

# Edgar Alandia: Andean music in an european context

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The communicative function of music, by way of intellectual and artistic interchanges through sound, has increased the proximity and friendship between the human beings in the universe. Sounds have facilitated coexistence since the beginning of times. The word, the language spoken in families and somewhat close circles, allows diverse expressive and intimate shades. Music, possibly due to the broad dimension of sounds, perhaps needs more time to unfold. This linguistic possibility, of universal and direct comprehension, took human beings to the conflict illustrated by the construction of the Babel Tower, where the word, each word, according to the person who had pronounced it and according to its origin, had different meanings, sometimes so different that its understanding was impossible. Sounds do not respond to these codes, they respond to the auditive sensibility, because sound is not composed by words nor expresses a determinate language, it expresses an indeterminate language that goes beyond the origin of whom utilizes it. Those who knew how to use sound in moments of human, social or religious conflict achieved the best results. The profound conviction of the sound expression resolved extreme conflicts, converting them into inseparable fraternities.

The social, racial and religious clash which happened in America with the arrival of the Spanish colonizers in the fifteenth century brought two different cultures subtly closer by means of music. This clash could not have been more violent and contrasting. Races, cultures and religions had to endure an initially

impossible coexistence. The ones responsible for improving the quality of such coexistence did not hesitate in using music (as well as other mechanisms) as a resource for expression, avoiding verbal communication, which had caused so much confusion in similar situations. Effectively, sounds were superior to any verbal attempts of communication and found the most human and sensible of each person. Thus, everything that has been produced in those first encounters generates a profound reflection; it is astounding that the circumstances and intentions behind these situations have still not been clarified, as opposed to some other cases.

The first years of coexistence of these different kinds of music in America offer examples that may be considered the most refined and sensible ever produced. Sound, as we know, does not bear color or race. It carries the message that is asked of it, without any other meaning that is not purely musical. The evolution of times leads to the accumulated potential of that coexistence that makes indivisible the origin of the authors. Were they Spanish or American? Certainly, there are some signatures which reveal authorship, although anonymousness is most common and instructive.

The study of the trajectory of musical materials in America is necessary for the understanding of today's music. There was an interchange of musical ideas since the first moment, as well as a fusion of artistic sensibility (especially of millenarian heritage), overcoming what may be considered racial differences. The trajectory, traveled side by side, took us to an equalizing conception of the soundscape, with the personal diversity that the creator stamps in each work, related to his or her human and artistic sensibility. When we get to the twentieth century, the accumulated musical potential achieves the highest levels of creative originality, given the sum of obtained results.

To admire nowadays the masters of this potential, situated among the world's most recognized values, is to synthesize the origins of music through times and cultures. To find the historical names of Villa-Lobos, Chávez, Ginastera, Revueltas and Roldán along with so many other geniuses helps to recognize the margins of accumulation obtained throughout the centuries between races and cultures. This accumulation takes us nowadays to the names of Mario Lavista, Manuel Enríquez, Leo Brower, Rafael Aponte-Ledée, Gerardo Gandini, Alcides Lanza, Roberto Sierra, Marlos Nobre, Alfredo del Mónaco and many others. Most of them had great experience and knowledge acquired in their original countries, but also became acquainted with the most up-to-date

tendencies in the international courses in Darmstadt, around the 1950s, after the Second World War, and, from 1961 on, at the Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales Torcuato Di Tella, directed by Alberto Ginastera in Buenos Aires and in the Latin-American Courses of Contemporary Music, which took place in several American countries. Nevertheless, the reflection we are making with this article points us towards one of the most representative figures among the new composers: Bolivian composer Edgar Alandia. Alandia may be considered a central piece of the musical renovation between America and Europe, due to his privileged position as a master in the Italian educational scene and his universal perspective of American and European contemporary music, since he is a member of a millenarian community and at the same time he encountered the evolved ways of the present, allowing himself to conjugate, as time went by, the most clear and representative elements.

Alandia came to the world in Oruro (Bolivia) in 1950, being a child of a cultured family, according to Andean standards. His family was conscientious of the social and cultural movements of the time, and confronted, with decision and enthusiasm, conservative forces, facing high-risk situations which were so common in those years that led to Che Guevara's guerrillas. It was in this context that Alandia dared to compose, being censored by the teachers of the Escuela Nacional de Música de Oruro. Later, at the National Academy Santa Cecilia in Rome, there were already signals of his discreet appropriateness, when Franco Donatoni did not notice the intellectual and artistic reach of his Bolivarian student and suggested him that, if he wanted to continue in the Academy, he should make music like him, Donatoni; otherwise, it would be better to go back to Bolivia and to make folk music. The pedagogical potential of Donatoni offered excellent results to those who opted to follow his directions and who continued somehow his composition conception, but our composer had a unique way of thinking about music, a way that was hard to understand from a Central-European organizational perspective shaped according to the philosophy of Darmstadt.

In the course of his educational process, Alandia, with his curiosity-provoking sensibility, had different experiences during the 1970s. Italy was the context of this process, with its thoroughly developed society, not only artistically but also industrially, economically and politically. There, apart from the Donatonian stimuli, Alandia acquired a technique, a profession, defined his interests and matured the seeds of a political vision of the world, society and life. The total of experiences lived since his initial Andean educational period, in contrast with

the European experience – which allowed him to see things from a different perspective – was an advantage in order to help him to define himself as an individual and musician. These experiences, along with his curiosity and interest for different cultures, contributed to the definition of his artistic identity and are reflected, undoubtedly, in the music he writes.

His musical output, following his cultural and artistic positions, always comes from a point in which ideas configure the present. This output is full of examples of conceptual innovations that can only be conceived from a standpoint of multiple values from broad and distant latitudes. The recognition of these values was quick and embracing: Prize Valentino Bucchi, Rome; Prize Carreño, Caracas; Prize Venezia Opera Prima and the presence in the most important festivals and programs in concert seasons in Europe or America. Among his works, we should highlight some titles that are the musical result of his political and social line of thought.

First, we shall cite *Rumi*, for cello and piano, for the possibility of a natural harmonic world, and *¡Grito!*, for soprano, for the rigorous structural organization which permits the impression of a quasi-improvising piece. In addition to these, *Paititi*, for string quartet and orchestra, in which a basic material developed by one of the instruments of the quartet ends up developed by the remaining three instruments, creating a new material that will be the basis for the orchestral development. The musical texture that appears in the orchestra, by its turn, returns to the quartet, which generates a new cycle that will be used, again, by the orchestra, and so on.

Alandia's instrumental comprehension would not be imaginable were not the experiences and knowledge of the Andean music he learned in his homeland, whose symmetry defined his way of thinking, of working and of organizing the compositional materials.

I should not forget, when listing works which demonstrate instrumental contributions and experimentation, *Phucuy*, for solo clarinet. This is undoubtedly an excellent example (one of the best in its genre) of technical knowledge of the chosen instrument, with a natural and playable precision of the most innovative and complex resources regarding multiphonics: broken sounds, real and resultant sounds, real and harmonics sounds, combinations of harmonics and real sounds, trills and tremolos with these sounds, etc. These elements work perfectly, possibly a unique phenomenon. *Phucuy*, which means “blow”

in Quechua, departs from a noisy set of nine notes which, progressively, project a melodious tune. In this work, the composer, in a clear reference to his homeland, renounces formal clarity and consistency in order to recreate a timbric atmosphere of the Andean Altiplano.

Alandia is consistent when he starts working on new pieces. The seminal elements of his new compositions rarely distance themselves from its original vocabulary, or, which ends up being the same, from his intellectual and human sensibility regarding the present moment. In *Khana*, which means light, an instrument proposes musical figures that are received by the other instruments, adapted to their own nature and reflected back, creating an extremely rich timbric texture.

Exceptionally, it is possible that Alandia uses the Spanish language as a resource to express the title, as when LIM programmed a series of events in homage to Olivier Messiaen, and the Fundación Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa (BBK) requested the work *Como una luz de invierno a mi lado*, on the occasion of the French composer's birthday. More than taking as themes strictly musical elements of the honored composer, Alandia found some common perspectives in the act of thinking about music – "... I do not seek music... I let music find me". In this work, a main structure (melodic, harmonic, timbric and gestural) superposes other secondary structures in the background. The secondary structures end up being contaminated by some of the elements of the main structure, and rework them according to their own principles, with little variations that suggest new ideas for the main structure.

In *Perla, fábula triste*, the music is expressed by words, an inversion of the opera principle, which values the text. Here, the recited parts (*recitativo*) take place in the instruments, and the singing (*aria*) in the vocal recitative. In fact, this is an experimental peculiarity, an innovation in the opera realm. Alandia breaks a highly accepted model in permanent usage and creates a format that deserves intense development.

The teaching aspect is an impressive particularity in Edgar Alandia's personality. His ability to communicate with colleagues in general and students in particular is especially interesting, helping to define the creative personality of each one of them. This special disposition for such colorful and committed communication may only be found in people who are very much convinced of their own experiences, people who have dealt with many cognitive phenomena.

All of Alandia's students, who are widespread around the world – he has taught in prestigious international centers like the Rossini Conservatory in Pesaro, Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome, Morlacchi Conservatory in Perugia (all in Italy), not to mention numerous workshops and courses in distinct countries – bear an open mind, a mind with good disposition for experimentation and imaginative creation; all of them have a highly distinctive technical formation.

Examples of the condensation of so many historical and contemporary elements of such diverse cultures, like the American and European ones, as is happens with Edgar Alandia, are fundamental for the communicative relationship and for intellectual and artistic interchanges through sounds. His fantasy world, as much as his objective reality, nurtures on these sounds. Without them, the possibility of interacting with the world in such a broad and varied way would have been very different, but over all greatly reduced.

Thank you to Edgar Alandia, and to all who were able to contribute with this musical and artistic treasure of our times.

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