

An Interview with Argentinian Composer Eduardo Andrés Malachevsky

by Dr. T. J. Harper

(Excerpts taken with permission from a June 2015 interview by María Elina Mayorga – San Juan, Argentina -The full interview is available at <http://es.calameo.com/read/004422631c2c9d3f6a99d->)

www.malachevsky.com.ar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHW6iqpn420>

While a worldwide platform or repository for all choral music does not yet exist, the International Federation of Choral Music and the American Choral Directors Association are making positive strides towards increased accessibility for all choral musicians. This is especially true in the case of choral music from Latin America. For many years, the availability of and access to Latin American choral music has been a challenge for many in the international community. Unless a conductor or ensemble has a direct connection to a Latin American choral music publisher or composer, many works from this region remain undiscovered. In this, the second of three articles focusing on new choral music from Latin America, I have chosen a composer and conductor with a unique voice who is fairly new to the world of choral music, but has been composing for many years. The choral music of Eduardo Andrés Malachevsky is at once powerful, sublime, exuberant, and intimately connected to the text, and this is profoundly

evident in his sacred settings.

Eduardo Andrés Malachevsky is a Latin-American composer and choral conductor from Argentina (of Ukrainian, Danish, Italian & Spanish descent). He was born in Santa Fe in 1960 and is now living in Bariloche, Patagonia. He holds degrees in choral conducting, harmony and counterpoint, flute, orchestral conducting, composition, and organ performance. For fifteen years, he lived as a Trappist Cistercian Monk and this contemplative life in the solitude of a monastery has had a profound impact on his compositional style and focus. He has received more than twenty awards and honors for his choral compositions including, among others, First Prize for *Aunque es de Noche* at the 2010 Concurso Internacional de Composición Coral de Cámara de Pamplona in Pamplona, Spain; First Prize for *Do Not Pass By Like A Dream* at the 2010 Esoteric's Polyphonos Competition for Choral Composition in Seattle, USA; First Prize for *Return to Him* at the 2008 TRINAC event (Tribuna Nacional Argentina De Compositores) in Buenos Aires, Argentina; First Prize for *In Pacem Tuam (Sero Te Amavi)* at the 2006 Premio De Composición Juan Bautista Comes in Segorbe, Spain; First Prize for *Il Pleure Dans mon Coeur* at the 2004 Concurso de Composición Polifónica Tomás Luis de Victoria, Ávila, Spain; First Prize for *Dios Pequeñico* at the 2004 Premios a la Composición y Expresión Coral de Canarias, Tenerife, Spain. He was honored in 2013 by the Universidad Nacional del Litoral (Argentina) for his contributions to choral music. He is the founder and conductor of the Coro de Cámara Patagonia (Bariloche, Argentina), and President of AdiCorPat-RN (ADICORA's Patagonia subsidiary division / ADICORA: *The Association of Choral Conductors of Argentina*).

What is your primary motivation for composing choral music?

As well as being a composer I am a choral conductor, which gives me inside knowledge of the technical and musical

possibilities of the human voice. Composing choral music is as natural to me as breathing. I'm also drawn to the close relationship between choral music and poetic text, particularly to the wealth choral singing can bring to the interpretation of the written word.

Do you feel particularly attracted to sacred or secular music?

"From the sublime to the ridiculous", this is how I like to define my creative contribution. I feel attracted as much to the sacred as to the secular. Actually, I like to alternate between composing something with a serious, deep and/or dense theme and something with an element of humor, irony, and even the ridiculous. After composing something that requires the sort of energy intrinsic to the creation of a more serious or 'highbrow' work, I need to come down to earth, chill out, laugh, be more light-hearted and outgoing, and it helps me to compose something that keeps me grounded. However, I do admit to having a natural inclination towards the spiritual – I'd say *spiritual* rather than *sacred* – the deep, the serious. I should mention here that I was a Cistercian Trappist (contemplative order) monk for fourteen years, so the sacred or spiritual is always present in my music one way or another.

How would you describe your compositional language?

Melodically, I might describe myself as an expressionist and I am very careful to accurately represent the text in the melodic lines. **Rhythmically**, my music is relaxed, unstructured, playful and irregular. **Harmonically**, I am a *neo* – neo-tonal, neo-modal, neo-classical, and a lover of the consonant disharmony or dissonant consonance. However, although I like experimenting, I'm very far from the avant-garde. In terms of *formal construction*, I am absolutely free and intuitive, which ends up being irrationally rational. I

never decide beforehand on any particular form for my music; the form of the text or poem tends to lead me towards the form of the work, which becomes clear as I compose it.

I'd like to return to the expression "*irrationally rational*", which is closely linked to all things intuitive. By *irrationally rational* I mean that, even though I don't rationally structure the form of the work from the beginning – actually, I use a *stream-of-consciousness* process – when I finish the piece I discover with awe a deep formal rationality. Experience and time have led me to the conclusion that intuition and apparent irrationality have more reasons than reason itself. In fact, I couldn't agree more with Blaise Pascal's famous «*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*» (*The heart has its reasons which reason does not know*).

A significant aspect of my creative process is the idea that I am being a *translator of a resonant silence full of meaning*. To me composing is not simply an artistic or intellectual task. As I mentioned before, for fourteen years I had the immense privilege of living fully the life of a contemplative monk, and I can recognize in my composing experience internal processes between the creative act and the act of contemplative meditation that are very similar to the priesthood. When I compose, I put myself in a spiritual state analogous to meditation or contemplative prayer where silence speaks and very subtly suggests a particular direction. The crucial task in this process is to identify those ideas that originate from the intellect and those that originate from another place. This understanding always ensures a successful end, and the *irrationally rational* happens! I have named this process '*inercia del corazón*' (inertia of the heart).

Do you recognize an evolution, or different stages in your trajectory as a composer? If so, can you pinpoint a reason, or

is it just due to a deep desire to explore new possibilities?

Without any doubt, I may certainly recognize three different stages in my trajectory as a composer. The first dates back to the years when I was a student at the conservatory. The second one covers my Trappist period, between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-eight years, where my creative production was strictly focused on liturgical and monastic pieces; and the third, post-monastic, stage, which begins in 1998 when I leave monastic life, up to the present. The first was shy and experimental, the second was enclosed, liturgical and introverted (completely so in the case of a Trappist monastery!) and the third is entirely free, open and extrovert.

Which of your pieces to your knowledge have been most sung by choirs from Argentina?

By Argentinian choirs? There is no doubt that choirs abroad have sung my music more than those in my own country (*no-one is a prophet in their own land...*). There are only a few Argentinian choirs who have performed a few select works.

What do you believe is the reason for this?

It seems to me there are several reasons:

- The level of difficulty that my music demands is too challenging for many Argentinian choirs. I do not consider my pieces to be extremely difficult; however, they are not easy. Still for most choirs it seems that my music requires rehearsal time that the conductors in Argentina usually do not wish to or cannot take.
- Until recently, my scores were not published: however, starting this year, I am able to offer my music through

my own personal website. I hope this will increase the circulation of my creative choral contributions.

- There are only a few recordings of my music available and no CD entirely devoted to my choral music.

Finally, in your opinion, is there a choral language that may be identified as uniquely Argentinian? If so, what are its distinctive elements?

If we consider only what we call 'academic music', I absolutely don't believe that we can identify any kind of musical language, choral or otherwise, as uniquely Argentinian.

In my opinion, we might be tempted to see, in the inclusion of musical elements taken from Argentinian folk music or tango, for example, an Argentinian musical identity, but I think this is a serious mistake. Every composer is himself or herself and his or her circumstances. They may or may not develop those circumstances linked to the culture of their country, city and/or the place where they live (for someone who lives in Buenos Aires, for instance, everything related to a tango might be one of these 'cultural circumstances'). But from this assertion to extrapolating about the existence of a significant number of composers highlighting the same circumstances, and hence sharing a common, uniquely Argentinian, language, there's still a long way to go, particularly in choral music where there are only a handful of composers.

In short, the act of creating something is essentially intimate and personal, and the higher its value and artistic quality, the farther it will be from the norm – such as the musical language of a country. It may happen that a country will adopt the musical language of this or that artist as its own, but not the other way around.

Selected Repertoire

De Profundis, Magnificat!

“Out of the depths my soul magnifies the Lord!”

Composed in 2004 for an international composition contest to celebrate the hundredth Anniversary of Berlin Cathedral (and awarded a prize in this competition) this piece aims to underline the very narrow link between the prayer of deliverance and the prayer of praise so particularly present throughout the Holy Bible and especially in the book of Psalms. Having this in mind, I have chosen to develop, beside the main verses of the Psalm “*De Profundis*” (Psalm 130), the first verse of the “*Magnificat* (Luke 1:47). The first movement is a heartbreaking cry of supplication and the second movement is an ecstatic shout of joy. Little by little, both movements convey a profound expression of faith and gratitude: “*De Profundis, Magnificat!*” “Out of the deep, my soul magnifies the Lord! Out of the deep, my soul magnifies YOU, my Lord!”

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