

# On Bolivian composer Edgar Alandia Cañipa's music

*Luigi Pestalozza*

Alandia is Bolivian, but he does not carry, nor carries his music, the implacable tragedy of his people and his country. He does not spend his time exhibiting “musically” whatever happens there, in the Bolivian mountains, where he was born in the middle of the last century.

It is hard to loose one's roots, even for those who have studied abroad, like Alandia did in Rome. Alandia, by his turn, does not want to loose his roots. In his works, they are preserved in an original way. Therefore, his music becomes frontier music, music of an author who, between different cultures, keeps going forward, making sure his music does not fall into frivolity. He has worked in such way for years in Italy, Bolivia, Belgium and other countries. It is interesting to see how clearly he refuses the temptation of following European composition trends, and how precisely he uses the techniques he has learned in the musical metropolises of Europe. Also clearly and precisely, he avoids the “style” of submitting to the rhetoric of his own Latin-American sources, which he does not renounce.

In *Antes*, for example, the composition bears a process of thought and expression very typical of Andean popular music, due to its symmetry and other elements. But Schiaffini's trombone (to whom the *divertimento* is dedicated) does not mimic folklore or its elements, although we can hear that it “has fun” with them. This is why Alandia affirmed, referring to himself and some works performed in

a concert: “the works I present are the result of stimuli and contradictions of the Latin-American being of today, and these belong to a series of reflections about the logical parameters (sometimes even Andean elemental parameters through sound). Sound, as a manifestation of a psychological state, is determined by a macroscopic nature and by sad existential conditions. A quest, in summary, for oneself. Therefore, in each of my works, I combine both music making and personal deeds; complex and delicate deeds, which confirm their precise cultural provenance in their search for the musical result, within margins of objective participation in a culture acquired and accepted through differences: the identity itself. For this reason, music comes before everything else; I refer to the pieces of the album *Studio* – recorded in 1980 by the ensemble *Nuove Forme Sonore* for the label *Edipan* – which absolutely cannot be summarized by a unique formula. They are united by ‘a compositional attitude’, which is a way of thinking music, and not only by the music itself.”

We often find in Alandia’s work, for example, a structuralist memory, but the insistent, perceptible and evident presence of sonorous structures, sometimes initiated by a sole sound, does not provide structural organization for the piece. It actually follows an articulation of figures and episodes which return to the initial material, according to symmetrical principles, characteristic of the Andean musical folklore. Therefore, it is preferable to speak in terms of sonorous, harmonic and timbric points of reference, around which the musical material revolves. This material is made of elements of different nature, of various syntactic allusions, as though a certain evocative, exploratory and musically open movement would aim not a contrast, but rather a musical and cultural integration with those essential points of reference. This is the origin of sensation: music, above all... is something to be felt. Such discursive interdependence (of great formal scope) produces a new kind of “recitative”: the music enunciates with instruments, sounds, relationships between materials, melodies and gestures typical from distinct music cultures, searching for itself, or in other words, searching for its reality, its truth. For this reason, compositional schemes derived from a kind of musical development that is only interesting to Europeans are not sufficient; for this reason, it is true and real the comparison the composer (master of the compositional techniques) makes with those points that are fixed, inalienable, and, for that matter, truly referential of his musical universe.

If Alandia’s style is easily recognizable in *Antes* and *Tu avrai delle stelle, como nessuno ha*, this is not only due to Andean references. Furthermore, in these

two works, these references lose their popular image. Actually, these two pieces' characteristics and structure require Alandia to adopt a precise attitude in his musical language, which is the attitude of modern music until postmodernism. This language is used by Alandia, but he does not identify himself with it, defending his personal style. In fact, his language does not "sound" subordinate, derived or ratified, even though it is part of musical history and all its issues; the "stories" of this musical history preserve him from a confusion of roles and cultural identities, because in his language it is the sound that differentiates him and sets him apart from European modern music, with which, at the same time, he shares all vicissitudes. His sound always turns back to Bolivia and, for that very reason (as we can now understand better), Alandia, a frontier musician, could cite Neruda's verse: "he llegado hasta aquí con todo lo que vino conmigo"<sup>1</sup>, commenting: "in these verses by Neruda one can understand the meaning of being Latin-American nowadays, and of being a citizen in the dramatic reality of the Third World: protagonists, spectators and mute witnesses, we have arrived here with the burden of the social and cultural heritage left by the grandiose local civilizations, the 400 years of Spanish colonization and the terrible price of hunger, paid to the neocolonialism of the capitalist empire". Therefore, even when it is not recognizable or explicit, the relationship with the Andean way of thinking music is the basis of his way of thinking or, in other words, his way of organizing sounds and pieces, his way of confronting himself and interpreting today's music in today's world, a multifaceted world, not anymore concentric. This is the message of Alandia's music, besides the music itself.

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<sup>1</sup> I have arrived here with everything that came with me.