

Monologues I-V; Works for Solo Instruments 2006-2013

By Marcelo Toledo

(Text written for the CD Monologues I-V, solo works 2006-2013 of Samuel Cedillo, Cero-Records 2013)

The five monologues for solo instruments by the young mexican composer Samuel Cedillo, dialogue. They dialogue in the accumulated memory of the listening experience, but also in the local memory, inside themselves. A crossed, fragmented dialogue of multiple clear and precise voices in a horizontal polyphony in which each voice occupies the center of the present, to be interrupted later by another one and another one, until arriving at the end. These monologues are an accumulation of solid presents.

Much music passes through the present as a condition or bridge in order to arrive to another place. This paradigm is found in most of Western music until the first formal adventures of Igor Stravinsky and Erik Satie, later to be continued in the American experimental tradition, the stasis of Minimalism, the Moment Form of Stockhausen, the luminous suspended sounds of Salvatore Sciarrino, the static blocks of some Latin American composers from the 70s and 80s, among others.

In Monólogos I-V there are no bridges, no processes toward other states of the sound, but rather an absolute to be in each moment, in each present, without the need or the illusion of moving toward another. Each new moment erases almost completely the prior one because there are no consequences from one to the next. There are no hierarchies among them; each moment collaborates in a totality made of fragments. Some of them seem to be more important than others due to their acoustic pregnancy or because of their duration. However, arriving at the end of the piece there is a flattening of the apparent hierarchies that allows the integrity of all of them in one unified experience.

The moments do not transform and do not lose their identities throughout their duration, however at the interior of each one of them bubbles an unstable material, an unquiet magma, a flux that, without suggesting direction, is in a permanent state of motion. It's here where Cedillo's work generates the necessary friction to hold on time, in order to inhabit it, in order to let it exist.

The voices, that is to say, the sonic matter of each moment, establishes clear and abrupt contrasts with others, but there is always a common element that unites them in at times remote at times evident ways. The continuum of the sonic unfolding, in which, practically there are no silences, creates multiple resonances in the short and long-term, a subtle formal quality that gives sense of a completeness to each work. There exists also

an inverse resonance, that is to say, the anticipation of future presents which we will understand only when we inhabit the future present. This happens inside each work, ex. the initial and final material in *Monólogo I, Laja del Tiempo*, but also in the dialogue among the Monólogos. This homogeneity of the mechanism in these works makes of this CD a totality, a coherent and autonomous microcosm.

Sonic matter and time are the essential components of this music. Someone could argue if that's not the case of all music. Not necessarily. In many cases, compositions are made out of other preoccupations, closer to concepts, ideas, abstractions, language or writing. Without doubt, there are in these works ideas, abstractions, that is to say formal speculation, language and a precise writing, but these are not the fundamental reasons that give existence to these Monólogos. There is a material quality in this work; there is not ingenuity in this material, nor a common use of gestures from the contemporary repertoire. There is knowledge of these practices but the sound material in this music seems to be presented naked, without ornament. An intelligent matter, a complex matter that informs acoustically of the instrumental and compositional practices of the last decades, but it doesn't rest on them but rather seems to resist their presence; a solid material at work, with the intention of preserving it, letting it exist, instead of creating from it a language. In other words, there are few rhetorical gestures in the compositional and instrumental techniques; a living matter, vibrating and creating time, or better, creating the experience of time.

The works on this CD have standard durations. Two of them last about ten minutes, other two about thirteen minutes, and one twenty-one minutes. These are relatively short pieces, but the listening experience situates us in a much larger temporal space, as if the materials, due to their nature, are dilating. The solid sound matter, acoustically speaking, resists the passing of time. Its richness, its density, delays the temporality of our perception. Another way in which we experience these temporal dimensions is in the tension between perceptual extremes: the dynamics leap from almost inaudible pianissimo to obsessive fortissimo, registers move to their extreme opposite. This mechanism of opposition expands our experience of time.

The material nature of Cedillo's music has, perhaps, its origins in two fundamental aspects. One is the great tradition of mexican contemporary music of the last few decades. Like many mexican composers of the new generations, Cedillo uses in his work the parametric writing for string instruments adding his own resources according to the intention of each piece. Each one of them proposes a new element. The writing separates both hands giving a special importance to the polyrhythmic action of the bow, which generates a complex sound material. Each piece uses one or several strategies. At times the instrumentalist has to consider four simultaneous and different aspects in the actions of the bow and the left hand. It is impressive the work of each instrumentalist in this

recordings since Cedillo's music works in a state of permanent instrumental challenge. Instead of generating a material that evokes movement and consequently transformation, a sound in a permanent state of becoming, a fugitive present that suggests crystallization without ever arriving at it, the present at the border of the present, Cedillo's sound material rests on a present that doesn't move forward and doesn't transform in essence, yet at the same time is never equal to the prior instants. This paradox of the material invokes the Heraclitean river, a philosophical space that reflects and concentrates the conception of these works.

The other origin of the materiality in Cedillo's music could be traced in the direct experience with the indigenous community of the p'urhépecha, of Michoacán, in which Cedillo has been working for several years. Cedillo has understood that the relationship of these people with sound is essential and permanent, it is a form of identity through the experience of sound. Perhaps it is possible to go back to the essence of what sound is after observing with care the space that sounds occupy in some cultures that are still not subjugated to the mentality of contemporary society.

In a time in which art risks becoming another product of consumption created from an over-valuing of the resources of language, rhetoric, aesthetic artifices, it is vital and refreshing to find a hand full of work that has the weight and consistency of a rock.

Marcelo Toledo, New York August 2013