cancion Mora' (Del Barrio); *Baile Cancion* [dance song] 'Marguerite' (Caffaro); *Paso-doble* 'La Veronica' (Caffaro).

⁵⁷ 'Novelty Music and Variety,' *The Listener In*, 3 Dec. 1932: 27.

⁵⁸ 'The Argentino Band,' *The Listener In*, 23 Dec. 1933: 13.

⁵⁹ 'The Incomparable Lou Campara,' *Music Maker* (June 1960): 7.

tangos and Spanish items, including some pieces performed under Caffaro that remain in the Candela music archive. A letter from Candela to Allan's music warehouse, Sydney, dated 4 June 1934, suggests that he felt the need to expand the repertoire to include the new fad, rumba music. He requested a price list of all 'Paso Doble, Tango, Rumbas, Bolero, and all Spanish or Argentino orchestration[s]'.⁶⁰

Figure 3. From right, Angelo Candela, Paul Morro, Lou Campara, Ray Crow, Giovanni Cera and M. Gagliardi. Reproduced with permission of CO.AS.IT. (Italian Historical Society).



By this time, the Candela Argentino Tango Band was providing the music at the magnificent, recently built art deco Myer Mural Hall dining-room which, along with various other big department store dining- and ballrooms, had become a significant employer of tango or 'Gypsy' orchestras. These department store Gypsy-tango orchestras were sometimes called 'cosmopolitan' or 'all-nations' orchestras because of their non-Anglo leaders and personnel, and the stores were increasingly suspected of paying under-award wages and subversively providing employment for refugee musicians.⁶¹

Caffaro's Rio De La Plata Tango and Rumba Band

In June 1934, *The Listener In* published an illustrated article called 'Rumba and Bandonian (sic) Music From the Argentine,' which announced that Caffaro's 'Rio De La Plata' Tango and Rumba Band would broadcast from 3LO with Caffaro featuring the bandoneon. The article included a photo of Caffaro in a bejewelled and sequined tango-band costume posing with his magnificent eighty-eight note bandoneon (see Figure 4).

⁶⁰ Candela Family Documents. CO.AS.IT. AB-0018.

⁶¹ 'Department Store's Dancing Activities,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Apr. 1934: 10, 14.

Figure 4. Domenico Caffaro in Tango Band Costume with Bandoneon, 1934 or earlier. *The Listener In*, 9 June 1934. Courtesy of Toni (Antonietta) and Ernest Koller.



The article mentions the immediate success of the ‘first tango band in Victoria’ formed by Caffaro and promised ‘Lilting melodies of the Argentine and particularly those adapted for the dancing of the Rumba ... the bandoneon will be played by the leader with rare artistry and effect.’ It states that:

‘Domeni[c]o has spent seven years in South America playing with the foremost Tango and Rumba bands and for four years was with Francisco Cuna[r]o’s at the Belgrano Club and the Jockey Club in Buenos Aires.’⁶²

Toni Koller’s recollections do not tally with the claim of seven years in Argentina, but she states that her father was there in 1925, and it is known that he travelled to Italy and Argentina during 1933, where he purchased lavish tango band costumes and probably his bandoneon, since there are no earlier references to it.⁶³ Toni recalls her mother and father making maracas for the rumba band by placing beans inside a hollow ball of some kind, since maracas could not be purchased here.⁶⁴

⁶² *The Listener In*, 9 June 1934: 13. The ‘Jockey Club’ was a famous Buenos Aires club for Argentinean aristocrats; the Belgrano Club was a high-class Buenos Aires sporting club. Italian-born violinist, Francisco Canaro was probably the most popular tango-band leader and tango composer in Argentina while Caffaro was there, and co-founded the Argentine Authors and Composers Association that Caffaro became associated with.

⁶³ He returned on the S.S. *Ormonde* on 7 May 1934. NAA 741, V/8705: 28.

⁶⁴ De Bolfo, *In Search of Kings*, 106; Toni Koller, personal communication, 25 May 2006.

Caffaro's tango band continued to broadcast and was engaged for the Myer Mural Hall in 1935 as the Cosmopolitan Tango Orchestra. The band came to particular prominence again in late 1935 when it was engaged by Phil Leggett's Palais de Danse, one of Melbourne leading ballrooms. A visiting London stage dancer, Victor Delaney, who heard the band at Myers, was 'particularly impressed with the band, whose tangos he likened to those of the famous Geraldo.'⁶⁵ This was high praise, indeed. There was considerable concern that Caffaro's tango band would displace the resident Anglo-Australian dance band led by Ern Pettifer, one of the most respected musicians in the palais industry. This situation was averted by employing both bands, Caffaro's as a dedicated Latin band and Pettifer's for conventional dance music, and combining the two for special effect in some numbers. Was this then a bold cross-cultural musical experiment fifty years before 'world music'?

At this time, the band comprised Caffaro, Cera, Gianniccini, Vasilli Ilster on piano and three Anglo-Australians, possibly to placate the Musicians Union.⁶⁶ A later article about Leggett's provides the only musicological description of a Caffaro band that I been able to locate:

As different from [a conventional dance band] as chalk from cheese. Caffaro himself supplies most of the melody on the piano-accordion [bandoneon?]. This instrument might have been expected to provide some rhythm, but this comes mainly from the piano, string bass, 'cello, the latter two instruments being, of course, plucked, and a strong double-necked guitar ... their success shows that for the correct [tango dancing] atmosphere proper tango instrumentation must be used by bands.⁶⁷

The reviewer notes the absence of drums, which begs the question of how, or if, percussion polyrhythm was provided for the Afro-Cuban rumba, apart from Caffaro's maracas.

Caffaro continued to lead his Cosmopolitan Tango Band for radio broadcasts until 1937. He sometimes called it Caffaro's Neapolitan Orchestra,⁶⁸ under which name it presented all or mostly Italian popular music. That year he was playing in the Gypsy band at Myers, for four pounds a week, under Carlo Briglia and, in September, was also engaged by J.C. Williamson for matinees in a long season of the Gypsy café-themed smash hit of the era, *Balalaika* (1936).⁶⁹ The show's very melancholy Russian tango-song theme, 'At the Balalaika,'⁷⁰ may have inspired Caffaro to reflect on his last decade with some remorse, despite his successes and the musical repute he still enjoyed. During the 1930s, he had left Maria Carbonetta and Antonietta and married an eighteen-year-old girl; by 1937 he was estranged from her and the son he had fathered with her. His income from music was all but consumed by payments to his wife and debts to Briglia and others, and he was soon formally bankrupt. In this state of personal and financial turmoil he left for Italy on the eve of World War II. He never returned.⁷¹

⁶⁵ 'Tango Demanded by All Melbourne Dancers,' *Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Dec. 1935: 5.

⁶⁶ 'Tango Demanded by All Melbourne Dancers,' 5.

⁶⁷ 'Caffaro's Tango Band at Palais De Dance: Extremely Popular with Dancers,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Jan. 1936: 4.

⁶⁸ 'Broadcasting Programmes for Week,' *The Mail* [Adelaide], 17 Apr. 1937: 25.

⁶⁹ Document from the Postmaster General's office about Caffaro's 1937 income and debts. NAA 741, V/8705: 22.

⁷⁰ Eric Maschwitz (lyrics); George Posford (music).

⁷¹ Outspokenly pro-Fascist, Maria was later interned for several years at Tatura and Toni joined her there. See De Bolfo, *In Search of Kings*, 109–12.

Other Italian-Australian Tango Band Connections

Until now, Caffaro has been passed over in Australian popular music history. For example, in discussing the genesis of the Argentino Tango Bands in his 1986 interview with Romilda Lauricella, Candela claims to have formed 'the first tango band in Australia' and he does not refer to Caffaro in relation to the tango bands.⁷² Even a 1934 *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News* article about the second Argentino Tango Band led by Candela fails to acknowledge Caffaro's seminal role in introducing the genre:

We doubt very much that such a unique combination has ever been heard over the air ... We congratulate Angie on the fine achievement of his band and also for his introduction of a new sphere of entertainment.⁷³

The exact relationship between the 1934 bands led by Candela and Caffaro is unclear from available sources, since Caffaro's personnel are not named. A web of later tango band connections can, however, be traced from Caffaro's 1932–33 and Candela's 1933–34 Argentino bands' personnel. How successful were the careers of other members of the original Caffaro and Candela tango bands and various other Italian-Australians who were directly or indirectly associated with them?

By the end of 1934, at least four other tango bands were formed in Sydney alone: Roy Maling's Cosmopolitan Tango Band, Rowe's Café Tango Band, Jack Woods' Tango Band, and the most successful tango band of the tango band era, the Harry Bloom Tango Band.⁷⁴ In cleverly choosing Peter Piccini for his band, Bloom gained a virtuoso accordionist with invaluable experience and knowledge of tango band music and presentation.⁷⁵ The exceptional success of Bloom's tango band and its daily ABC broadcasts under Bloom's brilliant management correspondingly boosted Piccini's profile. The following year, Piccini became the star soloist at St James Theatre, Sydney, under its conductor and famed classical pianist, Isador Goodman. Many more successes followed. After the war Piccini relocated to Perth and established the Musette Music Shoppe, an immensely influential music retail and accordion school with several branches that eventually taught 150 students a week.⁷⁶

Piccini's accordionist partner from the 1920s, Laurie Pensini, formed a popular Gypsy Accordion Band for broadcasting and also co-formed with Lin (sometimes called Lyn) Sharam the costumed ABC Gaucho Tango Band in 1940. The band had its own national network program, 'Tango Tableau,' presenting Spanish and Latin-American music.

Piccini's place in the Bloom band was filled by a brilliant and handsome seventeen year-old accordionist, Lou Toppano, whose success was immediate. In 1937 the ABC engaged Toppano

⁷² Transcript of Romilda Lauricella's interview with Angelo Candela, 6–8.

⁷³ 'Angelo Candela and his Tango Band,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Mar. 1934: 36. Another article published five years later in *Tempo* claimed that Australia's first tango band was formed in Sydney in 1933 by Roy Maling for the ABC. Pearce Hart, 'Roy Maling,' *Tempo*, June–July 1939: 2.

⁷⁴ 'Tango Band: Harry Bloom at Hillier's: Interesting Experiment,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Sep. 1934: 3.

⁷⁵ See 'Gaucho Tango Band and Vocalist in South American Melodies,' *Tempo*, July–Aug. 1941: 6.

⁷⁶ Piccini's son, also called Peter, absorbed all his father's knowledge of the accordion and enjoyed an illustrious Australian and international career as an accordion virtuoso, pianist and musical director. See 'Brilliant Success for Young Peter Piccini in Overseas Trip,' *The Australian Accordionist*, Mar.–Apr. 1957: 5.

for a national concert tour with the Finnish saxophone virtuoso, Joseph Kaartinen. Bloom's tango band was reformed in Melbourne as the ABC National Tango Band and Toppano led a popular costumed contingent of the band that broadcast separately as the Gaucho Trio, specialising in 'Gypsy music of the fiery and spectacularly melodious type.'⁷⁷ He remained a household name in Australian musical entertainment for several more decades, eventually became musical director of a number of Melbourne radio and television shows, and established the immensely influential Toppano Music School. Yet he never forgot the tremendous success of his Bloom tango band years.⁷⁸ In 1950–51 he had revisited the tango band concept with his Lou Toppano Gaucho Quartet for radio broadcasting⁷⁹ and also formed the Lou Toppano Samba Band, which released a long-playing record of Latin standards in 1952.⁸⁰

Ezio Gianaccinni and Giuseppe Viggiano

Gianaccinni is occasionally mentioned in music and entertainment journals after the 1935–36 Leggett's ballroom engagement,⁸¹ and in the year that Caffaro left for Italy he is reported as leading his own seven-piece Gypsy band at Foy & Gibson's department store in Melbourne. The band included Cera on guitar, mandolin and accordion, Joseph Curcio on second violin, Prospero Acarco on bass and harp and Giuseppe 'Alf' Viggiano on reeds.⁸² A photograph in the CO.AS.IT. collection shows Viggiano to have been a member of Candela's Argentine Tango Bands around 1934.⁸³ In the 1940s Viggiano led his own Spanish bullfighter-costumed five-piece tango-rumba band at Navaretti's cabaret in Melbourne, which included his brothers Francescantonio and Michelangelo and a vocalist, 'Margherita' (Giuseppe's wife Rita Mellon), who was claimed to be 'a charming South American.'⁸⁴

Lou Campara

After his first break in the music industry with the Candela tango band, Lou Campara found himself in demand for theatre variety-act and orchestra work and he also broadcast with leading Melbourne dance orchestras, the Shell Show and Alex Burlakov's Gypsy Band, among others. The major breakthrough of his career came in late 1937, when he won the famous P&A Parade radio entertainment contest as part of a duo chamber music act, 'The 2 LS,' with Lal Kuring. This instantly launched the 2 LS to national fame, an ABC tour and theatre circuit contracts, and *Australian Music Maker* headlined them as a 'sensational' success.⁸⁵ Their act was described as 'the result of an accidental recording made during an interval between two numbers played by a tango band [Burlakov's Gypsy Band].'⁸⁶ Success after success followed for Campara, and from 1953 until 1960 he was engaged in a remarkable odyssey of overseas

⁷⁷ 'The Blossoming of Bloom,' *Australasian Dance and Brass Band News*, 1 June 1938: 5.

⁷⁸ Lou Toppano, personal communication, 3 Dec. 2007.

⁷⁹ 'Notes on the Radio,' *Sunday Herald* [Sydney], 15 Apr. 1951: 8.

⁸⁰ Melbourne: Spotlight Varieties SV6, 1952.

⁸¹ 'Giannaccinni and Cera ... from 3LO on Sunday December 6,' *The Listener In*, 28 Nov. 1936: 4.

⁸² 'Seven Piece Ork at Foy & Gibsons,' 4.

⁸³ CO.AS.IT. P-06055, c. 1934.

⁸⁴ 'Continental Band at Navaretti's Café,' *Tempo*, Aug.–Sep. 1942: 9.

⁸⁵ 'Sensational Sydney Success of "2LS",' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Sep. 1938: 9.

⁸⁶ 'Cello and Mello-Piano Team,' *Courier Mail* [Brisbane], 27 Sep. 1938: 10.

experience that spread his fame far and wide.⁸⁷ At the end of the 1950s, he was invited to Pavia, Italia, to perform and accept an award 'which acknowledge[d] him as one of the five greatest accordionists in the world for 1959.'⁸⁸

Angelo Candela

The success of the second Argentino Tango Band raised Angelo Candela's reputation nationally as a leader and he went on to have a distinguished career in theatre and concert orchestra music. Before the war, he was appointed deputy conductor for the Melbourne Tivoli vaudeville theatre and remained with the Tivoli for twelve years overall, spending the four wartime years as Musical Director for the Entertainment Unit, 6th Detachment. Candela was described in 1951 as 'probably the most experienced musician in vaudeville in the country.' He was also a highly valued member of the Melbourne ABC Dance Band for many years.⁸⁹ There is no evidence that his later career was especially influenced by the Argentino Tango Band from a musicological perspective, but an ongoing affinity for Hispanic music is probably indicated by the relatively large proportion of tango band repertoire that remained in his music library at the end of his life.

'Prince of Strings': Giovanni Cera

Giovanni Cera was always closely associated with Italian community entertainment despite his much wider popularity as a radio and variety stage artist. He and his musician brother Rino ran Club Caneva, a function and entertainment locus for the Melbourne Italian community, for seven years from 1933, and he, Rino, and other Tango band members, entertained at various club functions. Neapolitan and tango music were always Cera specialties, and he led a 'tango' or tango/Neapolitan band at the famed Italian restaurant, Mario's, for twelve years before and after the war.⁹⁰ Post-war mass migration brought Cera into even greater demand as a community concert and *spettacolo* (Italian variety show) artist and band leader, and he worked with Nina Alda, the virtuoso Italian guitarist-bandleader (and Hispanic, 'Gypsy, and 'continental' music expert), to provide two-band entertainment programs for huge community functions such as the annual Italian debutante balls at the St Kilda Town Hall.⁹¹

Cera fully utilised his long experience and expert knowledge of what appealed to this isolated and nostalgic community: Neapolitan and tango music and Italian popular song. So, for example, a 1947 concert organised by Cera for the Italian community at Koo Wee Rup opened with two Argentino Tango Band favourites composed by Caffaro, the *paso-doble* 'La Veronica' and the rumba 'La Biscacha,' and included 'traditional' Italian and light classical work on mandolin and guitar from the Cera brothers, a samba, rumba and a 'Carnival of Venice' fantasia on accordion. Albert Argenti, Mario's resident tenor,

⁸⁷ He was based in London, where he appeared in numerous BBC radio and television programs and in theatres and recording sessions. Show tours from Britain included continental Europe, the Middle East and the Far East. See 'The Incomparable Lou Campara,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, June 1960: 7.

⁸⁸ 'The Incomparable Lou Campara,' 7.

⁸⁹ 'Presenting the ABC Dance Band,' *Music Maker*, Dec. 1951: 19.

⁹⁰ See Mietta O'Donnell, *Mietta's Italian Family Recipes* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2002) 88; Elsa Paulin, Summary of oral history interview with Maria Cera Menara, 13 Sep. 2005. Cera Family documents. CO.AS.IT.

⁹¹ For example; 'Grand Coronation Ball,' *La Fiamma*, 8 May 1953: 6.

performed excerpts from Italian opera and a 'Tarantella.'⁹² Cera's exquisite and famed Italian stringed instrument-making and his expertise on these instruments further identified him with popular Italian music traditions. However, the popular taste of the complex and dynamic post-war community was not static, and by the end of the 1950s, younger Italian-Latin bands like *Orchestra Mokambo* were being engaged for the highest profile functions.⁹³ Neapolitan song and tango remained popular (the latter as *lisco*), but Neapolitan song was *not* the modern *canzoni* of Domenico Modugno and romantic old world tango music was *not* the rhythmically exciting mambo or cha cha cha. Neither could the 'sweet' timbres of the mandolin and traditional guitar compete with the new, electric guitar-saturated sound of Beatles-era 'Italy beat' music. Yet 'Maestro' Cera and his music and instruments remain deeply embedded in the heart of this community and its cultural memories. Cera, himself, paid occasional tribute to Caffaro of the original Argentino Tango Band by including Caffaro Hispanic compositions in his programs.

World War II and Tango Band Music

In the lead-up to World War II, the music profession and its union became stridently resentful of the success of European musicians and, fearing an overwhelming flood of refugee musicians, began to invoke the old White Australia platform of 'Australian jobs for Australians.'⁹⁴ The Aliens Control Bill of August 1939 declared Italian nationals to be enemy aliens. Arrests and internments began in mid-1940 when Italy entered the War and several Italian restaurants in Melbourne were vandalised, among other acts of vilification.⁹⁵ Toppano, Candela and various others enlisted and contributed much to the war effort as high profile entertainment-unit personnel, but Italian nationals such as Cera (naturalised in 1946), if not interned as a security risk, could not even travel to work or visit family between designated security sectors without a permit.⁹⁶ Some Anglicised their names after the war to ease the way, such as the Sydney tango band leader Antonio Massuto who became 'Tony Moss.' Yet there is nothing in dance music industry magazine reports to suggest that well-established figures were damaged professionally by retaining their Italian family names throughout the war and in the immediate post-war years.

Conclusion

The term 'tango' refers to specific forms of music and dance but, like the term 'Gypsy,' is also capable of conveying infinite varieties and complexities of meaning, including a widely appealing and mysterious 'Latin' exoticism that sensually imbues almost any construct placed upon it. Hence, in Australia, 'tango band music' of the 1930s and 1940s could embrace and conflate various concepts and genres with ease, or be embraced by others, such as 'continental,'

⁹² Concert program dated 15 Dec. 1947. Cera Family Documents. CO.AS.IT.

⁹³ John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell, 'Cha-Cha-Cha to *Ciuff Ciuff*: Modernity, Tradition and the Italian-Australian Popular Music Scene of the 1960s,' *Musicology Australia* 32.2 (2010): 309–13.

⁹⁴ Frank Kitson, 'Unions Take Commendable Stand on Alien Musicians Question,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 Nov. 1938: 4.

⁹⁵ Kate Darian-Smith, *A City in War: The Home Front in Melbourne 1939–1945*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne (1987): 22.

⁹⁶ See Cera's 'Aliens Control' application 4 Oct. 1939. NAA B6531, Natralised / 1946–1947 / Italian / Cera Giovanni, 'Cera Giovanni.'

'Tzigani' or 'rumba' band music. All these genres and concepts offered professional advantages to musicians with European credentials of some kind and Italians, and Italian accordionists in particular, were especially well-situated to fill the cultural space created by the absence of practitioners from Spain or Latin America. Those accordionists mentioned above who became associated with tango band music were, in some way or another, advantaged by occupying or 'minding' this space.

Unlike most of the later tango bands, the Caffaro and Candela Argentino Tango Bands were entirely dedicated to presenting the music for which they had the most cultural affinity: Spanish, Latin-American and Italian music. They also represent the first really profound and successful expression of Italo-Hispanic musicality in Australian popular music, the same musicality that was so widely expressed several decades later in post-war Italian-Australian community entertainment. The strongest metaphor for this Australian-located cultural phenomenon should be the handsome Argentinean-costumed Domenico Caffaro and his magnificent bandoneon.