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## With his accordion, he creates music that spans many worlds



Chango Spasiuk's passionate performances have turned him into a star in Argentina

In the verdant lands along the Paraná and Uruguay rivers in northern Argentina, life moves at a deliberate pace. The music of this region is called chamamé, and it tells a vivid story about the people who have lived there since the late 19th century.

Immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean brought their instruments and dances, which blended with the already mingled cadences of Spaniards, Africans, and Guaraní Indians. The resulting mix, a hardy accordion-driven style that accompanies community celebrations, is little known outside of Argentina. But Chango Spasiuk, a prolific composer, accordion player, and gruff, soulful vocalist, is bringing chamamé to the world.

"My sound is a new way to look at a language," says Spasiuk, 40, from his home in Buenos Aires, speaking in Spanish through an interpreter. He notes Argentine musicians Astor Piazzolla and Atahualpa Yupanqui in particular as sources of creative "nourishment." "They're a fuel that helps me find my own way," he says. "Even when I'm not looking to do so, I find myself taking this music to other places, so there could be some similarities with Piazzolla's search with tango."

Spasiuk makes his Boston debut at a World Music/CRASHarts concert tonight at the Somerville Theatre with his acoustic quintet, featuring bassist Juan Pablo Navarro, violinist Víctor Renaudeau, guitarist and vocalist Sebastián Villalba, and his brother Marcos Villalba on the box-like Peruvian cajón and other percussion.

While his music remains tied to the red soil and farming ways of his province, Misiones, Argentina's northeastern horn nestled between Paraguay and Brazil, Spasiuk has transformed a regional, folkloric style into a precise, beautifully balanced concert music, losing none of its deeply felt nostalgia and joy along the way.

"He's beyond charismatic," says Michael Stone, executive director of Princeton University's Program in Latin American Studies, who wrote the liner notes for Spasiuk's recent CD "Pynandi" (Harmonica Mundi/World Village). "His music and his stage presence are almost transcendental. It's a music of profound beauty and feeling, and as amazing as it sounds on a

recording, it takes seeing the music performed live."

Spasiuk's passionate performances have turned him into an unlikely star in Argentina, where thriving rock and tango scenes tend to dominate. Dedicated to forging a contemporary approach to chamamé, he's collaborated with a wide range of artists, from the Argentine rockers Divididos and Cienfuegos to adventurous downtown Manhattan musicians John Zorn, Marc Ribot, and Cyro Baptista.

"I like it when we relate beyond the form, not as if we were tribes," says Spasiuk, the grandchild of Ukrainian peasants. "The fact that I've played with other types of musicians comes from a personal need to build a music that allows me to express myself. Simply repeating the forms that are known up to now doesn't satisfy me."

Like much of South America's folkloric music, chamamé is built on the 6/8 rhythms brought to the continent by enslaved West Africans. Where its far better known cousin, tango, flaunts an almost brutal, urbane eroticism, chamamé swings with stately grace, strongly influenced by European polkas, schottisches, waltzes, and rasguidos dobles. While the style coalesced at the beginning of the 20th century, its orchestration and instrumentation were codified in the songs of Tránsito Cocomarola, one of Argentina's most popular "country" artists of the 1940s.

Chamamé was the only live music Spasiuk heard while growing up, a constant soundtrack at weddings, baptisms, and birthday parties. His father and uncles, who were carpenters, played at celebrations, though he says their music was strictly rough-hewn. Still, the sound ignited something deep within him, and his music flows from his memories of the region's pastoral cycles and rituals. These rustic ingredients provide the inspiration for an expansive world of music documented on six CDs, including "Tarefero De Mis Pagos" (Sounds From the Red Land), which won him a BBC award for world music (best newcomer 2005) and a 2006 Latin Grammy nomination for best folk album.

"Their music was more than entertainment," Spasiuk says of his family. "It was food. They didn't teach me how to play well. But I did understand from watching them the hunger for sound and the desire to feed it."■

**CHANGO SPASIUK** At Somerville Theatre tonight at 8. Tickets are \$28 at 617-876-4275 or [www.worldmusic.org](http://www.worldmusic.org).