

ARTUR CIMIRRO – A Controversial Artist

ARTUR CIMIRRO (30) is a composer and virtuoso pianist, titleholder of awards in Brazil and abroad. He is also a music researcher and art critic, and his technique as an instrumentalist is compared to the greatest past masters such as Cziffra, Horowitz, Godowsky and Liszt.

MARCOS H.PFEIFER – Unlike most pianists you have never taken part of piano competitions, why?

ARTUR CIMIRRO – Because I am not crazy! (laughing). I believe that piano competitions are inhuman. Art cannot be evaluated as good or bad taking in consideration the particular taste of the judges, because in a contest with thirty pianists where most likely none of them will commit mistakes, choosing three and ordering them up seems really unfair. Besides that, I distrust the capability of several judging committees to judge something without consider their own hearing expectations. Some of them might want to hear a Chopin on the interpretation by Arthur Rubinstein, others by Claudio Arrau. And that does not contribute to art in any way. Now, there are those who make this a profession, generally pianists doomed to the interpretation sterility that does not add anything, they just survive.

MP – Your prestige as a pianist is directly related to your repertoire. What takes a person to dedicate itself to an extremely challenging virtuous repertoire as yours?

AC – I like challenges, but I do not dedicate myself to virtuosity alone. I only perform a repertoire that pleases me, whether it is easy as the Granados' second Spanish Dance, or the extremely hard “Capricci Ritmici” by Hermann Heiss. On the other hand, I do not even consider works that I do not like as, in general, the ones by Gerswhin and Piazzolla, for example.

MP – It is always current a discussion between those who believe in the importance of the technique, and those who prefer an instrumentalist’s expression. What are your considerations about the subject?

AC – People misjudge musical expression with the action of doing grimace or “to roll the eyes” while you play the keys of a piano. From another view, some people think that having technique, means to play quick arpeggios and scales. That is completely wrong! To have art expression is to make a melody have its own growth, decrease and breathing, in a way that the music becomes intelligible to the lay audience, and that is a part of the set of techniques a professional must dominate to state: “I am a pianist”. A musician must make quality music, it does not matter how he moves or dresses himself. I care about the sound. As for the audience taste, each head is a sentence, but it is just worthy to remember that, several times, the taste is an art enemy.

MP – According to your biography, you have created a “Scientific System of Interpretation”. What exactly is that system and what is the relationship between art and science that surrounds it?

AC – I believe it is good to clarify the reason of such creation. When I started studying music I did not have regular theoretical classes, my theoretical class was basically copying a complete book about it into a copybook, which I used to do

with a lot of enthusiasm and attention throughout some months. Once perceived that the method worked for me, I have searched on my own, counterpoint, harmony and analysis books. But once I got out and went from theory to practice having contact with others, I realized that a majority was not faithful to what the theoretical books used to dictate. My understanding of interpretation was quick; however I also realized that many people disguise the inability to play something using spurious / doubtful resources. The "Scientific System of Interpretation" made sense to me when I realized that, for example, there was not a recording of the *Grande Sonate Pathétique* Op.13 by Beethoven where it was possible to hear the left hand melody in the introduction, after all, as it was customary in the classicism and in the transition to romanticism, chords should not be interpreted as melody, and that's exactly what happens with this work; you hear a wrong melody that at some point became a tradition and it still remains unchanged. And as the problems that occurred in that work, we can find in most of the repertoire, especially from Beethoven and Liszt, where the technique demand seems to be the driving force of most pianists' interpretive error.

That being said, I will explain: the Scientific System of Interpretation is a more complete and detailed analysis method to the creation of an interpretation; is not a way / attempt to standardize something, but a more correct or more stoned way to realize where we need to be faithful and where we can take liberties. There is no relation to science itself, but with a scientific methodology. Art is not science, but by no means should be Dadaism or mere puerile conceptualism joined to a lack of technical knowledge.

MP – What is your relationship with popular music?

AC – In countries like Brazil it is important to educate the public, since the choice of the repertoire is one of the crucial moments for the acceptance of a good artist. Obviously I do not dedicate myself to popular music, but I add some popular compositions in my repertoire in Brazil, and the general public even prefers such works, because they do not know the piano repertoire.

In general I do arrangements or free improvisations on the melodies in the last part of a recital that changes them from "simplistic" or "poor" to at least "interesting." The bias on the part of some musicians lies in the fact that the compositional process of popular music happens by "training" rather than technical knowledge. But if a melody is beautiful and the audience likes it, and taking in consideration that being a pianist is to work with entertainment, why not?

MP – Is it possible a comprehensive music education in Brazil?

AC - Art is sanity, and populist politicians do not want people to be sane. This is the complete answer. Anyway, it is important to mention that we have a set of problems that make the art education (not just music) an utopia in Brazil. We have incentive laws that make artists look like beggars, dependent on the goodwill of sponsors; a media that every day proves more interested in vileness and encouraging shoddy media subcultures that are called "national" and which serve only to human degeneracy. Universities have improved in number and decreased in quality. Nowadays we have alumnus, graduated, masters and doctorate degrees in art completely unprepared, useless theses and projects, money spent in shoddy researches, etc.

**And there are those who try to set orchestras in the suburbs, often with little or no return, just to say that the government does something for the culture and in fact not changing anything about education politics and real culture.
I do not believe anything will work in that direction in Brazil.**

MP –And what about projects such as the “Orpheonic Singing” by Villa-lobos?

AC – Poor Villa-lobos. He was a culture pathfinder; however he lived in a time where, even with all the difficulties, it was possible to do something about education in Brazil.

For a long time now, blaming on the populism and savagery that people deal with money, that has become impossible. Happily, Villa-Lobos is in a better place...

MP –And what about the projects to save young people from traffic/drugs through art?

AC – It is very good to encourage art in any way since childhood, but more important is to encourage honesty and the value of all kinds of work. Utopia? Probably. But it bothers me to see children working with art on the television. Is that ok? To work picking oranges is not? It lacks coherence. Can a child work in a soap opera and stay close to actors doing scenes almost pornographic and snorting cocaine?

Well, I do not consider myself a conservative person on the current pejorative meaning of the word, I just think it is hypocrisy to speak about projects for young people through art, without mentioning projects for young people through farming and/or other so important areas to society.

MP – What are the difficulties found by a young artist currently?

AC – I have always had zero support and that made me focus my work on the differential I offer, but the big problem is that even the musical environment does not contribute if you are not the right person’s friend. I do not know a single orchestra who is receptive to an unknown soloist that does not belong to a clan (or mob) in which the conductor also comes from.

MP – As a composer, what is your chosen language and in which stylistic movement do you fit your work?

AC – I use to say that I am a chameleonic composer. I like to compose in different languages and, as far as I can help, I try not to imitate others work or repeating myself. In the same way, I have composed the “4 Romantic Pieces Op.12” in which I use languages/techniques that Mendelssohn could have used, or my “Sonata Op.3” which has six movements and lasts about two hours in a closer language to the modernism of composers as Busoni, Stravinsky, Sorabji and Messiaen.

However, I do not search difference at any cost; I consider it a terrible habit of several undertrained composers that do not dominate any technique and dedicate themselves on the search of a plausible explanation to an add up of bad taste noises which two interprets will never be able to repeat without sounding completely different one from the other.

It also does not attract me a work entirely composed through mathematics (Stockhausen and co.). Those who say they like to hear it seem to me more interested not showing ignorance among the others than real experts. At all, under an aesthetic point of view, these “mathematics” often are brilliant and I must say

that I consider a wonderful class to study the scores of some Klavierstücke by Stockhausen, and also enjoy other of his works that are much more musical than mathematic, such as “Licht”, which has been weighing a lot on the language of an opera that I am composing.

MP – Talk more about this opera, it will be your first vocal work according to your catalogue

AC – As a matter of fact it will not be the first to be composed, but the first that I consider to be well composed. I have made several tests, parts of musical poems, but it has always been missing an idea that I considered to be captivating. For now, this opera is called “The King of Jews” and my intention is that the text is in Aramaic, Hebrew and Latin. Obviously, it speaks about the life of Jesus Christ under a humanist point of view rather than a religious one, but I believe I will maintain the “miracles” and the “unexplained moments”. I have about a quarter of the work composed.

MP – Paraphrases and arrangements are your specialties/preferences?

AC – I have done several arrangements/transcriptions, over seventy, and I like it as much as composing. On the other hand, I have not done so many paraphrases; I have just had the idea to honor posthumously the Hungarian pianist Georges Cziffra with a cycle of 6 Paraphrases that was my Op.7. Of these paraphrases, only three have been recorded. Besides that, in 2004/5 I also composed a paraphrase entitled “Reminiscences of Carmina Burana Op.2” based on themes of the famous cantata by Carl Orff. What happened was that, in the few opportunities I had to record, the situations or contracts (which was what happened with the Cd recorded in Australia last year) led me to record such works that, in general, are very well welcome by the public on the concerts. I really like to improvise on the piano, and that automatically makes me, from time to time, easily create a paraphrase about known themes.

MP – When you speak about improvisation, what is the relationship with Jazz?

AC – None. I can improvise a Jazz because of my enough knowledge domain on such thing, but it does not please me. Lay sometimes think improvisation was born with the Jazz, which is a big mistake, because the improvisation exists for centuries now, but it was transmitted more orally than otherwise. So today we have an idea on how Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin or Liszt used to improvise, but no treatise was written by these composers about their experience in the area. My improvisations result from my historic-sound research.

MP – Besides persistence, what else does an artist of your area need to achieve its goals?

AC – A complete artist must never stop updating himself, or even staying encapsulated in his own world. It is of a critical importance to comprehend art as whole, regardless of what is the one professed by the artist.

I cannot conceive an artist that does not understand ballet, who does not have contact with literature and philosophy, that does not know how to differ Delacroix from Degas, or even that is not updated with the current technological/scientific progress. When a pianist is going to interpret a work as, for example, “Après Une Lecture de Dante” by Franz Liszt, he must keep in mind all the influences on that work by Beethoven, Schumann, Draeseke, Dante Alighieri, Delacroix and Victor

Hugo. That is, it is necessary to close a knowledge circle before expressing something through art. Everything is interconnected and however we cannot know everything about everything, we should seek as much as possible. And if you are a studios who is at this level and enjoys what you do, then perhaps you are an artist!

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www.arturcimirro.com.br**

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