

Interview with Alberto Posadas

10.08.2014 in Bamberg in seinem Studio, Unterer Kaulberg, Bamberg

U: Could you please tell me something ...

P: Yes, to check the sound and to check the levels ... and perhaps we can wait till we have some noise from the street. And then you can see if it works or not.

U: It will work, because one mic is what you call a Superniere.

P: Close ... it's directional.

U: It is directed, so you get yourself perfectly, whilst the others are so called 8 – and they catch all the surrounding sounds even my voice.

Sophie, dürfte ich dich vielleicht bitten einfach das Ding hier mit zu hören, falls – nimm dir den Stuhl – falls der –

S: Ne, den Stuhl nehm ich nicht, das würde dich stören ...

U: Dann sitz auf dem Boden, das ist auch ok.

S: Ich noch mal dein Handy aus, vielleicht ja.

U: Yes please. Falls die Batterie ausgeht oder so etwas, weil das kann ich nicht kontrollieren. It is wonderful. So thank you for the time you gave us ...

P: You are welcome – it's a pleasure.

U: We will see ... no, ähm ... I thought before we get into the two pieces I know from your music which is a string quartet which works on fractals ... and the other one is the long quartet with is not a quartet, but a sextet –

P: With voice and clarinet you mean ...

U: Yeah ... I heard together Sophie in Witten ... I just want to hear some words how you got a composer.

P: How I got a composer when I was young ...

U: I don't think that you did nothing and woke up one day and said whupp – from now on I don't want to construct streets anymore but I want to get a composer.

P: Well, you are right, that is not something that happens in one day suddenly. The first memory I have was when I was 13 years old.

When I was 13 I sat at home and said I wanted to be a composer. And those days I wanted to be a pianist also. And it was a big shock at home because in Spain of course we have music but music is nothing important in society and is especially nothing important in cultural

terms. So it something like to propose to be a bullfighter in Finland – something like that. Something strange. But when I proposed this of course I was not realistic. I had no idea what it meant to be a composer. But I remember when I started to repeat the pieces by Chopin Listz and so on by the piano I always liked to improvise, on the keyboard, and to try to do something personal. Something I didn't have to learn. Something that really happened. Free. And then after years practicing my piano quite hard I decided that I prefer to develop this need to try to write the music I was trying to improvise than to dedicate all my life to all the great composers I was playing. It was when I was 19 when I decided to abandon the line of a piano player and to focus all my energy in totally to be a composer.

04:56

U: So it was not that you heard something in the concerthall – as an idol?

P: There was something important also. I was born in Valladolid, which is a middlesize city in Spain which is 200 kilometers from Madrid, and there it was impossible to have any relations to contemporary music. So the only way I had to discover the contemporary music was through the radio. Those days the radio was stronger than nowadays in Spain. And they broadcasted a lot of contemporary music. So this was my first contact. And there is something I always remember. When I was trying to improvise the music playing the piano finally I was repeating sketches different styles of music I knew. So I was able to notate it. But when I heard for the first time contemporary music in radio I always had a question in my mind: How it is possible to notate this kind of sound. It was for me something really fascinating. The way to find to represent the symbols of sound that was completely new for me. And this relationship between sound and symbolic notation it is something it has been always very important for me. Even years later when I decided to compose because finally this is what decide how is the relationship between your idea and the reality that the performer want – have to work with.

6:56

U: Is it only the notation or is it maybe another relation to maybe another art that was in your mind. So what is about paintings or sculptures for instance ...

P: This is something that came later for me ... it was just a pure musical relationship. In sound and notation. But of course after some years composing I was interested on other artistic disciplines. It came very easily. The need to try to carry a relationship between at the beginning architecture and later painting and dance and other artistic disciplines and music. Architecture was something that came in a very natural way because I was always interested in mathematical models to construct the music. So in a way it was a way of thinking related with a way of thinking with an architect. So it came very easily. When I tried to establish the first time a relationship painting and music – it was something that was quite hard for me. Because the process of the painter is really different in relation with the process of the composer. But finally I found a way it was to try to analyze how was the technique that composer sorry the composer used and to try to get this like a model to compose. It was a piece entitled **Anamorfofis** it was written in 2006 I far remember well. And it was based on a painting that I discovered when I was a child in a museum in Spain – it was an anamorphic painting by Lucas Cranach. And it was a portrait of Charles the fifth. The Emperor. And when I was child I was fascinated for this ... you are not able to recognize the shape and finally when you look through a little **hole** in the frame you recognize the portrait of the Emperor. I was fascinated for this idea. And I decided to apply this technique. To the composition of the musical piece I had difficulties, because I tried to do it from a geometrical point of view. And I was not able to control the result. I mean the technique from the painting was not giving me enough freedom. Enough control in what I wanted to get. So finally I changed the process, the idea and I used it in an arithmetical way. Because finally I realized that this anamorphic technique was only a particular case of distortion of perspective. So I tried to explore this idea of distorting the perspective but instead of terms of space in terms of time and in terms of pitches. Of sounds ...

10:48

U: So, just to get your – because I don't know this picture – this is a picture painted by Lucas Cranach. And to understand what he painted you have to look through a hole.

P: A little hole in the frame.

U: So it is like a camera obscura – the first cameras.

P: In a way.

U: In the frame? So you have to look through this hole and then you will get the picture – and then you recognize the Emperor or whatever he painted. And without that – when you look at this picture like that, then you something abstract or something unrecognizable?

P: Yes. It is something magical. Because it means of the point of view of perception that there is only one angel where you can perceive the shape where you can perceive the information that the painter wanted to show. And when you have to look at the painting from another angel you are not able to recognize it. It means that you have to look for the properly angel.

12.10

U: That is a philosophical question.

P: Yeah – of course.

U: It's the question about truth. If you want to say or get close to something true then you have to look for a special angel? If you change the angel, then you will miss it.

P: Right.

U: Or you get another truth.

P: Right. Also – but interesting was for me, that – I am talking mainly as listener not as composer – as listener also that have looked at the picture – as audience – it means that you have to move – your position if you want to discover. If you want to learn. For me the experience of art – is an experience of learning. Always. And once I go to the concert hall and I have a premiere of a piece I want to discover something. I don't know exactly what. But if I want to discover something it means that I have to move myself. I have to change – the angel – that I normally use to perceive the music. Because this is a new music. So the same position – is not usefull to try to understand what is happening to try to learn something new. Perhaps I am learning something that I is completely different to what the composer wanted to show. This is another point. But this is what makes it

interesting for me, the experience of the art. That there is a composer in this case showing something. There is a listener on the other side let's say ... but the listener has to also to compose his own process of listening. And perhaps he will establish a relationship with the composer with the information that the composer wanted to show perhaps not. Perhaps he will find she will find something completely different. But something, that is usefull for him or for her.

14.27

U: But there is also a third thing I think. At least in your music. That is, what I discovered. May be I am wrong or not. A third thing. So one thing is the composer. One person. One thing is the listener. A second person. And the music itself is the third thing. And it seems to be a subject as well. It is not an object. So this is what I thought when I listened to your music – again and again – that the music itself is composed in a way, that I got the impression that this music once wants put onto a way onto a into – like given birth – in the beginning – so it seems to develop itself. For it's own.

15:38

P: Perhaps I can not avoid that.

U: May be you want to ... to ... create something like that.

P: Hmmmmm probably. But it doesn't mean, that I want to impose to the listener a way ... very often people told me ... ok ... you write a music that catch you. And hmmm It It follows you that way ... sorry: It shows you the way to follow. ...

16.22

U: This is not what I am talking about. It is something different.

Hmmm ... No there is ... it's something like ... like a plant growing.

P: (Schmunzelt!)

U: Within the seed there is all information that the plant needs to grow. In that or that Gestalt – form ...

P: I understand ...

U: And and once you put the seed into the soil, then it will start growing. So the farmer has no influence any more. May be a bit. He can cut off some leaves and things like that. He controls. But the growing itself is by it's own.

P: I understand now.

U: Ja.

P: All right. This is my way of working. It is always starting from something that is very basic very simple. Like a seed.

17:21

You used the right word, I always use this word also. Like the seed. And I always think ok. – what I want to do what I want to build with this little seed. This primitive information. And then I think what time I need to develop these processes based on this seed. And finally I try to find a model – a model that allows me to control this process of growing of the musical plant lets say in a metaphorical way. And since you work like that the process imposes it's own way of building something. This doesn't mean that you are not free during the process of composing the score of writing the music. But it means that you think that you got the properly model this model should be self-sufficient to control what is happening from this what is growing from this little seed.

19.03

U: So from the very beginning on there starts something which can develop in a way that is right or wrong. You as the composer can make mistakes by composing because the inner laws – the subject of your musical ... so your musical object is seen from the musical point of view a musical subject ... can be treated well – like a child, that you educate – I mean you can do something wrong with your children. By telling them not the truth or by treating them in a way, that are not in ... the way you should treat a child. ... The question behind is what is often used to describe musical objects and them compared to corpus. Körper. A body. But it is difficult to use this word, because a musical work is not a body. It is sound. Do you use the word body to describe your own music.

20.38

P: Body not – normally not body. But similar terms related with nature. Absorbent processes or growing processes – I used very often this kind of terms – they are terms of this kind that builds up the body also. But there is something very interesting you said at one point – you said ok. You choose the model and you can do mistakes. And this is a very interesting point because of course I can do mistakes. But for me composing or in general speaking art is mainly and for most an **exercise in** speculation. And speculation means that you try to

establish a process of growing a line of working without having firm (?) evidence. This is art this is not mathematics. Even if I use mathematics to compose I am not a mathematician – I don't want to demonstrate anything with my piece in mathematical terms. I just want to explore – I just want to do this **exercise in** speculation. But it is very important that you don't have the firm evidence that this is the right way to do it. Finally there is always the point where you have to take the risk. I feel that this is the way but I am not sure. I have to develop the piece I have to compose the score I have to practice the piece with the musicians I have to listen the piece but finally perhaps forty years later I will be able to say ok it was right or not.

22.48

U: Why do you use mathematics? So I know that you are using fractals but I want to put you the question: Why you are using mathematics for creating music?

P: At the beginning at the very beginning well Galileo said that mathematics is the language used to describe the nature. Or nature is written in a mathematical language. He wrote something like that I don't remember exactly.

U: So you have the relation between notation and the nature?

P: Ya, between the sound and the nature. So when I used the mathematics in the beginning it was because to use the language to describe the process I was interested on in the nature (in the natural). I find nature attractive. Because in nature I can find efficient models. I mean efficient models – you can find models that are very simple and the nature is building something very complex. This is what happens in fractals for instance. And once I started to work with mathematics then later I discovered that the mathematics itself even without the relationship with the nature were important for me. Because it is a very abstract language. Even more abstract than music let's say. So even if it is not the same way of thinking – the way of thinking the mathematics and the way of thinking of the composer, but you can surf in the same kind of thinking. It is something that has no kind of **aesthetic** implication. When I work with mathematics I feel very very free. Because mathematics is so abstract that it doesn't mean anything in **aesthetic** terms. And the other models or systems that you can think on – tonal music modern music serial music spectral music and so

forth there is always some **aesthetic** link with the model. Which is not something wrong ... It is not something bad of course – but with mathematics you don't have any link. So you have to construct the link. You have to compose also the model. This is also something very important for me, when I choose the model so from mathematics so from nature I never apply it directly. I always change the model. I always compose the mathematical model also. Compose I mean I always transform it. Because I need to find and create this link between the abstract tool and the sound that will be finally not so abstract. Finally it will be something even physical. That you will perceive like a physical element.

26.30

U: So could you give an example for a model and the result in music. I think that I haven't got what you mean with the link – because if you talk about the twelve-tone-music or spectral music they use as well a lot of mathematics. So spectralmusic can't work without mathematics. Because you have to analyze the physics of a sound and from there on it gives a certain input into music which is often a serial – or a lot of numbers or scales and everything. So this seems to me to be quite mathematical. So I haven't got till now the difference between your relation between model and music. Compared to ...

27.35

P: It is true that in spectral music or in serial music there are also mathematical systems or models. But these systems were built from some musical problems. I say problem in the good meaning of a problem. If you use mathematics **you are** trying to build or to get a model, not related by itself with any musical problem. For instance with the same mathematical process you can compose something like the music I compose with fractals, or you can compose music like Balinese music – music from Bali. In fact we did experience a long time ago in the University in Spain I was researching with my teacher those days some fractal models and we used the same mathematical result with different kind of scales rhythms and so on and we were able to reproduce music from Bali with the same pattern that we were using for our own music which is very far from the music from Bali. But if you use a serial system, of course you are using also mathematics, but as this system comes from a musical problem it

gives a musical solution. So it means that it creates by itself a framework for the composer with its own **aesthetic** limits.

29.41

U: Ok. I try to describe what I understand. Or understood. So serial music for instance tries to give an answer to a problem which was created by tonal music. So to open the doors from the limitations of tonal music the answer is serial music. And spectral music tries to systematize the nature of sounds and overtones of musical objects and so it works with that. And you are talking about for instance fractal mathematics which can be used completely abstract without any link to any other science. And but you can use it to describe the growth of clouds. Or the growth of trees. Or the flow of blood flowing in our body. But you always say that a fractal as a mathematic thing is not the same as the clouds, ...

P: Yes, it is not the same. No, it is not the same. Just let me a little break, ... With fractal systems for example you can **write** pentatonic music, you can compose modern music, you can compose serial music. This is what I try to explain. It's a tool, and that gives you freedom. Completely freedom. And then you have to decide what is the **aesthetic** line I want to follow and what is the kind of music I want to control through this tool. And once you start with fractals you realize very soon this problem you said that it's not the same a cloud and a musical piece. Of course it is not the same. I don't use the fractals or the mathematical systems to describe nature. In our history we find a lot of relationships between sound and music and nature. We find this relationship in the baroque period for instance. When they wanted to describe the birds and this kind of things. I don't want to use the mathematics in the same way. I don't want do describe a cloud. Or a coastline or ... with the music. I just want to take the power of this model to control the musical material I choose. And I want to give to this process a natural development. Something that is not related with form in terms – musical form I mean – in terms of distribution of isolated rooms but it's something that follow a line through the time where you cannot divide the time in frames. It's something like you would find in a tree. You find something that is really complex and if you look at a tree from a distance you cannot identify all the stems all the details of the tree you just realize a unity

that you identify like a tree. Once you get closer to the tree you start to discover different levels. Of complexity. And you start to find information about the microscopic levels of the tree. This is something I am interested on with the music. I like the music **where I the music (I would suppress this, as it's only a mistake of spoken conversation)** that you can listen from different scales of listening. For instance Bach. When you listen a fugue by Bach you have different levels of listening this music. Because you can try to listen the music like a **whole** thing but in the same time it allows you to follow two voices of the fugue or another combination of two voices or tree voices of the four voices or so forth. You can chose what is the relationship what are the different levels of informations he gives in the score. And this music is extremely complex and extremely rich. And when I have a look to a tree I find something as complex and as rich as the music by Bach. And this is why I am so fascinated for these kind of models because it – of course I am not Bach but I like this approach to the music where you can give to the listener the possibility to listen something like a global thing or something where he can goes in very small details – let's say music that you can listen once and twice and different times and you can always try to find something you didn't pay attention before.

35.52

U: Because of the complexity. But you said that you want to install let's say a natural development. What ... where this word natural comes from ... what do you think in your music what is natural?

P: It means that the time is distributed like an alive organism.

U: Is this then what I called a body or organism. So this is a metaphor and you mentioned Galileo and you said that the nature in its essence is mathematic.

P: The description of the nature.

U: Desription – not the essence.

P: I don't know. This is something to complex to answer. I feel that's it's also the essence. But at least what I know about it is that at least it is a way to describe it. Nature has different possibilities of perception also. For instance in the non-occidental **of (again to suppress this word)** philosophy they have another relationship with nature. Why not – it is not my approach. My approach my relationship I want to establish

with the nature is not of description but of knowledge. I said before as listener I always try to learn something. As composer also. I always try to get some knowledge from the nature. And this is something amazing when you really start to understand the model of the nature it is something really magical. It is something that has not only a mathematical approach. This is why I didn't answer you so clear before. So clearly. It has also a poetical approach.

38.22

U: May be mathematic is poetry.

P: I think so ...

U: I didn't want to ... but E.T.A. Hoffmann lived in Bamberg and we are in Bamberg now. He was completely misunderstood but he did a lot to be misunderstood – by dividing music into construction and feeling. So the E.T.A. Hoffmann who was published as a novelist and red like a novelist was the one who described music as feeling, body sex, whatever you want, all these kind of things related to the body. But on the other hand he wrote at least three times or four times as much than in his novels about music he wrote about construction, and he said that you can not understand nothing about music if you don't go into the construction because there most of the things happen. (Sophie meint, dass die Stühle Geräusche machen und wir aufpassen sollen).

40.00

U: I am far away from thinking that mathematic is an opposition to the body and an opposition to sex and an opposition to feeling because there are so many mathematics happening within a feeling or you might say that our body is a complex system fractals for instance or processes that can be described by fractals. So that in the end you have a feeling.

40.40

P: For me it is not possible to have a separation between feeling and construction. For me it is completely the same. I remember once I was giving a lecture in Spain, after the lecture a man from the audience he asked me: Ok. Finally you want to create a music that he said is very close to the feeling he said ... why to use the models mathematical models that puts you very far from the human vene.

41.18

U: Vene?

P: Being. Human being.

U: Ah, human being!

P: Ya, human being. And I said, sorry but as far as I know the human being we are the only one that have mathematics in our mind. So mathematics is part of us. Is something as natural as a plant or as water or as our hand there is no this barrier between mathematics and our live. Our live is full of mathematics and I consider that music is part of our live. That I am a composer it is not because it is my job. It is not an activity I do- it is not something to get money it is not it is not hobby ... composing **it(again could be deleted)** is my life. I mean it is surrounded by all the aspects of our life. You said some of them. It's nature it's things it's sex it's philosophy it's other arts it's something global. And this is why I find so easy or so natural to work with mathematics. And there is another aspect, something I learned from Xenakis – I always consider Xenakis like my grandfather – I watched an interview with him some years ago and he said something like: Each time I start to compose a piece I try to find a new problem. Because I need to give a new solution. And this is something very important for me. Because with mathematics I am not trying to create any system. I am not interested in creating a system that allows me to compose a lot of pieces very fast and it has no sense. With each new piece I have a new problem. I feel the same than Xenakis. And it means that I have to find a new solution. It means that I have to research a new mathematical model that gives me the possibility to get this solution. And it is not only mathematical models I sometimes I use without mathematics also. I am working now on an opera based on a text on a libretto. And there is no any mathematics. IN this way of working. But it is time that I need to feel that I have something to discover and I have something so solve.

44.30

U: You have something to discover that is exactly what my question was. That I wanted to put as well. Do you think, that you express yourself with your music. Or do you think that your composition expresses itself as composition.

P: I would prefer that the music expresses by itself.

U: How much Posadas is in Posadas music?

44.56

P: I would say, 100 percent. But I think this is the same for all composers. Not only for me. How much Webern you have in his music. I think his music was himself. But I don't mean in a romantic understanding of this approach. I mean for instance it is very often to listen ok. The music by Webern for instance it is very cold music because you have a lot of rules that construct this music and so on ... but I always wonder why ... does this mean that this is not expressive music. And perhaps the idea of expression of this music is a different expression, and this different expression was Webern himself. His way of thinking his music means his way of understanding life. So for me if the composer composes in a sincere way not in a commercial way I mean it is impossible to avoid the composer in his score. But finally what is important is the score not the composer. Is my view. Finally what makes incredible the music by Bach it was not his life it's the score. It's the score it's something magical by itself.

46.41

U: When you are composing something like a work as the string quartet which is a sextet which was performed in Witten do you know from the very beginning that this will last almost 80 minutes? Do you plan an architecture of this length? Or do you start to write and then step by step it gets that size?

P: First I plan all the sketches – it's my case I am not able to compose the first bar and then the second and the third and so on. I need to have a global view of the music. Which means that first I want to know the length of the whole cycle but but it means that I need to know what materials I want to use what I want to do with this material what kind of relationship I need to establish in the pieces. Of the cycle and and so forth. For me it is very important when you compose a cycle you have to create something solid it means I am not very interested on this kind of music that is wonderful and very interesting ten seconds. And after that nothing happens. I am more interested in a music that all the time or almost all the time is trying to give information new information or related information of something that happen before to the listener. And I can only get this with strong planification of the project. For me it means that structure is very important. But once you start to develop the scores one by one each detail each bar of course I

want to be free to change something that I planned in a way and I thought that it was going to last 2 minutes and I need 10 seconds more. So I write 10 seconds more. But structure is very important because ... I always think that structure is like a touristic guide for the tourist. Let 'suppose that you visit Paris for the first time and you don't have any guide. You have no news about Paris and you are in the middle of Paris and you start to walk – to walk around the city. Perhaps you can walk for years and you will never discover the Louvre or Notre Dame and so on. You have a good guide ... it will ensure that you will go to this beautiful places but if you follow only the guideline the tourist guide you will miss something for sure. Because very often in the middle of a little street you will find in the end a little fountain that is marvelous that is not in the guide. In this sense the structure is very important to me. There is the guide that ensures that I will go to the important points along the piece. But once I start to develop the score I want to be free for – now I will go through the street I haven't think about and then I explore what I have to explore and then I go back to the main street and I go – and finally I will arrive to the Louvre of the piece.

50.53

U: So at least you know a lot, you have a general map of your quartet already in your mind and then in the composing situation you have the freedom to make some deviations. Well another thing I thought of and this is maybe the last question. When I listen to that music and to the recording you sent me I somehow and some when had the idea this music is not composed for the concert hall. This music is composed to be looked at as some musical object. So this is a tiny little difference. The difference is, that I had the idea that I walk around an object which is always the same object, but my position changes whilst listening. Indeed I sit in a chair the boxes of my stereoplayer and my CD-player – so very static – but my feeling was to walk around an object. In Witten – so listening to the music, when it was played live, was completely different, it was a lot more ecstatic – in Witten, I sort of – I did not sleep in, so this little in between dreaming and sleeping – it was a situation of forgetting the time, of getting out of the time – you start to sort of fly somewhere else – so after that listening I remembered that I had listened to something very beautiful, very

exciting, but I couldn't tell you anything about what. Because I was not – I was not ... I was within an object, I was not watching an object. So it was a sort of ecstatic relationship. Or not-relationship, because ecstatic means that you have no relation, you are. Well – this is not a question. But maybe you have your own ideas as well. Do you write for a concert hall? May be this is a question. Or do you write for another set of listening music? Which maybe does not exist or may perhaps exist in the future?

54.24

P: Well it depends on the cases. But sometimes I really write for a space. I mean a concrete space. More than space I would say that I write for some acoustical conditions. For instance if you listen some of the solo (?) pieces I wrote for wood winds for instance ... it doesn't work in a concert hall. It's really chamber music. In the old terms. Well – it is music you should listen in a room middle size or even small size with very few people and to have a very close relation with the sound. If you listen that music in a concert hall you really lose the essence of this. Of this music. For instance in Witten, there was something that didn't work – it was the acoustic of that church. So then if you have the soprano filtered by this panel of the stage and when the clarinet player comes from the back the reverberation was so long that you miss all this kind of details. So I don't write for any concrete space normally, but I need some acoustical conditions. But it is the same for all the music what happens when you listen renaissance vocal music in a concert hall. For me it doesn't work. Because it is not a music that is written for a concert hall, it is another dimension of the sound. So finally as a composer you write for utopian acoustical conditions but the reality is the reality and finally the music is performed everywhere. You cannot choose where. So for the listener it is not the problem, but the listener lose some details even if the performer played perfectly. Because the space in music is very important. But finally space in music is really an utopia.