

About the collaborative work Performer / composer

by Juanita Fernández and Sofia Scheps

Tags: Piece, sound process, woman, instrument, creation, installation, composition, rural, performer, composer, art.

The purpose of this article is to describe the creative process that took place in the period 2018/2020 with Sofía Scheps Uruguayan composer and Juanita Fernández Conceptual artist and Uruguayan performer.

These artists began to work taking as their starting point the need to develop research in creation through a space for exchange and systematic experimentation between composer and performer.

This research and creation collaboration reflects on the possibility of creating multi-format pieces, in order to propose different production supports for a single starting idea. That is, versions of an idea that can be presented in different contexts and spaces without losing its essence: a piece that can be a concert composition, but can also take the form of a sound installation, or an electroacoustic piece, or a piece of video art.

In this sense, composition as a process of experimentation and the systematic composer / performer exchange enables a creative dialogue of porous borders: who composes and who performs? As it is well known, composition is sometimes performance, and performance is also composition. From this process comes a piece with its own identity, a condensation of these experiments and exchanges that can take different forms and means of expression (formats and supports), illuminating in each one of them, different edges of the original idea.

The work entitled *A Cántaros* is the first of this multi-format piece process, which began in 2019. Having been presented as sound installation format in 2019 as part of the *Gran Premio de Arte Contemporáneo* (Alianza Francesa Uruguay), it is currently in the process of making a video-art forma version.

The work begins, mainly from the personal affinity between the two artists, but mainly from the need to seek new means of expression for sound creation, questioning the rigidity of the single format, and proposing instead multiple formats, hybrids, multi platform devices, with the ability to adopt different forms and multiple and diverse outputs that still represent the essence of the initial idea, the starting point of research and creation.

It is not about products/objects but about ideas, and how those ideas spill out and take different forms as diverse products/objects/devices, illuminating different aspects of creativity.

These previous discussions led us to the need to create a piece where we could develop different expressive techniques appropriate to our interests and place conceptual, experimental, sound art in the place we intended. Combine a very broad idea in one piece, and the multiply that piece in several formats.

From the beginning of this collaboration, the fluid integration of acoustic and electroacoustic elements (mediated by technologies) was at the center, and we found in sound transduction a technique that achieved this integration in a particularly effective way: activating from these devices vibration and resonance of acoustic instruments / objects. This allowed us to think in the first instance of a mixed piece for percussion and electronics in which the percussion instruments themselves functioned as amplifiers of the electroacoustic material (and in many cases the amplified material were recordings of those instruments themselves, or particularly resonant frequencies previously found , generating a recursive system and remembering a situation of ventriloquism).

From the first experimentations, the set of instruments was expanded to a set of found "objects", chosen for the type of response to transduction, but also for their aesthetic characteristics. This balance was very important from the beginning. There was a special curatorship in the selection of objects, which involved searches among familiar objects, and visits to antique fairs. The qualities of these objects, the sound materials used and the gestures proposed for the interpretation of the music quickly triggered a strong poetic connotation, which was interwoven almost from the beginning in the creation process and defined a certain rural work scene.

A woman works, composes a representation, draws a sound cartography from the action, proposes a dramaturgy that has as its raw material to activate the resonance of the spaces and use them as amplifiers. The woman repeats, accumulates: she seeks the contingency of the sky, of the states of water. It rains and the field of action is the field of sound, this determines the scenic, the will of the woman who works: the tempo of the work, its sonority.

For us, it's a huge piece that is still looking for spaces and forms to express itself. Basically this is the task of a woman, apparently in a rural environment, who develops certain actions in order to make it rain. This is not necessarily evident from the beginning, nor even late in the piece, but it was a central element in the construction of the piece. Once the task is completed, in the middle of the piece, there is a poetic action of nailing a knife in the earth, as a sign of tradition, given that until today in the rural area, this is the method to "cut the rain" (to stop the rain from falling, when it's enough). At this point, those who know about this tradition will perhaps be able to resignify the actions that took place previously as a ritual that seeks to stimulate the rain. Or not, this is not the important thing. The last act involves a song of gratitude and of noting the link with nature, in many cases terribly forgotten.

The important thing is to produce and make available to others a series of acoustically interesting, poetically evocative, and aesthetically enjoyable scenes that can be appreciated at different levels of perception and interpretation, offering an unusual and extraordinary space for perception.

The process involved first an approach to the real territory and the scenic device of the work: what the rural environment looks like, sounds like and feels like. Or rather, how we see, hear and feel this environment, and with what elements (and how) we can operate artistically from that perception.

From the selection of instruments and objects, and from the selection of a specific gesture for the different scenes, an arrangement in space begins to form, which responds precisely to the micro-universe of gestures and actions that the piece proposes. Different symbols emerge from this spatial configuration, and also intervene with the creative process: it consists of an axial symmetry, where there is an axis that reflects the sky on the earth.

There are 4 bass drums and 4 brass that function as speakers, in a mirrored arrangement of the Southern Cross, a constellation that identifies the southern hemisphere as such. Each step with Sofia was accompanied by a strict response to the desire that drove the piece. Every technical and aesthetic decision was necessarily driven by this impulse. We walk from the beliefs of the "souls of the drums" that throughout America is part of our culture. For example, in the Candombe (AfroUruguayan music, played in the street with 30 drums or more), our drums must have a name, since it is through us that they speak. Just as we have one and speak through it is of them when we play in the street.

Another aspect is the use of technology for the realization of the "fiction" component and the dubbing idea.

The bass drums and brass contained attached transducers and each one of them was manipulated in an octophonic system to be able to control the participation of 8 "sound objects" that actively participated in the development of the scene.

Likewise, in the deepening of our species, the term "transcending" our human condition and being able to make the piece, without the need for a certain person to act on it. Therefore this piece has a parallel component, which is that each version must be recorded and superimposed with all the previous ones. That is, every time the piece is mounted it will have the overlap history of all previous versions.

This will lead us to a very dense network of visual texture, but with a certain unity in the directions of movements. There is a tradition to follow, each of the movements, but with different ways, clothing, physical forms, character, spaces, etc. One of the versions involves a gradual formation of a storm on the roof of the space where the piece develops, this condenses in an extreme way until the rain falls.

The piece in the installation format, contains moments of "activation" where the person who personifies this woman of actions, appears and does his own thing, but between the lapse of one activation and another, people can inhabit the space and the last activation is projected zenithally superimposed with the previous ones during the installation format.

It is a space where to live, where to work, where to reflect, where to live a storm and the passage of it, where to thank for that collapse and for water, where we can value what exists in our lives, even if it can be confused with the canons that are imposed of what is "a good life" or "a complicated life".

That is not written anywhere, just as it is not written how to assemble a space that is vital to be able to transcend.

Inheritances are not only blood, bonds imply nothing more than bonding and knowing what we are made of. Every step of the piece is a defection. But not how

to build it, it is a decision to forget that the piece is "ours". No. We are from the piece and it is itself who showed us where we needed to go.

This total and absolute delivery, where the techniques, both compositional and interpretation were at the complete service of it, and the arbitrariness were natural. So much so that on the day of the opening, it rained at sea. In and out.