



analia llugdar

interior travels

BY RICHARD SIMAS

IN HER MUSIC, MONTREAL composer Analia Llugdar delves deeply into the primal interior of sound, as evidenced by a sampling of her work from 2003 to 2009. There are compositions for solo cello, small (trio) and large ensembles, often incorporating singing and speaking voices, as well as a music-theatre piece inspired by the charismatic French theatre innovator Antonin Artaud.

This impression is confirmed in the Montreal première of her creation *La Machi* (2010) and by her comments at a recent conference dedicated to *le théâtre instrumental*. “I am longing for the core of the sound. My exploration is a search for new and surprising timbral possibilities. I need to visualize it.” Evident in her theoretical articulation, as well as in the results of her musical creations, these impulses imbue her work with a dramatic and decidedly contemporary character.

Llugdar began studying piano and composition in her native Argentina. Later, at the University of Montreal’s music faculty, she completed master’s and doctoral degrees under the guidance of José Evangelista and Denis Gougeon, respectively. When asked recently about Llugdar’s work, Gougeon commented: “To my eyes and ears, the fundamentals of her music possess care for details and attention to form, rigour, and precision.” It wasn’t academic influence, however, that led her towards Artaud and a marked penchant for the intense and unstable.

In her adolescence she was fascinated by long conversations with her psychiatrist uncle, who shared stories about his patients. “In their abstraction of reality, I discovered a parallel to artists’ relationship with their art. I liked the ambiguity of not knowing whether his patients were conscious of reality or not.” She was also struck by the life of Vincent van Gogh, as described in the famous correspondence with his brother Theo, *Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, thus leading her to Artaud’s book

Van Gogh, The Man Suicided by Society (1947), and opening the door to Artaud’s ideas.

In the program note for *La Faim Artaud* (2007), a music-theatre piece scored for voices, mixed ensemble, and actor, Llugdar carefully describes Artaud’s influence on her work. “His raw, excessive, physical, and explosive language, and the way he shatters words in order to destroy meaning and reveal their physical reality and expression captured my interest.”

Llugdar’s pieces *La Faim Artaud* and *La Machi*—a work for solo flute, electro-acoustics, and flautist’s voice and “facial expressions,” in which expressions are scored into the composition along with theatrical directions—are striking examples of Llugdar’s current compositional territory. In

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both pieces she conceives of the performer’s body as a direct and organic extension of the music. Her compositional process propels her towards the profound interior of sound, and the musicians performing her creations necessarily make a similar voyage. The experience is also intense for the listener-spectator, who is drawn along with them. Llugdar’s process, particularly in the compositional and research phases, involves passing through a violent state, a limitless zone of saturation and insistence as segments of her work bear testimony. Despite the rawness, there is a delicacy, perhaps even femininity, in her manipulation of the materials.

At the end of this journey lie expressive zones of deeply rooted colour and timbre

variations. They are composed of shifting glissandi and crashing consonants uttered by performers. In the case of *La Machi*, an incantatory effect is created by the sliding syllables taken from the indigenous Mapuche language, by cries, and by the omnipresent sound of the performer’s breathing.

Because she is uncompromising in her dramatic point of departure, it is not surprising that Analia Llugdar’s compositions are best appreciated when seen on the stage. They possess a ritual-like and decidedly physical engagement, lending further weight to her comment that the aesthetics of contemporary music bear striking resemblance to those of certain traditional and ethnic music examples. Her work stands as strong testimony to the vitality of contemporary instrumental music theatre, and there is an intriguing dramaturgical finesse involved in the two pieces cited earlier here.

Artaud’s groundbreaking collection of essays *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) was an attack on theatre conventions of the day and included an influential manifesto called “The Theatre of Cruelty.” In Llugdar’s work, the question of artifice or truth comes to mind, particularly while watching *La Machi*. Written for and in collaboration with flautist Marie-Hélène Breault, it is a highly successful work because of the seamless unity that binds the intense interior experience, nearly shamanistic, with a finely manipulated contemporary and aesthetic performance. They coexist comfortably, creating an organic performance language that includes music, or, as her muse Artaud would state, “a unique language halfway between gesture and thought.” It is here that Llugdar’s art is most obvious, as she intertwines artifice, drama, and experience with finesse and singularity in a definitively interior journey.

Richard Simas is a Montreal freelance writer who won The Fiddlehead literary contest, short fiction category, 2008.

ON THE CD: *La Faim Artaud* (excerpt)