



# World Mandolin: La Tipica

by Paul Oorts

*La Tipica* is a challenging and fun mandolin tune with a lot of history behind it. It was written by Carlo Curti, a rather important figure in the history of the mandolin in the US and in Mexico, and a prodigious chameleon of an impresario.

Trained in Italy as a violinist, he probably came to the US in 1866, and played for a traveling Opera Company. Later he conducted the ensemble at New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel. In 1880, a group of Spanish students toured around the US, dressed in national costumes, singing and playing guitars and bandurrias. Seeing their great success (and the fact that they could only tour during

summer months when they were out of school), Curti decided to form a troupe with his Italian violin playing buddies, pass themselves off as Spanish students (who could tell the difference?), and make some lucrative tours all over the US. That was, by the way, when Carlo added a first -s to his name and became "Carlos." His ensemble contributed to the popularity of the mandolin, first in the ivy league schools, and trickling down from there. Because they were originally violinists, they all played the neapolitan roundback style tuned GDAE. not the flat-back bandurrias with different tuning schemes.

In 1884, Carlos was on tour in Mexico City and made some great connections. He performed at a celebration of the recent re-election of General Porfirio Díaz. Anti-Díaz forces had successfully used folk music as a propaganda tool, which is reportedly why the general was so interested in creating his own "typically" Mexican music. By adding some traditional Mexican instruments to his outfit (salterios and bandolons), Curti created the "orquesta Típica Mexicana" and performed a suite of pieces entitled "aires Nacionales Mexicanos." Some of these he had arranged, others were of his own composition, including probably this "tipica." Soon Curti and his Orquesta were touring all over Mexico and the US. The maestro got a job teaching at the Conservatorio Nacional, and published profusely in Mexico - to this day they have orquestas tipicas in Mexico playing his repertoire --as well as in the US. I found a trio arrangement of this tune in Little Italy many years ago. It was published by Cardilli in New York (no date, probably early 1900's), and gave as author "Charles Curtis." Second -s.

## About the Author

**Paul Oorts** started his musical career in his native Belgium playing the flügelhorn in the village band of the small town in which he grew up. During the late seventies he learned to play guitar, bass, and 5-string banjo in the vibrant folk scene of Antwerp, then a magnet for buskers of all feathers. He first picked up a mandolin while living in Italy and got his first decent instrument just before he moved to the US in 86 and traded in his upright (which was rather hard to take on the plane...).

During graduate school in PA he started playing for contradances, and got interested in the hammered dulcimer, which would lead him to a lifetime friendship and collaboration with Steve Schneider (with whom he recorded an album called "Momentum") and to a marriage and musical partnership with Karen Ashbrook. Their "Celtic Café" is an exploration of the connections between Celtic and Continental music, and they perform at festivals across the country.

Moving to the DC area allowed him to explore the world of the mandolin orchestras and to become a semi-professional musician, playing in a variety of dance bands and teaching mandolin, cittern, and guitar privately. He has been on faculty at the Augusta Heritage Center (WV) the Swannanoa Gathering (NC), Common Ground on the Hill (MD), Pinewoods (MA), Hill County Acoustic Music Camp (TX), and the Volksmuziekstage in Gooik (Belgium). His most regular gig is teaching French and Italian at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.



ff p

ff

ff

1 2 D.S. al Fine

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**TRIO**

p

2 0 5 4 5 0 5 2 5 4 4 5 0 2 4 2 0 5 2 0 0 5 5 5

*f* 0 5 3 2 3 5 3 0 3 2 5 0 1 3 7 5 7 5 3 1 5 5 3

0 5 4 0 0 5 3 1 1 3 1 0 5 5 3 2 0 5 2 5 5 3 3 3 3

*ff* *p* *ff* *p* 0 2 3 5 0 1 0 2 0 2 0 3 5 2 3 0 5 0 2 3 5 0 5 0 5 0 5 2 3 2 0 5 7

*ff*

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 5 5 5 5

0 5 3 2-3 5-3 0-3 2 5 0 1 3 3 5-7-5 3 1 5 5 3

*D.S. al Coda*

0 5 4 0 0 5 3 1 1-3-1 0 5 5 3 2 0 5 2-5 5-3 3 3 0 4

**Coda**

*ff*

3 5 5 3-7 5 0 2 5 3 5 5 3-7 5 0 2 5 3 2 0 5 4 5 2 5 7 5 5