

# Edgar Alandia: musician and friend

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I have known Edgar Alandia for a little more than a quarter of a century, since 1990, in Rome. The occasion was a course which, thanks to his efforts, I taught at the Asociación Musical Astaldi. The click was immediate between the two of us and we initiated an enduring friendship, even though not very geographically favorable. At the onset, a simple reason would unite us: coincidentally, both of us have Latin-American and European bonds – he is of Bolivian origin, residing in Italy, and I am Mexican, son of Spanish political refugees – although we had never met in our own continent. Our friendship lasts strongly because it was never imperative for us to coincide in the aesthetic terrain – he is a neat musician of academic origin, and I am an anti-academic to the greatest extent.

In one of our first encounters, Alandia gave me, as a business card, his *Etiquettes* for piano, which I carefully brought to Mexico and which, years later, my wife Velia Nieto performed. Since then, I followed his steps in different European festivals – Germany or France, for example – and particularly in Italy, for instance the *Rassegna di Nuova Musica*, organized by our well-esteemed common friend, Stefano Scodanibbio, of tragic memory.

A couple of years ago, Alandia and I met once more in Mexico, where he conducted a seminar and a conference at the *Cátedra Conlon Nancarrow*. These events attracted the attention of young composers of my university, who appreciated, as much as myself, his intelligence and sensibility for explaining his work or for talking about music in general. I take the opportunity to leave

him a message, that he should polish his perceptive ideas and publish them in writing!

A work like Alandia's will unlikely be properly appreciated in our countries, where radio stations, festivals and even performers interested in contemporary music are scarce. For several decades, Edgar's music comes to fruition through the hands of mostly European performers, who face its difficulties and give artistic sense to the creative aspiration of his scores.

Alandia, the intuitive Bolivian scholar, does not use in his compositions the discursive mask used by many, a presumed "Latin-American identity", because his art is the expression of someone who hears and thinks with the ear, in a solitary way and by means of a rigorous writing. He needs such working ethics in order to retain fantasy experiences; at the same time, it is an intellectual requirement whose aspiration is to decipher the ghost.

I can see, in Edgar Alandia's work, an intimate mark whose inventive roots are set free in search of oneiric atmospheres, ready to be awoken for a flight, even though for fugitive instants. This happens in the *Intermezzi* for string quartet, for example. At other times, this mark is characterized by a sweetness which sheds light at the explorer who carries his own work, as it is audible in ...*sottili canti invisibili I-II*, for piano, the instrument we know he masters as a performer, and which we suppose to be the private laboratory for his blurry, noisy or strident resonances. Later on, he transposed the same experiments for other instruments, like in ...*se me ha perdido ayer el canto de las estrellas*, one of the titles inspired by the late Bolivian poet Jaime Sáenz. Alandia's musical inspiration creates melodies whose harmonious character carries, without fuss, Pablo Neruda's *Grito* ("...y nosotros los muertos, los escalonados en el tiempo..."). He summoned Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* to dialogue, as the grand solitary child, with the stars in the firmament in *Tu avrai delle stelle, come nessuno ha* ("You alone will have stars as no one else has them"), a seed, by its turn, of more recent works, like *Thumpa*, piece for bass clarinet in which he inserts a poetic rubric: "amidst the profound silence".

Alandia's music is, without any doubt, manufactured with the new tools of the old continent. Nevertheless, I can hear a very personal trait in it, manifested in a usage of such tools (habits, abilities, habitable places) that is not necessarily adjusted to the system or the compass with which most navigate. His style creates a distinct joy, the joy of getting lost in dreadful pathways, to which he

does not succumb. At the risk of oversimplifying, I detect three main attributes of his compositional approach: an interest for the structural solidity of symmetry; an inclination for waving temporal micro-filigree; and a predilection for an arcane universe, the introversion before the wind's nebulosity – a memory preserved by the Andean instruments.

Alandia has the nature of a lyrical and intuitive musician, even when he is not being spontaneous in order to achieve that, for Edgar is made of good intellectual fiber and of the tranquility of the happy man who hears, without any hurry, the interior of his private universe. From such universe, we can expect new impulses filled with the same usual poetic depth, and perhaps he will impart his way to the opera *Perdido viajero*, a libretto of his venerated old friend, Jaime Sáenz, which still awaits for the voice that will make it sound.