

Tango of the White Gardenia



A tango-infused chamber opera in two acts
Music by Ethan Gans-Morse • Libretto by Tiziana DellaRovere

Tango of the White Gardenia is a compelling new chamber opera that weaves together humor, emotional depth, and timely messages through the riveting music and dance of Argentine tango. Although it is an opera buffa that offers fun winks and nods to the *commedia dell'arte* style of centuries past, it is also a contemporary story that features urgent themes for today's audiences, such as how enduring love and staying true to one's heart are more precious than winning external recognition. This opera shows how the consequences of parents' mistakes cast a shadow on their children's lives, and how bullies are made, not born. The story reveals how the abandonment of a child by a mother can create a sense of not being worthy of love, and how the absence of a father can produce a compulsion to win worldly recognition at any cost.

All of this drama unfolds against the background of Argentine tango, which permeates both the musical score and the choreography of the six dancers who mirror each of the singing characters. In this context, the Tango becomes a metaphor for life and a perfect canvas for the expression of intense passion, deep connections, strident conflicts, and powerful reconciliation.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Later in life, renowned tango teacher Anthony still longs for his now-deceased lover and mentor, the beautiful and soulful Sofía. Her spirit appears to guide, inspire, and comfort him. Anthony has dedicated his life to teaching tango as a path to heartfelt human connection. His most eager student is an insecure young woman named Sandra who longs to be accepted and is using tango to get the approval of her critical and narcissistic boyfriend, Victor. During a tango class, Victor announces that a major competition is coming to town. Anthony is dismayed because he doesn't believe in tango as competition. Another student, the ambitious bully JoJo, seizes on the opportunity to win the competition, which would open the door for her to escape the confines of their little town. JoJo's boyfriend and dance partner is Justin, a good-willed young man from a wealthy family whom JoJo is using for his higher social status.

When the competition begins, JoJo cheats by sabotaging Sandra's shoes and convincing Victor to drop Sandra and partner with her instead in the final round. Sandra discovers the deceit and confronts JoJo, only to learn that she and JoJo are bound by a common trauma: When they were young, Sandra's mother left with JoJo's father, devastating both families. Justin, appalled by JoJo's treachery, partners with Sandra, and the two discover a deep and soulful love for each other. In the end, Sandra has a chance to reveal JoJo as a cheater, but instead she slyly allows JoJo to win and leave town for good. Sandra and Justin, now freed from JoJo's torment, prepare their new life together. They have come to embody the true connection that Sofía used to call "the Spirit of Tango," and Anthony knows his students will carry on their legacy.



[Additional Information ►](#)

PREMIERE

Commissioned by Cascadia Chamber Opera. Premiered in the fall of 2018 in Eugene, Oregon and toured across four additional Oregon towns.

CAST AND MUSICAL FORCES

- **Sandra (soprano)**, a young ingénue whose journey of self-discovery and self-empowerment forms the central story of the opera.
- **JoJo (mezzo)**, Sandra's rival in dance and in life, the bully and central antagonist.
- **Sofia (low mezzo with optional contralto register)**, Anthony's mentor and lover who taught him all he knows about tango and life. She was 10 years older than him and already famous. She appears as a spirit who guides and inspires Anthony from beyond the grave, even though he can't perceive her directly.
- **Anthony (tenor)**, the tango teacher who provides a narrative frame for the story. He's younger than Sofia, who passed away many years ago, but he's a full generation older than his students.
- **Justin (tenor)**, JoJo's boyfriend and dance partner, whose tender heart and optimistic worldview end up making him a much better match for Sandra than for JoJo.
- **Victor (bass)**, Sandra's narcissistic boyfriend and dancer partner, whose constant criticism and comical self-absorption ultimately drive Sandra away.
- **Tango quartet:** Violin, Bandoneón (Argentine tango accordion), Piano, Bass

DANCING DOUBLES

The six characters are matched with six corresponding dancing doubles, comprising three pairs of tango dancers who enact all the dancing scenes.

DURATION

Approximately two hours

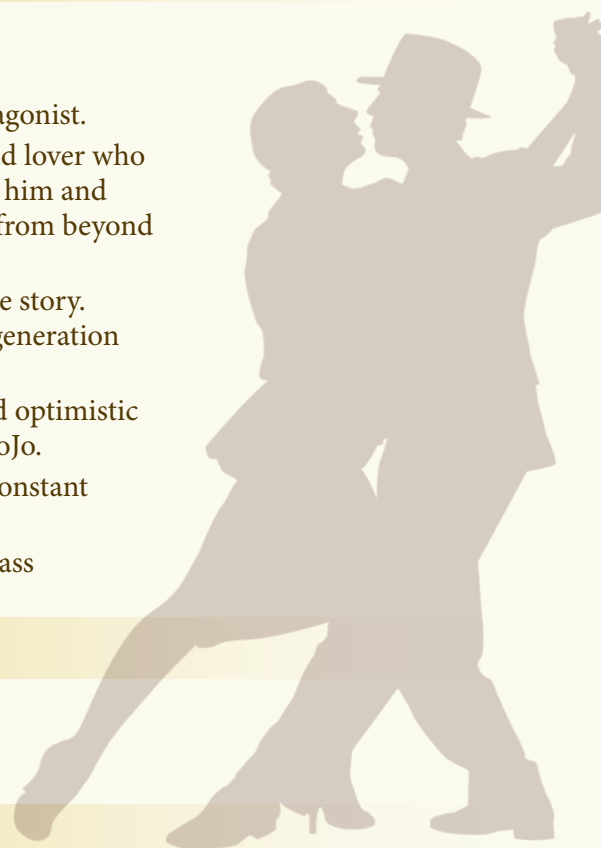
SETTING AND PRODUCTION

The story takes place in present time and is set in an unspecified fictional coastal town in northern California. Most of the action takes place in Anthony's dance studio; as such, the piece requires only minimal sets. Regarding costuming, the primary requirement is that each character shares an obvious visual cue with his/her dancing double, such as wearing the same costume.

Tango of the White Gardenia is the property of the composer, Ethan Gans-Morse.

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