



The construction of a performance from the tripartite model: Interpretive decisions applied to the song *La Rosa y el Sauce*

A construção de uma performance a partir do modelo tripartite: Decisões interpretativas aplicadas à canção *La Rosa y el Sauce*

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ABSTRACT

This article has as object of research the song *La Rosa y el Sauce*, by the Argentine composer Carlos Guastavino (1912 - 2000). The study uses the tripartite model of Nattiez (1945) aiming to assist the research and musical interpretive decisions of the present authors. In the conclusion, arguments are presented that indicate the insufficiency of the score as a total representation of the musical work and the important role of the performer in the sound materialization.

Keywords: Semiology of music, Singing, Piano, Musical Gesture, Musical interpretive decisions.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objeto de pesquisa a canção *La Rosa y el Sauce*, do compositor argentino Carlos Guastavino (1912 - 2000). O estudo usa o modelo tripartite de Nattiez (1945) objetivando auxiliar a pesquisa e as decisões interpretativas musicais dos presentes autores. Na conclusão são apresentados argumentos que indicam a insuficiência da partitura como representação total da obra musical e o importante papel do performer na materialização sonora.

Palavras-chave: Semiologia da música, Canto, Piano, Gesto Musical, Decisões interpretativas musicais.

1 INTRODUCTION

The musical interpreter when idealizing a performance needs to make decisions that transcend the indications of a score. *A fortissimo*, *pianissimo*, growing and decreasing have nuances that will be part of the artist's intonation. Such decisions may only belong to the imagery of the performers, but how do we know if they will be suitable for the musical work? With this, it is necessary to expand the place that sees a possible performance, making it an impulse to the construction of knowledge: social context, mesology of the composer, appreciation of other interpreters are elements that aggregate the possible interpretive decisions. In this article we will use as a methodological tool the tripartite model of Nattiez (1945) applied to the song of the Argentine composer Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000) — *La Rosa y el Sauce*. We admit



that such a model provides the search for elements external to the score, supporting possible interpretive choices, aiming at an authentic performance in balance with the musical genre of the Argentine song of the twentieth century.

2 THE TRIPARTITE MODEL

We understand that the information contained in a score is insufficient to the construction of a performance. It shows us an outline, provides investigative clues that may or may not ratify our interpretive intentions. Music is no longer just a process of narrative or communication, but a symbolic process, open to new interpreters. The semiology of Nattiez is not the science of communication, but rather the study of the specificity of the functioning of symbolic forms (NATTIEZ, 1990). The researcher states that a musical work is not centered on itself, or on the score, or on the intentions of the creator, but it is in motion, characterizing itself as a symbol, triggering an infinite process of interpreters in the agents involved, that is, composers, performers and audience. Thus, three dimensions of this symbolic process emerge:

(a) The poetic dimension: even when empty of all intended meaning, as it is here, the symbolic form results from a process of creation that can be described or reconstituted. (b) The esthetic dimension: the "receivers", when confronted with a symbolic form, assign one or more meanings to the form; The term "receiver" is, however, a bit misleading. Clearly, in our test case, we did not "receive" the meaning of a "message" (since the producer intended none), but rather constructed meaning, in the course of an active perceptual process. (c) The trait: the symbolic form is embodied physically and maternally in the form of a trait accessible to the five senses. We use the word trace because the poetic process cannot be read immediately within its guidelines, since the process (if it is in part determined by the trace) depends heavily on the lived experience of the "receiver." Molino proposed the name *niveau neutre* [neutral level] or *niveau matériel* [material level] for this trait. An objective description of the neutral level can always be proposed - in other words, an analysis of its immanent and recurring properties. This is referred to throughout this volume as "neutral level analysis" (NATTIEZ, 1990, p. 11).

The tripartite model considers not only the material level, also called neutral, represented in this article by Guastavino's score, but the poetic and esthetic relations, configuring a synergistic and feedback exchange in the construction of a performance:

Poietic process Aesthetic process

Emitter → Trace material ← "Receiver"

The interpreter in this model acquires the important function of co-creator, because when walking through the three levels proposed by Nattiez, the interpretation of the symbols apprehended influences the artistic intonation itself and the result of this intellectual work can add new values to the work, not initially inserted by the composer.



3 CARLOS GUASTAVINO (POIETIC LEVEL)

The composer Carlos Guastavino was born in the city of Santa Fe, Argentina on April 5, 1912, having died in the same city in the year 2000. The artist moved through different aesthetics, bridging the gap between modernism and the popular traditions of his country. Guastavino broke the regional barriers, having as emblem the "Argentine romantic nationalism". The composer's style can be understood in an interview excerpt given in 1990:

I don't like dodecaphonism. For me the music is made with a good melody well surrounded. At the Conservatory, the other professors called me old. But my songs are around the world, everyone in the lyrical world has ever heard of Guastavino (Clarín, 2020¹)

The catalogue of Guastavino's works reaches a total of two hundred and sixty-six songs, mostly dedicated to voice and piano. His songs gained great international dimension by being interpreted by famous singers of the opera world. His plays are characterized by hybridity, bordering between the popular and the lyrical.

3.1 THE ROSE AND THE WILLOW

The rose was opening
Hugging the willow
The passionate tree
I loved her so much!
But a flirtatious girl
It has been stolen
And the disconsolate willow
He's crying (Francisco Silva)

The work presents a melancholic atmosphere, characterized in its musical elements and enhanced in the poetry of Francisco Silva:

With clear influence of surrealism, Silva, an amateur poet close to Guastavino, wrote this synthetic poem. Their ability to represent the psychological states – which in this case correspond to a personification of two biological species – and the scene that the text describes, is manifested through the melodic, harmonic and dynamic resources they use. From the melodic point of view it is no coincidence, for example, that Guastavino uses the highest notes of the entire melodic line in the word "passionate", more precisely in the syllables that use the first vowel, and that he also performs a sequence, repeating the distant turn of a lower major second. Nor does the use of the descending octave interval in the word "tanto" go unnoticed, which seems destined to emphasize the passion of the text (MANSILLA, 2011, p. 75)

¹ 20 years after his death Carlos Guastavino: the emblematic Argentine composer who conquered the world and made an arrangement for Arroz con leche, disponible em: https://www.clarin.com/espectaculos/musica/carlos-guastavino-solitario-compositor-argentino-profeta-tierra-alla-fronteras_0_5gOAuVUP.html



The musical challenge is to create a coherent dialogue between poetry, piano and voice. The character of the song, an adage, with the 100 BPM collage, is insufficient information to the poetic text, which has three different moments: (1) The love between *La Rosa y el Sauce*; (2) the theft of the rose by a girl; (3) the result of interrupted love. With this, the work leaves room for the insertion of new musical elements, not indicated by the ligatures and indications of expression of the composer.

4 THE SCORE (NEUTRAL LEVEL)

Despite being an accompanied melody, the texture of the accompaniment is polyphonic, with elements based on counterpoint:

Figure 1 – Excerpt from the score.



Source: Ricordi Americana S.A.E. C.- Buenos Aires.

The first phrase of the sung melody is in a minor key, with strong modal color, characterized by a dominant minor.

Figure 2 – Excerpt from the score.



Source: Ricordi Americana S.A.E. C.- Buenos Aires.

The passion of the rose and the willow has a melodic apex, in the highest note of the vocal range, emphasizing the word "*apasionado*". A harmonic progression begins in a cycle of fifths, generating tensions and resolutions, culminating in a Phrygian cadence:



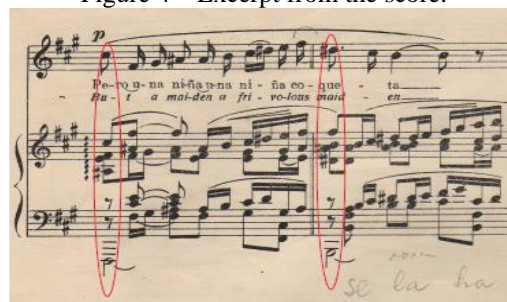
Figure 3 – Excerpt from the score.



Source: Ricordi Americana S.A.E. C.- Buenos Aires.

The dominant one will now settle into the larger namesake. The new tonal color features a new character — "*una niña coqueta*," with two ascending phrases, in a more agile rhythmic articulation, along with a new cycle of tensions and resolutions in major chords:

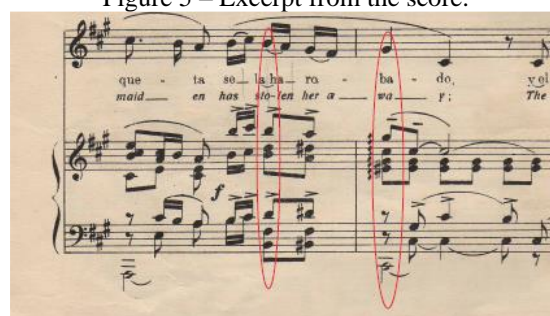
Figure 4 – Excerpt from the score.



Source: Ricordi Americana S.A.E. C.- Buenos Aires.

The progression culminates again in the Phrygian cadence that will now resolve into the minor tonic:

Figure 5 – Excerpt from the score.



Source: Ricordi Americana S.A.E. C.- Buenos Aires.

The ending of the piece does not use any new musical elements. In a minor key, a vocalize using the vowel [a], evokes a possible cry of the willow, a result of the abrupt separation of his passion. The harmonic



and melodic elements are the same as those presented in the introduction, in a melodic dialogue between piano and voice.

5 AUDIOVISUAL (ESTHETIC LEVEL)

We cannot eliminate the possibility of analyzing recordings offered on digital platforms such as *youtube*. This analysis at the esthetic level helps us to understand the orality and interpretive aurality of the work:

(The notation) does not tell us about the connection of the structures. It doesn't tell us how the song sounds as much as how to make it sound. However, no one can make it sound as the writer of the notation intended unless one has, in addition to the knowledge of the tradition of writing, the knowledge of the oral (or rather aural) tradition associated with it—that is, a tradition learned by ear by the student, partly through the elders, but especially through the precepts of his teachers. It is to this aural tradition that most of the knowledge of what "happens between the notes" is left (SEEGGER, 1958, p. 186).

We will analyze three tenors: José Carreras (1946), José Cura (1962) Javier Camarena (1976), aiming to auscultate intonation, gestural and vocal technique. The interpreters are hispanohablantes, which helps to optimize the phonetics appropriate to the text. Another important factor is that they are from different generations, favoring the understanding of the aural tradition of the work. In addition, different vocal timbres and singular interpretations are added. Below, photos of his gestures in the articulation of the word "*apasionado*" and the respective performances available in *QR code*:

- a) Jose Carreras

Figure 6 – Gesture of the tenor José Carreras.



Source: YOUTUBE – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ew34vCh2OY>

The Spanish tenor sings in the key of F#m, with the interpretive emphasis on the power of his voice. Carreras imposes an operatic character to the work, sometimes bringing an excessive drama. His natural voice seems to be lighter than idealized by the singer, generating the impression of effort in an attempt to forge a more robust timbre. However, he has a bright, intense voice and great face-to-face strength. The



proposed tempo is close to that indicated in the score, but without the expressiveness requested in the dynamics. The singer uses few *portamentos* and clearly articulates the text.

b) Jose Cura

Figure 6 – Gestural of José Cura.



Source: YOUTUBE – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxofq4IG2ag>

José Cura sings in the key of Fm, which favors his vocal tessitura and timbre. His voice is more robust, a dramatic tenor. The intonation of the singer and his *legato* bring a medieval character to the piece. Like Carreras, great drama is placed in the words "*el árbol apasionado*", re-insurguing the operatic character. The proposed tempo is a little slower than indicated in the score. The singer uses *portamentos* and performs some dynamics indicated by Guastavino. There is good synergy between piano and voice, showing focus on musical expressiveness rather than vocal virtuosity. The singer has a fluid and energetic gesture, enhancing his face-to-face strength.

C) Javier Camarena

Figure 7 – Gestual do tenor Javier Camarena.



Source: YOUTUBE – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhnIk4Qrd30>

The Mexican interpreter sings in the key of F#m. His voice is *squillante*, with a fast vibrato, characterizing the sonority of a light tenor. It imposes great expressiveness, but without exaggerating the drama. His intonation is very personal, with great concern in the emotional articulation of the text and dynamics. Camarena avoids, because they are outside of her ideal tessitura, sustaining the bass notes. The



tempo is much slower than proposed in the score. The gesture of the singer is more restrained, giving a slightly more chamber character to the work.

6 INTERPRETIVE DECISIONS (POIETIC LEVEL)

The first question arose between pianist and singer – what parameters would we use to choose the tempo? Initially the slower character proposed by Javier Camarena seemed a good choice, but this generated a mechanical difficulty. A slower tempo would require a large, concert piano, making it possible to sustain the notes without excessive pedaling. This factor made us choose a tempo closer to José Cura. What may surprise us is that Guastavino himself in piano performance, chose a different tempo from that indicated in the score, ratifying our feeling that the elements indicated on the neutral level are not crystallized:

The speed indication of the work is Adagio (quaver: 100). In Fuller's recording², we have a small difference, because it is played at 90 bpm. From the moment the singer begins, the pianist adapts to the speed and melodic conduction of the singer, resuming a more metronomic speed in the passages without singing. The conductions of the pianist, in this case, are adapted with the agogic of the singer (DE LIMA, 2020).

At another time the composer had a great impression of the interpretation of the soprano Victoria de los Ángeles (1923-2005) and the Italian pianist Alfredo Rossi (1906-1986), performed in 1962 at the Teatro de Colón³:

Although the author of the work, Guastavino, has had a magnificent impression of the concert, we can not fail to verify, from an archive recording, that the song is executed at a slower speed, at 70 bpm, than what is indicated in the score, which is 100 bpm. It happens in the interpretation of *The Rose and the Willow* just what the critic observes about the interference of the operatic vocal technique in the chamber singing and a valorization of voices of the piano antagonistic to the possible choral interpretative proposal on the work that we are proposing. That is, the critic's observations contradict the sound phenomenon recorded for posterity, at least in relation to this song that was an encore of the program (DE LIMA, 2020).

As commented by the music critic, who by historical evidence, opined against the great part of the audience, the singer must decide whether to use a higher impedance and a more robust timbre, characteristic of the opera, or a more appropriate adjustment to chamber music. Traditionally we perceive that this work brings as a quality the hybridity, ratified by the interpretations studied and by the composer himself. The consensus decision, between pianist and singer, was to use the poetic text as an interpretive compass. The tempo used would be close to 90 BPM, possible for the pianos available for rehearsals. The vocal adjustment chosen leans towards the operatic, given the challenges of the song's tessitura, but in a sound that is organic

² Recording: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oSbRMUDLxRnAme4uXPIQpU2jG4fHKDrr/view?usp=sharing> made available by (DE LIMA, 2020).

³ Victoria de los Ángeles and Alfredo Rossi. Recording link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_Meypb275i3ipi-w1EQDDsRQEHgUoKYy/view?usp=sharing provided by (DE LIMA, 2020).



to the vocal instrument and the song. Our wish is that the text "*el árbol apasionado*" does not sound overly heavy. The moment is delicate, of the love of the two protagonists of the work. This feeling will only be interrupted by the passage "*Pero una niña, una niña coqueta*", then possessing a dramatic curve. The challenge is to bring this poetic intention to the intonation, because the culminating note is in an open vowel [a], a region inviting the increase of intensity in lyrical voices. However, it is possible to articulate it in *mezza voce*, but it will not be comfortable, losing the operatic character and expressiveness of the later dynamics.

7 TRANSCREATIVITY

Figure 8 – Authors' essay recorded on November 23, 2021.

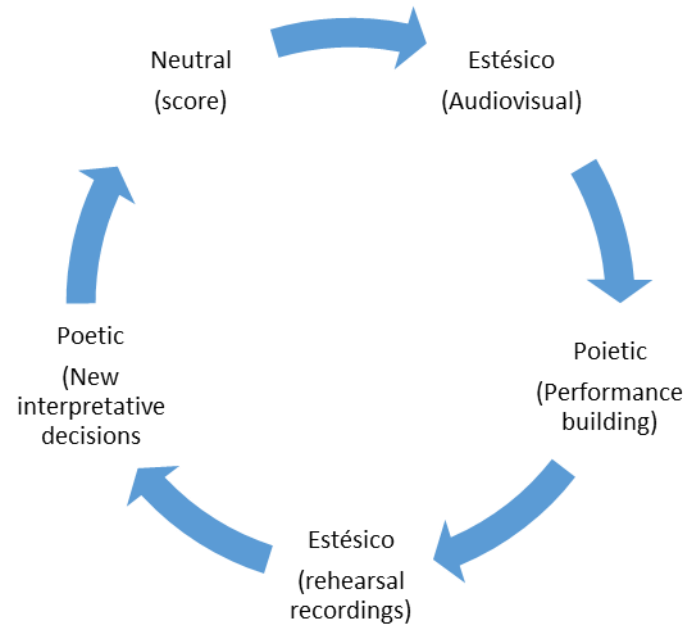


Source: YOUTUBE –https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5aoSorwAOs&list=UUbzp_Ah3GwEGU5jT0IGT1xg&index=2

We documented through audiovisual recordings the total of four essays, where we tried to apply the reflections brought in this article. At that moment, base year of (2021), we were in the process of maturing the performance, we had not yet conquered the zone of metaphysical fruition, whose rational process is transgressed by the free and organic artistic manifestation. However, joint practice and critical listening (aesthetic level) provided the growth of the skills necessary to materialize our interpretive ideal. The strong point achieved was the synergy between piano and voice, the result of understanding the intonations and inflections of each musician. Difficulties of tuning, vibrato, phrasing, arpeggios and sustaining were overcome. It is now necessary to improve the musical gestural – expressive reflection of the body in reaction to musical fruition. The interpretive decisions based on Nattiez's tripartite model enabled the growing transcription-transcreation, resulting in a greater connection with the work of Guastavino and an authentic performance, which continues in full movement:



Flowchart 1 – Practical-analytical cycle resulting from the tripartite model.



8 CONCLUSION

After eight months of rehearsals, we realized that the song *La Rosa y el Sauce* by Guastavino is a musical challenge. The indications in the score are insufficient to structure a solid interpretation, giving space to many musical idealizations. Nattiez's tripartite model provided a more cosmovisionary performative construction, which in our practice was configured in a circular way, since our own recordings provided moments of restructuring of interpretive decisions. Access to the opinions and performances of the composer himself showed that the information in the score is not absolute data. The action of co-creation of the interpreters is a desirable factor for the creation of a singular performance, however, contextualized in oral-aural parameters, respecting the aesthetic tradition of the work.

8.1 FINAL RESULT

Figure 9 – Authors' performance recorded on May 31, 2022.



Source: YOUTUBE. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7txSEB19wE>



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