

The Art of Sensual Sound

Fernando MAGALHÃES

*Music critic of the Portuguese newspaper Público
Crítico de música del periódico Público de Portugal.*

Translation/ traducción by Karen Bennet

Imagine a woman with a body-shaped soul and a voice-shaped body. That woman is Fátima Miranda. When you listen to her, you listen to the voice of the voice, the voice of the body, the voice of the soul.

The French writer Marguerite Duras once said that man moves through space while woman fills it. Fátima Miranda, woman-voice, fills space with her song, a song which passes between us like a breeze, a gale, a waterfall, a fire, a thunderstorm, from the subterranean regions of hell to the immaculate purity of the heavens. It murmurs secrets, tosses out sarcasms, amuses itself with childish games and forbidden pleasures, whispers a prayer and chews over a curse. Fátima Miranda's song fills the inner and the outer space, a temple of harmony and vibrations. In her face, when she sings, stained glass windows open. To hear and see her sing is to watch a procession of masks across which all existence flows.

But Fátima Miranda - a singer from the same lineage as other great contemporary voices such as Cathy Berberian, Karin Krog, Shelley Hirsch, Diamanda Galás, Joan La Barbara or Meredith Monk - is also a priestly presence, lovingly sculpted from the Sacred. There, in that space that opens up within us and reveals itself through her song, a procession passes by, a procession of howling animals which, during the Medieval Carnival, were brought by peasants to their orgiastic revels.

ArteSonado is like a round trip through the realms of fear, a masque, or display, without the disguise of the ridiculous or sublime. This is the same interior cinema-scape that Buñuel and Dalí invented in *Un Chien Andalou* to explore the void of the human soul.

There is an inherent cruelty in this unashamed exhibition of truth. Fátima Miranda is a pretender, like Fernando Pessoa, cultivating like him the ethic of drama, and knowing that there is no other way to bear (or to touch) light and nudity.

Thus we find ourselves in the domain of architecture. Cathedral of light and sound, of body and spirit, future and tradition, theatre and initiation. *ArteSonado* operates from its choice of title, which refers to a type a filigree work used mainly in Classical Arab architecture, but which may also be read as the *Art of Sound* (like a construction of multiple floors and rooms). Each song - let us call each of the stages of this journey a song - has doors for entry, windows with panoramic views, hidden trap-doors, spyholes, game rooms, dens of vice, silent cloisters, dungeons filled with torture implements, attics of memories, halls for banqueting with angels and demons, stairs and ropes, passages to other dimensions.

As a whole, the building is a palimpsest, uniting the fiery centre of the soul with the designs of the flesh. It is a journey of (re)discovery. As music unites (or reunites) and because Religion really means *re-linking*, Fátima Miranda's music is, above all, religious music. Each sound is renewed, as tradition is endlessly bent and recycled to create a music in which the past and present play together on a stage of mirrors.

We begin the journey vibrating with Life. We are warmed up with *Diapasión*, which tunes us into the primordial vibration of the Orient. India. The India of the masters and of the *Dhrupad* singing. The *India*

Song of Duras, freed of plague? Fátima Miranda is already calling, but still on a slow flame, a *drone* punctuated by fireflies and night crickets. Just as the alchemist in the laboratory of the soul prepares the raw material for the birth of his great Work, so Fátima Miranda mixes and kneads, collecting dew and lighting the ovens, separating the Masculine sulphur from the Feminine Mercury and Salt. Fátima-woman-earth-light-water which, in its own air, ignites the solar flame.

In *Desasosiego*, the work passes along a path peppered with dangers and traps, illuminated and shaded by the hallucinations of madness, but also with offerings to pleasure. It asks to be smelt, eaten. Her voice unfolds in ancient pulsations, in onomatopoeic spices of opium and incense; language unrolls, vests itself in folklore; Fátima paints her face and her voice, and dances.

Palimpsesta. Murmurs. The sleepiness of the siesta. Dream. Dreams within dreams. Ritual of memory. The subtle body unfreed and flying. What does she see when her song flies up beyond the notes of the world? What do we see through the eyes of her voice? Sighs. Laughter, so far away... so deep... so gentle. Ghosts flitting about. The high notes separate from stone and become clouds. Ancestral presences question anyone that has dared to gaze at these lands where physical reality ceases and another extends in its place towards the infinite. And the woman grows old, becomes carcass, dust... And in dying backwards, millions of years before, one remembers. Back to the dawn of the universe. Her voice is now, before and after, beyond time. It has changed into other voices. Let us fondle this newborn baby, gently. It awakes suddenly. The rope is tense. And there we are again, occupying the body which was sleeping. But everything around seems different...

Someone is burning. Someone is calling. Alguém LLAMAda Fátima Miranda.

Jubilation. The joyful voices of *A Inciertas Edades* are here. Little girls face that sings like a flower, lost in a forest of poliphony raised like a barrier before the face of the gods.

HORAdada. The hour of the wolf. Of the she-wolf, Fátima Miranda. The shadowy high notes trespass on the night of Walpurgis. The hour of fear, of clammy skin, bodies chilled to the core taking refuge in the temple, beseeching some unnamed god to appear. This is the singer who becomes singers, the intrusive force of a scream at the same time as the withdrawal into murmurs. A voice here more than ever inflamed by the fire of Spain, challenging, penetrating, tearing at the bars of destiny.

The voice returns, cheerful, rejuvenated. A percussive voice, multi-tracked, part of the domesticated ethno-urban territory in *Zap Mama* but which immediately moves away to virgin regions. *RePercusiones* (*esto es de lo que no tiene nombre*). But what is there that is nameless except primordial sound? The repercussions of this vocal colloquy, masked poliphony, reveal the most theatrical, amusing and declamatory side of Fátima Miranda. In this humorous equation, the important thing is gesture and signs. Tide of meanings and messages colliding in a poltergeist of forms. Communication. Communication interrupted. Communication re-established. Do you hear me? Do you hear yourself? Do they hear? Gestures of the voice. Her gestures, surrounded, intertwined with words. It must be harrowing to attend a live performance of this work. It is, always.

And finally, at the end, the centre. The sea. Waves vibrating infinitely through the aeons of creation. A soulful blues, of course. Yes, now more than ever, of course, *Nila Blue* slides along the dark southern river, from its source to the voice. Swinging. Rolling and swinging the soul, full rich rhythm of the waters of the womb. Green-blue-golden voice. The work is complete. Voice, body, soul, colour, sex, sea, all appear concentric. Silence. We hear the transparency. From the foundations to the last sweep of the arcades, in the final reflection of the stained glass windows, in the most secret concavities of the vaults, in the highest point of the cupolas, an echo is unleashed in direction of the infinite.

Now in the inflamed silence that remains, hovering in the aftermath, an old teaching may help us, that which the masters throughout life taught Fátima Miranda, the POWER of the voice. Fátima Miranda CALLS. Her fire burns in a spiral and lights up from the centre to the portico of the throat, VOICE.

This was how I imagined *ArteSonado*.

But each time the voyage begins, the coordinates of the labyrinth alter.

ArteSonado is an initiation into the essence, an introduction to the various embodiments possible of the human voice by means of this unique woman, Fátima Miranda, an incessant quest for new senses and renewed forms of equilibrium for its expressivity and modernity.

It is the *art of sound* but also the art of the tactile voice, a voice that touches us. A music with senses for the senses. A sensual record. Sensual sound.