

Across Borders and from Diversity

A Personal Experience

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Music has the ability to express emotions and sensations so profound that words alone cannot express them. The communicative power of music has been studied through interdisciplinary approaches all over the world, from the scientific perspectives of neuroscientists such as Oliver Sacks (*Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*), Daniel Levitin (*This is Your Brain on Music*) and Gottfried Schlaug (Director of the Music and Neuroimaging Laboratory at Harvard Medical School) to the semi-humanist pedagogy of Howard Gardner, Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard University (*Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity as Seen Through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi*).

My experiences as a professional musician over the last twenty years, as an interdisciplinary educator at the University of California Santa Barbara, at Harvard University, and at The College of the Holy Cross, as well as my passion to share universal narratives through personal events informed this talk on the communicative properties of music at the International AGACOM Conference.

The director of the Royal Galician Academy, author and professor Víctor Freixanes, suggested in his remarks at the conference that "*to be different is to exist*" and spoke of "*language as a marker of social identity*." Silvino Lopes, president of MEDIA-COM - Cape Verdean Association of Communication Sciences, also spoke about language as "*an instrument for the conception of identity*" while journalist María Yáñez reminded us that "*the future is oral communication*" when comparing oral/audiovisual versus textual languages; Yáñez noted as well that the first Galician language blogs were started by Galicians in the diaspora (*fillos.org*).²

My background as a professional musician in the United States is directly linked to the Galician language, specifically to the work of Rosalía de

Castro. When the president of AGACOM and professor at USC, Francisco Campos Freire, asked me to "*reflect on protection strategies of Galician culture beyond Galicia*" and Víctor Freixanes suggested that I filter an "*opening perspective*" through my experience, I decided to question what was it, really, that opened doors for me to the cultural market in the United States: a linguistic coincidence wholly unrelated to my playing the bagpipe...

Lúa Descolorida

In 2006, I was in the second semester of my Doctorate in Musical Arts at Rutgers University. In the United States, Music and the arts in general are part of a university's system and regulated as such. My specialty, and the main reason I moved to New York, was to fully focus on the lyrical, operatic, and symphonic repertoire I so enjoyed as a pianist throughout my academic career in Galicia and Barcelona. Even though in Spain a degree offered a specialization in chamber music, it did not grant the exceptionally detailed training of the *Yankee* system. My area of concentration, *Collaborative Piano*, comprised instruction in the diction of languages in the traditional lyrical repertoire (German, Italian, French) and in the not so traditional (Russian, Slavic and Scandinavian). It comprised as well an extensive study of vocal work with piano (art songs), complete operas, and an instrumental repertoire specifically with piano (sonatas, trios, quartets...). Being a collaborative pianist meant being in constant conversation with one's fellow performers, creating and recreating musical productions as an ensemble, and living in constant learning since this field of study possesses one of the most extensive repertoires.

During this second semester, the Vocal Performance Department Chair asked me to be the pianist for a Master's class of the Russo-Argentine composer Osvaldo Golijov. One of his compositions was intended for soprano and piano and, ac-

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According to her, I was the perfect collaborator since the language of the piece was *like Spanish*. My task as pianist included working with singers on the diction of the melodic line, and the fact that this work, in particular, was in *a language similar to mine* prompted her to think of me to collaborate on the correct diction with the singer. When I received the music score in order to study it, I saw that the title of the piece was “Lúa Descolorida”³ (*Colorless Moon* in Galician, my own language, and the name of a poem written by the most iconic writer of 19th century Galicia, Rosalía de Castro). As a result of the poignant combination of melancholy, longing, and emotion that shaped my response to the piece, I worked on it with unrivaled passion. After making a phonetic transcription, I sent the singer a recording of the recited poem as well as a second recording with the poem following the rhythm of the song. That was a magical time: just when I had decided to leave behind my life as a bagpiper in Galicia to follow the dream of being a pianist in the United States, Rosalía de Castro appeared to remind me of the power and the beauty of the difference factor.

Golijov reached Rosalía de Castro’s work through his admiration for Federico García Lorca. Having fallen in love with the sound and symbolism of the Galician language, he wrote a piece for the soprano Dawn Upshaw and the pianist Gilbert Kalish in 1999. This composition included various versions and orchestrations, and it was, in a certain way, the climax of one of his most popular pieces: *La Pasión según San Marcos*, a macro composition intertwining Latinamerican roots with classical language through the composer’s own effort to understand the relationship between his own religion, Judaism, and Christianity.

In the first decade of the 21st century, Osvaldo Golijov was the most renowned composer in the world of classic-contemporary music: he received requests by the Metropolitan Opera of New York, Lincoln Center and the Chicago Symphony as well as for soundtracks by Francis Ford Coppola. Golijov presented a conference/master class open

to the public about his music at Rutgers University. At that time, all accompanying musicians met to rehearse and receive his advice before the event, and my curiosity to know how much he knew about Galician culture led us to a long conversation about language, identity, and—how could it have been otherwise—the Galician bagpipe. This conversation led both to an invitation to speak at the university where Osvaldo Golijov taught, The College of Holy Cross, and to a profound immersion into the possibilities of the sounds of the Galician bagpipe.

And so everything began in this way, with a Galician poem and a curious composer who had nothing to do with Galician culture...by the time I met him, Golijov had already spent some years placing Rosalía de Castro’s oeuvre at the epicenter of contemporary music.

The Silkroad Project and Yo-Yo Ma

In September of 2006, Golijov arranged *From Air to Air*, a chamber piece that included two movements with the Galician bagpipe (in low G). The story of how this work was written and made its debut at Carnegie Hall reached the front page of the art section of *The New York Times*⁴ and led me to the organization that changed my life: The Silkroad Project. Established in 1998 by the cellist Yo-Yo Ma (of Chinese origin, born in France and raised in the United States) with the idea of using the Silk Road as a metaphor for contact and cultural exchange through music: to find musical connections to the east and west embracing differences, to reassess the power of music in society, to create the tools to make it possible and to place music at the center of a global conversation: “*Yo-Yo Ma conceived Silkroad as a reminder that even as rapid globalization resulted in division, it brought extraordinary possibilities for working together. Seeking to understand this dynamic, he began to learn about the historical Silk Road, recognizing in it a model for productive cultural collaboration, for the exchange of ideas and tradition alongside commerce and innovation.*”⁵ In this manner, an organization

was born that to this day responds and reacts to the challenges of a society with a created language imbibing the experiences and traditions of its collective parts. All members of the organization are independent artists who joined Silkroad to collaborate and create “*a musical language centered in difference (...) able to serve as a metaphor (...) for a more hopeful world.*”⁶

I began working with Silkroad in 2006 led by Golijov’s work. In 2011, I became a member of its leadership council and have been its Learning Advisor since 2014. As the bagpiper and pianist of the ensemble, I have worked in the commission and premiere of a dozen works belonging to composers of multiple musical languages, from the jazz of Vijay Iyer (*Playlist for an Extreme Occasion*) to the multiculturalism of David Bruce (*Cut the Rug*) and the rock of Glenn Kotche (*Mille Etoiles*). I have collaborated with orchestras like the Chicago Symphony, the Hartford Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony, and The New York Philharmonic. Included is work with compositions and arrangements born out of the cultural traditions of the Ensemble’s members—traditions from Syria, Israel, Russia, Lebanon, China, Korea, Japan, the United States and Galicia—or created as a result of the themes developed for academic environments.

Yo-Yo Ma uses the ecological term “*edge effect*,” the point where two ecosystems meet, as another metaphor to define what we continue to do as an organization. At this edge or boundary, *at this intersection, we can find greater biodiversity*⁷. Our principal function is to work at the crossroads of communities, of disciplines and of societies. Our “home” is at Harvard University. Here is where we have our offices and develop collaborative projects with the Graduate School of Education and the Harvard Business School. Here is where we forge courses about passion-driven learning (The Arts and Passion-Driven Learning Institute) and about the challenges of cultural entrepreneurs (The Dean’s Cultural Entrepreneurship Challenge), which advocates for collaboration among business and humanities students within the university.

With Yo-Yo Ma, members of the ensemble tour the United States annually (from New York’s Carnegie Hall to Los Angeles’ Hollywood Bowl) and China, South Korea and other countries biannually. Members of the ensemble also develop

more compact projects within our own respective communities—tours through India guided by Sandeep Das and through China with Wu Tong, or participation in my own festival, Galician Connection (2012-2014)⁸. In addition to working with Harvard, we collaborate with Stanford, Berkeley, Princeton and Rice; with museums like the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Natural History in New York, or the Aga Khan Museum of Toronto; and with the public schools of Montana, Iowa, Massachusetts and New York in the integration of art. Ours is a network, continuous and without pause, based on alliances and interconnections among multiple realities and truths born out of the same social, academic, economic, and cultural contexts.

Networks of Constancy and Diversity

*Collaboration, flexibility, innovation, and creativity are traits that musicians working as a group practice constantly. These are also necessary traits for professional survival in the 21st century.*⁹ Following along these same lines, my own experiences in the field of music in the United States and at an international level is based on the simple strategy of forging as many activities and alliances as possible with surrounding resources. No one needs a bagpiper on the other side of the ocean, but the characteristics that the instrument itself may convey (its pastoral origin, as a catalyst for the survival of a cultural identity) and its practice (centered and sustained within the community) are universal values that helped me create themes receptive to the interdisciplinary study of immigration, cultural identity and the loss of memory (both at a cognitive and a cultural level).

Based on public knowledge, I might perhaps be best known as a bagpipe or piano performer; in reality, however, the richest part of my experience derives from the intangible traits I learned through my teaching practice. I use my experience to promote conversations that would be difficult to have in educational environments without music as a mediator. The socio-economic context of classical and popular instruments and their place in history help me speak about inequality in today’s world. In turn, my experience as educational advisor at Silkroad helps me see that communication problems among the departments of the same academic institution are similar in all parts of the world where we work, and from the experience of work-



Cristina Pato in her workshop at the AGACOM Conference

ing as part of a collective arise alliances and ideas to help me achieve transformation through small projects centered in the beauty of diversity and difference.

The history of the Galician language and the Galician bagpipe may very well be a universal story. It possesses all the prerequisites: the idea that it was the people who kept and continue to keep alive its two languages is an idea that is both powerful and interchangeable. From the history of the bagpipe as a universal instrument (all the bagpipes of the world), and from the Galician bagpipe, in particular, I was able to work in previously unthinkable circumstances because that “difference” prompted the curiosity in my interlocutors necessary to explore a previously unimaginable road.

To survive, I live in a state of constant listening—internal and external listening—and inspired by Silkroad, I take care to respond to my environment both in the United States and in Galicia. One of the collaborative projects I have been leading these last few years revolves around the Galician reality of an aging population, with the loss of memory at a cognitive level (through a personal story) and with the loss of memory at a cultural level (through the study of American and contemporary European societies). I began work-

¹ Author’s Note: this article includes personal impressions about the conference and an extended version of ideas discussed there on November 21, 2017 as well as in a discussion with students in the Department of Communication at USC.

² Personal notes on the PANEL: Language, Communication and Diversity Networks, 11/20/17.

³ <http://www.osvaldogolijov.com/wd9.htm>

⁴ Oestreich, James R. (9/16/2006) “Revealing the Soul in Soldierly Bagpipes”. The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/16/arts/music/16pato.html>

⁵ EPK Silkroad: <https://www.silkroad.org/about-us>

⁶ Mission and EPK of Silkroad: <https://www.silkroad.org/about-us>

⁷ Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy. Americans for the Arts 2013. Conference/concert with Yo-Yo Ma regarding art and society. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWsdrjUhol4>

⁸ Information about the three editions: <http://cristinapato.com/galicianconnection/>

⁹ Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy. Americans for the Arts, 2013. Conference/concert with Yo-Yo Ma about art and society. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWsdrjUhol4>

Talent entails a responsibility. And on my list of responsibilities is placing the bagpipe in places up to now limited to “conventional” instruments. I try to separate myself from the instrument as much as possible in order to gain perspective when it is programmed in the New York Philharmonic season or when my project “The Gaita and Orchestra Commissioning Project” received financing from an American institution for contemporary music

ing three years ago with Dr. Kenneth S. Kosik, a neuroscientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, to create a course focused on combining the humanistic view of science with the scientific view of the humanities.

We put together a team of fourteen professors and change agents to study memory from the perspective of various disciplines: geography, anthropology, art, technology, sociology, literature, leadership, and activism. Out of this collaboration came about a course titled *Memory: An Interdisciplinary Exploration* co-created by Mary Hancock (anthropology, UCSB), Kim Yasuda (public art, UCSB), Kenneth S. Kosik (neuroscience, UCSB) and me.¹⁰ The class was born out of one of the pieces that I wrote to my mother, Maruxa, when she began to lose her memory as a result of frontotemporal dementia: “*My Lethe Story: O Río do Esquecimento.*” This composition combines narration with chamber music and is based on a connection among the story of the arrival to Galicia of the Romans by way of the river Limia (the river of forgetfulness), mythology (the river Lethe in Hades) and the patterns of constant repetition that make up the daily life of a person living with dementia (my mother, in this case). I composed this work within a Silkroad residency about rivers (as a metaphor) at Harvard University where it made its debut in 2013.¹¹ The residency included a collaboration with the Galician neurologist at the same university, Dr. Miguel Alonso-Alonso. Once again, a musical language to tell universal stories opened a door to a world of connections between communities and departments. As a result of that work I began to work as artist-in-residence at The College of the Holy Cross for their “*Time, Memory and Identity*” program. And in 2016, UCSB hired me to create a course with Ken Kosik.

As with Silkroad, I network and look for constant alliances. Teaching is the strongest calling I have had in the last few years—with passion and as a vocation. But the bagpipe performer in me is the

one who opens the door to the teacher, and this is why I continue my career as a soloist, even one with limited seasons, because the undivided attention of an audience who pays to listen to a concert is a privilege for which I am grateful and to whom I owe my academic career. Talent entails a responsibility. And on my list of responsibilities is placing the bagpipe in places up to now limited to “conventional” instruments. I try to separate myself from the instrument as much as possible in order to gain perspective when it is programmed in the New York Philharmonic season or when my project “The Gaita and Orchestra Commissioning Project” received financing from an American institution for contemporary music (New Music USA) and along with whom I could commission composers such as the Galician Octavio Vázquez and Argentinian Emilio Solla, to write concerti for bagpipe and orchestra, concerti that have already been premiered by orchestras on both sides of the ocean (Sphinx Orchestra in 2015, Real Filharmonía de Galicia in 2017).

Conclusion: “To Be Different Is to Exist”

With my students, I often speak about my “alphabet plan” (plan A, plan B, plan C, and so on until plan Z), that I often link with my family’s survival instinct. My parents, as so many others of their generation, had limited access (if any at all) to education, and this is why they developed an almost religious reverence not only for schooling but also for an enormous capacity to continuously innovate, transform and renew. My father was an accordionist, a photographer, a traveling jewel salesman, a framer... he adapted and responded to social needs. My mother understood that the only way for her four daughters to be free was through education and training: the more the better. Her instincts of survival and improvement are relevant and universal for the Galicians of her generation and social reality, as well as for those of my generation.



Cristina Pato at the Sejong Dream-Tree Harmony Orquesta, Seoul, 2012
Photography : Taeuck Kang

My role of *“artist-in-residence”* in American academic circles is directly intertwined with an artist’s ability to renew, innovate and adapt. From this strategic place, at the intersection of departments, I can advance projects, courses, and works that respond to a society’s reality or to the needs of an academic environment. Through these residencies, residencies that could very well be adapted to the Galician system, I have tried to explore issues resonating with the multiculturalism and diversity of Yankee society, and through this exploration, I rediscovered the power of Galician universal values.

Citing Freixanes: “to be different is to exist.” The fact that my status as a bagpiper would not be relevant on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean swelled my interest to make it so. Yo-Yo Ma notes that passion transforms “having” to do something into “wanting” to do it. The fact that when I decided to leave behind the bagpipe in favor of the piano, Galician language appeared to remind me of the power of its culture made me question my own responsibility at having been so fortunate. Through

an infinity of projects, of a network of constant diversity and of collaborative work, I realized that perseverance and alliances are the only allies when it comes time to show the beauty and importance of difference.

True to form, we are all different, and we all have a story to tell. If we can unite and share the thousands of stories of Galician men and women through their work and life, perhaps we can project Galician cultural values in a more forceful way. It’s the smallest steps that take us the furthest... ■

⁹ Detailed information about the course at <http://www.cristinapato.com/memory/>

¹⁰ Video of the first reading: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHMd_F2Tb2Q