

New paths in Argentine contemporary music: *Aparecida* (1986) by Carlos Mastropietro¹

Edgardo J. Rodríguez

Facultad de Bellas Artes, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina
edgardo.rodriguez2@speedy.com.ar - www.edgadorodriguez.com.ar

Proceedings of the International Conference *Beyond the Centres: Musical Avant-Gardes Since 1950*
Thessaloniki, Greece, 1-3 July 2010, <http://btc.web.auth.gr/>

Abstract: The development of the Argentine twentieth-century music may be described and explained according to the compositional and esthetic models from the central European countries. The fundamental opposition between A. Ginastera and J. C. Paz (the leaders of the two main divergent tendencies in the Argentine compositional history) is articulated in terms of categories belonging to those models and defines the limits of esthetic and compositional stances in Argentina from the forties onwards. Ginastera was an heir to the nationalist poetics, while Paz focused his work on musical internationalism. The former was directly linked to Bartok and Stravinsky's esthetic and compositional concerns; the latter to the Viennese School, especially to Schoenberg's work. In turn, by the mid-sixties, the Latin American Center of High Musical Studies emerged at the Instituto Di Tella (headed by Ginastera) which exerted a strong influence on the composers born in the forties. The Center, which existed until the beginning of the seventies, updated the knowledge of European and North American mainstream tendencies, which did not cancel the trends already present in the country (those initiated by Ginastera and Paz), but provoked their diversification. Precisely, this generation influenced the Argentine composers that today are about fifty years old. Standing out from among them is Carlos Mastropietro's (1958) production about whom we will discuss one of his earliest work '*Aparecida*' (1986) and some of his most important esthetic concerns, those which separate him from traditional models. The main source of his compositional language is his 'bad memory', which transforms his musical culture in 'a source of forgetfulness and deformities' that structurally precludes textual and stylistic quotes. In close relation to these we will develop two of his main esthetic and technical ideas, those of the 'non-domestication' of music, on the one hand, and the 'fragility' of the work, on the other.

The majority of the developments of the Argentine academic music in the 20th century are clearly influenced by the Central European and North American models. Not only are these models reproduced in vernacular esthetic issues but also in the pieces themselves.

The nationalistic esthetics, that was at its peak in the first part of the century, was the counterpart of the European trends, their main musical models were Stravinsky and Bartok. The internationalistic tendency, contemporaneous and critic of musical nationalism, takes on the Viennese School's serialism mainly through Schoenberg's music.

Alberto Ginastera and Juan Carlos Paz were the Argentine composers that headed these trends and paradoxically both had similar esthetic itineraries. Their earlier compositional stages were rooted in diatonism with folk tints in the case of Ginastera and neoclassical in Paz's music. Later, both engaged pitch serialism: Paz in 1934, Ginastera in 1958.

The permeability to the models of the main countries that has characterized the history of the Argentine music, may have enabled that opposition to delude in comparable esthetic paths. In fact, esthetic trajectories were established, which were unthinkable for the composers who originated those models. Thus Paz, for instance, at the beginning of his compositional career was an anti-romantic neoclassical formalist, that later became a twelve-tone composer, the ultimate goal of Schoenbergian romanticism.

The Argentine musical scene hasn't been substantially modified until the sixties, when the Latin American Center of High Musical Studies (CLAEM, 1962-1970), the musical branch of the Instituto Di Tella, emerged. The Center strongly influenced on the South American and Argentine composers born in the forties. It updated the knowledge of the latest compositional trends in Europe and North America. A library which contained the latest scores and an electroacoustic lab were created; important concert series of recently composed music were

organized, at the same time that reknown composers taught and gave lectures (possibly the most remembered visits were those of I. Xenakis, L. Nono and J. Cage).

This updating enabled the diversification of Argentine musical esthetic spectrum, hegemonized up to that moment by the nationalism-internationalism opposition. At that time, the first groups of improvisation and experimental music emerged together with the highly politized esthetics, the electroacoustic music was established as a real compositional possibility, the knowledge of North American avant-garde was deepened, etc..

CLAEM's generation shaped the generation born in the late fifties, in which is possible to detect some authors that clearly produced some kind of novelty or differentiation, neither merely discursive nor declamatory, from the hegemonic models.

The compositions of Carlos Mastropietro (1958) are an example of this new tendency, already present in one of his earliest works '*Aparecida*' (1986) on which we base our presentation.

Mastropietro: some esthetic issues

The main source of his compositional language is his 'bad memory', which transforms his musical culture in 'a source of forgetfulness and deformities' that precludes structurally textual and stylistic quotes. On the other hand, in Mastropietro's poetic discourse the ideas of 'non-domestication' of the music and 'fragility' of the work stand out.

The non-domestication of his music results not only from the conscious search for the differentiation of the dominant compositional models and from what they bring along (their esthetics, their techniques, their analytical methods, etc.), but also a particular way of achieving musical structure focusing on the characteristic features of the instrumentalists who will perform the work.²

When writing, the composer is strongly linked and adapted to the interpreters, detecting and exploiting their interpretative specificity and peculiar sonorities, as if, in the end, the existence of an 'Argentine' expressivity, a specific detour, a vernacular performer's typical swing, were assumed.

The idea of fragility of the work, that can be defined as the 'degree of resistance against the interpretation's inaccuracies', is an inherent feature of the non-domestication. The composer must make sure that the structural aspects of the piece are not fragile. Thus, the concern about what is the essential for the work's concretion, the non fragile, establishes a writing stripped of the domestication's rhetoric, away from serial and post-serial legacies, on the one hand, and from the North American school, on the other.

Conceived in this way, the work does not express, as the dominant compositional canon has expressed, the composer's abstract musical ideas. Rather, these, which of course also exist, are filtered through the identified individual performers' skills, namely, those that will determine the work's fragility level. This feature, which could be a serious constraint to the composer's expressive possibilities, in Mastropietro's labour is promoted to the rank of esthetic assumption and of inspiration for the compositional work. The composer's imagination departs from the objective conditions for its recreation and if these were specific enough, in fact, the work could hardly be performed by another instrumental group. In that sense, it is seeking to establish less a generalizable language than a specialists' dialect. Somehow, this would close the possibility of interpretation.

The concern about the work's fragility supports the multiple versions of the piece; the one that we will discuss in this paper, for two sopranos, violin and flute; the flute and soprano 1 version; the violin and soprano 2 version; the instrumental one from 1991 (flute, oboe, clarinet, two violins and viola); and a last one for two sopranos currently being composed. In other words, the concern for the piece's structural strength is such that allows those minimum versions.

Aparecida³ (1986), para dos sopranos, flauta y violín

The piece is written in a 4/4 meter that has been perceptually canceled not because of rhythmic difficulties (not beyond 3 against 4 polyrhythm) but by the glissandi and pedal tones action.

The glissandi fade the semitonal discretization, blur the pedal tones and, while accentuating the continuity of the piece, seem to imply music that never happens or infinite possible continuations. It is this implication which drives the piece forward in time, makes it dynamic but not teleological.

The work can be divided into two instrumental groups, soprano 1 and flute (group 1), on the one hand, and soprano 2 and violin (group 2), on the other. Each pair of instruments relate to each other by establishing a rather strict pitch canon (without rhythmic imitation). In group 1 (G1), pitches are entered by the flute which is imitated by the soprano 1 (until bar 42, from bar 48 it is reversed), the same happens between the violin and soprano 2 of group 2 (G 2).

G1 is structured by relays between instruments and rhythmic articulations of sounds. G2, by glissandi between pitches usually longer or less articulated.

The work is the outcome of the superposition of these two distinct behaviors: long glissandos that are surrounded by shorter halftones. The overall result is a narrow mobile-band cluster over a background of stable sounds.

The violin provides the only major disruptions of the piece that, otherwise, is essentially continuous. These occur in two ways, with the note G on the fourth string and with high underdetermined pitches on the first one. Some of these disruptions precede the articulation of contrasting formal sections, especially those in bars 20 and 31, while the rest are juxtapositions in the continuity.

The other structural factor of the work is the change of harmonies or pedal notes that occur among some of the disruptions mentioned above. Most of the times, these harmonies and pedal notes are taken and left by glissandi. The stability of this component is opposed, as we said before, to the rhythmic instability of the immediately articulate neighbour tones.

The harmonies and pedal tones are (the numbers refer to the score attached at the end of this paper):

- 1) the A at the beginning of the piece (alternately attacked by G1's instruments) and the glissandi (played by G2) that surround that pitch by symmetrical distances.
- 2) the E-A axis of bar 11 in G2, which is surrounded by the neighbour⁴ tones Bb and, later, B of G1.
- 3) the E in the soprano 1 at bar 14, taken by the violin in the next bar (reinforced by its octave and by the flute: in unison or alternating with the descending fifth) and the neighbour tones D# and F (to which Bb and B are added when the A reappears at bar 17).
- 4) D-A short pedal (in the violin and octaved by the other instruments, respectively).
- 5) the A-C design over the note E in the second beat of bar 20 (and its neighbours D and F# in the scattered attacks of G1).
- 6) the E pedal in G2 (at bar 30) plus the soprano 1's C pedal (surrounded by the flute).
- 7) the A-C# melody over the flute's pedal in the second beat of bar 31.
- 8) C# pedal from bar 34 to 35, where D is added as a neighbour tone. From the second half of that bar the pedal goes back to E and then it widens up to C#.
- 9) at bar 38, G1 establishes a D pedal and G2 an E one. Both are surrounded: by C# in one case, and by F in the other.

- 10) at bar 42, over soprano 2's A pedal (after the A-D transition of bar 41), the following are articulated: on the one hand, violin's glissandi departing and arriving to the A, on the other hand, flute short attacks using notes that have been part of the pedals (A, C#, E, D) or their neighbours (D#, F, Bb).
- 11) in the following bar the soprano 1 sets a new pedal on F (a neighbour tone already in play), which is neighbored by G2 (Eb, G and then F# at bar 47) and by the flute (F# and E) at bar 46. From the last part of bar 48, pedals disappear and a gradual rise by glissando (G2) or by halftones (G1) is established. This culminates in the cluster of the middle of the bar 50.
- 12) at bar 50: high C pedal in the flute (taken by the violin at bar 56) over which chromaticisms and glissandi cover the B-E interval.
- 13) at bar 56: ascending and descending E-C violin glissando (an imitation of bars 48-50) then, from the last part of bar 59, begins a falling glissando that reaches the end of the piece in unison with the soprano 2. Meanwhile, G1 descend stepwise from E to B (soprano) and C (flute).

Concern about the fragility of the work can be traced in some musical materials and in the modest technical level required to be performed. Thus, most of the violin's configurations contain open strings sounds: the glissandi from the beginning arrive or depart from the open second string, the sforzandi low disruptions are on the G of the open fourth string, the high ones are in the first string but randomly chosen, and so on.

Something similar happens with the flute: the register, the rhythmic complexity and the technical resources required (frullato, for example) are those that could be satisfied by an average performer.

The voices in turn, either are associated with the action of the instrument (as in the case of G2, where many of the voice's glissandi are in unison with the violin) or they move by halftones around a pedal note (as in the soprano 1). However, they are the most fragile aspect of the structure.

Concern about the non-domestication of the work through the idea of fragility, favours the emergence of the novelty, of the difference, and this quality allows the insertion of the work in the avant-garde tradition of the central countries. Paradoxically, the cancellation of the canon situates the work in the canonical tradition.

References

- Corrado, Omar. 1997. The Construction of the Otherness in Twentieth-Century Argentinean Music. *World New Music Magazine*, Nº 7 :81-87. Köln, IX.
- Corrado, Omar. 2007. Neoclasicismo y objetividad en la música argentina de la década de 1930. *Revista Argentina de Musicología*, No.8 :17-67.
- Fessel, Pablo, comp. 2007. *Nuevas poéticas en la música contemporánea argentina*. Buenos Aires: Libros de Música, Biblioteca Nacional.
- Novoa, María Laura. 2008. Proyecto de renovación estética en el campo musical argentino y latinoamericano durante la década del sesenta: el Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM). *Revista Argentina de Musicología* 8: 69-87.

¹ The research presented here was funded by grants from the University of Buenos Aires (UBACyT F118) and the National Agency for the Promotion of Science and Technology (PICT 0707-2008).

² Perhaps, at the same time, this was the composer's solution to the lack of access, characteristic of the Argentine's music scene, to the orchestras and large ensembles specialized in this type of music. The instrumental excellence is supplied by the knowledge of and the work with the particular performer during the process of realization of the work.

³ The word means 'appeared': the piece is the result (appeared) of the superposition of the flute-soprano 1 and violin-soprano 2 duets.

⁴ Neighbour tone here is used to refer to the notes that surround by tones and halftones another usually longer note.