

Fernanda Aoki Navarro Dissertation Recital

May 31, 2019 at 6:00 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Music Center - Experimental Theater

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jessica Flores for her support throughout the past 6 years. She helped me materializing my ideas, even when they were questionable or bad, and made them shiny and more compelling to our audiences. It is true that she once welcomed me in her office with a baseball bat in hands, pointing it against me. She was a bit skeptical when I proposed a piece in which I would run against the wall repeated times, and thought about many ways to amortize my impact. For that gesture, and for so much more, thank you.

Caroline, husbie, thank you for your kindness, love and support. Thank you also for all the good fights and collaborations we were – and hopefully will always be! – involved with. Can’t wait to defend and go to the beach with you!

Stefani, I’m so grateful for our friendship and all the good stuff we created together! I hope our flying brooms bring us to where we need to be so to continue working together!

Ine, thanks for your friendship and for trusting me with your guts, your vulnerability and your strength. Cheers to that and much more in the future!

Matt, can words ever be sufficient to explain how grateful I am that our lives crossed paths so beautifully? If my words could only have half of the power that you have to move people with your artistry and charisma... I would be frigging Virginia Wolf!

F*****ck! LAUNDRY!
Thanks Kyle. For your implacable good mood.

Felipe, I can’t believe I actually manage to make you say “me-me-me-me-me” on a microphone, non-stop, for 20 minutes, while showing graphic photos of femicide and lecturing you on feminism in front of an audience. This was more than sufficient to keep our friendship tight. Obrigada de coração!

To all XX co-organizers: Thank you! Sometimes you were a pain in my Latina bunda (I’m sure I was a pain too!), but I definitely learned a lot from all of you. We definitely made some waves. Please don’t stop!

Katharina, thanks for opening an entire new world of possibilities to me! Your classes, your approach towards music and your energy were definitely one of the most eye-opening experiences I had at UCSD.

Steve, I must say that there was, for the longest time, in the grad student bunker/office, a sticker in the fridge saying “Schick happens”. I’m not sure they meant it in a positive or negative way, but my thought was: “that’s true; he definitely makes things happen!” I truly admire your capacity to master so many different things, and I’m very honored and grateful for all the opportunities you granted me.

Rand, thank you for your guidance, support, expertise, diplomacy and artistry. Thank you for the necessary reality checks deposited in my sometimes idealistic, sometimes delusional account. But most of all, thank you for being so good at nurturing my creativity, in the best way possible. I’m very thankful that you embarked in this half-decade long journey with me, trusting me all the way through it.

Roger, I wish I could say I’m sorry for how I behaved in your analysis class in my first year at UCSD. I was very antagonistic to your approach and very vocal against it. But I can’t say I’m sorry, because... I’m not. It was only because of this adversity that I could actually understand how admirable you are. I always thought that the grandiosity of a person is not seen when the circumstances are favorable, pretty or fresh; the grandiosity of a person is truly seen when they’re moving through unexpected adversities. I’m very thankful for your mentorship, for your relentless support, for always being there for me, for stablishing a rigorous, nurturing, safe and creative pedagogical environment in which I could thrive. I will bring with me, forever, your example of relentlessness and uncompromising commitment to music and pedagogy.

Thanks to Kyle Blair, Michael Matsuno, Bob Zelickman, Lauren Jones, Michael Jones, Hilary Young, Shayla James, Kiyoe Wellington, Wilfrido Terrazas, Judith Hamann and so many more for performing my music!

Thanks Teresa, Ilana, Mari, Madison, TJ, Alex, Matt for your artistry and friendship, and for making this night possible. I hope we can make music again soon!

Thanks Jeremy for your expertise and support tonight!

And thanks Luke, for being mountain when I was storm. (also, thanks for hosting a party for me!)

Everyone is invited! Post-concert party at 8322 Via Sonoma, apartment 75.

Too Big For The Door

Matthew Kline, double bass

Through

I. Watching

Alexander Ishov, flute

II. About Beauty

Teresa Díaz de Cossio, flute

Emptying the Body

Tyler J. Borden, violoncello

Impermanence

I. Mestiça

Mari Kawamura

II. Uprooted

III. Permanent Alien (and native friends)

Alexander Ishov (flute), Madison Greenstone (clarinet) Ilana Waniuk (violin), T.J. Borden (violoncello), Mari Kawamura (piano), Matt LeVeque(percussion)

Too Big For The Door

I had a nightmare about a giant wood creature who was stuck inside an empty room and was desperately trying to leave it. However, the door was too small and the creature wouldn't fit in. It decided to hit its body against the walls in a desperate dance to break itself into pieces so it could be small enough to go through the door and escape. This piece was written in collaboration with bassist Matthew Kline.

Emptying the Body

This piece is related to my research about the manipulation of time and the relationship between movement, corporeality, abstract and concrete gestures. The idea of giving the cello the power of reaction and “decision” (instead of being solely the object manipulated by the performer) was in my mind, and many of the performer's activity is a response to the cello's reaction. The idea of emptying the body was, somehow, related to the struggle of trying to find something inside or beyond the body, that could not be observed by its exterior, by its completeness, but only by cutting it, analyzing the fragments, emptying its content and trying to rebuild it departing from this experience.

Through

Ine Vanoveren had a project for a concert in which she would play all solo flute music written by Brian Ferneyhough. She then commissioned me a work to serve as a companion piece to Ferneyhough's flute music and gave me some sort of prompt (to “reflect” or “interpret” his music in some way). My first instinct was to ignore the prompt. I felt both honored and intimidated, excited and conflicted. Her prompt made me think about what it means to create a work that “reflects” the music of a canonized, respectable and influential composer. What does it mean to write a “companion” piece? Is it just a “filling” in the program? Is this commission a reflection of her thoughts on aesthetic similarities between Ferneyhough and I? If so, should I feel flattered that she is drawing such a connection, or should I be offended because she assumed I am some sort of derivative of a renowned composer? My reaction was to rebel against the prompt and to not compromise. I did not want to be stuck, so I decided to neither reflect or inflect the prompt.

I decided that my motivation would be to study Ine's relationship with the flute, which opened an entire world of possibilities to deal with virtuosity, corporeality, interpretations of femininity, vanity, insecurity, bravery, playing from the guts...

I. Watching

This piece is composed by fragments of 4 songs: *I'll Be Seeing You*, *Every Breath You Take*, *About Beauty*, and the *Internationale*.

Fragments of memory and surveillance:

- During the dictatorship in Brazil, the newspapers would publish a cake recipe in the front page, as a replacement of a headline or image that was disapproved and vetoed by the military government.
- Many artists in Brazil encrypted their voices, singing about a lost love using a romantic cheesy song as a metaphor for the freedom they had lost. They sang upbeat samba about the physical exhaustion of a dancer during Carnival as a metaphor for the physical violence against those who were persecuted by the government.
- In the year I was born, the best-selling single in the US was a pop song about stalking. And perhaps love. The Police, *Every Breath You Take*.
- In 1938, Sammy Fain and Irving Kahal composed I'll be seeing you, a jazz standard that became an anthem for Americans serving overseas during World War II.
- There is such a thing as a socialist anthem. Is there a capitalist anthem?

II. About Beauty

The fact that music is not and could never be a language, combined with the

(perhaps naive) desire of “communicating” and creating meaning through music, and with the

(perhaps futile) necessity of creating semi-reliable, seductive, solitary and semi-rational structures of abstractions,

led me to the attempt of composing a piece that could be

a reconstructed version of a language that was never spoken, never read, never written, but only felt (do we “feel” language?)

I resent language for being a perverse, flawed and insufficient tool to produce meaning;

I resent music for being so incomplete and yet so self-sufficient.

Impermanence

I. Mestiça

As a child growing up in Brazil, it took me a while to fully understand why people would call me and categorize me as “Mestiça”. As time passed, I understood not only the semantics of the term, but also its social implications: I wasn't considered Brazilian enough nor Japanese enough, even though I was born and raised in Brazil. The Japanese have a similar term, “hafu”, adapted from English: half. This idea of being “half”, too Brazilian for the Asians and too Asian for the Brazilians, permeated my perception of belonging: neither from here, nor from there. I was 6 years old when I heard one of the most remarkable questions of my life. A girl my age asked me: “do you see the way I do, or do you see everything like this?” [she put both index fingers at the outer corner of her eyelids and pulled them outwards, showing me how my eyes looked like to her eyes]. I stood at the same spot for a long time after she laughed at me and ran away to play with the other kids. I remember listening to my knees squeaking, tired of supporting my stillness, of waiting for my brain to satisfactorily answer that question. It never occurred to me, until that very moment, that people would see the world differently; I had no way to prove to her how I see and I had no way to see with her eyes. I asked my mom: “do people see the world the same way? do I see the world like this?” [I pulled my eyelids and saw a distorted mom]. Her almond shaped eyes dropped a tear and no answer came out of her mouth. It was also around that age when I first learned a piece that used only the black keys of the piano (“The Rickshaw Man”, a rather stereotypical “oriental” pentatonic piece for children, composed by a white man who probably didn't see the borderline racist nature of his work). Mestiça combines simple fingering patterns used in children's piano music, interleaved with the difference, clash and mutual assimilation of the “black keys” and the “white keys” of the piano.

II. Uprooted

The main inspiration for Uprooted was the feeling of not belonging: not belonging to the place of departure (a home country, for example) and not fully belonging to the place of arrival either. Another important component is the idea of journey and impermanency → the joy and angst caused by this “to-from” trajectory. This piece is intended to sound as if sound waves were adrift, uprooted, as if lost in oceanic waves, sometimes calm, sometimes violent. I wanted to explore and elicit the delicate physicality of microtonal beating patterns, to highlight the friction and richness of contrasting notes working together. Uprooted was conceived as a semi-improvised structure in order to increase gestural flexibility, to facilitate simultaneity of different rhythmic patterns that don't share the same beat or the same metronome marks, and to use sonic (but non-verbal) communication between the performers. Every iteration of this movement should sound slightly different. Although there is a lot of room for improvisation, there are components that should be followed strictly: the instruments used; the duration of each section; the physical trajectory of the performers in the hall; the overall sonic environment. Movement is one of the most important aspects of this piece. I wanted to make visual the idea of sound in movement, and make sonic the idea of bodies in movement.

III. Permanent alien (and native friends)

It's been eight years since I became an alien. In 2011, when I moved to the United States, I learned that I was an alien – more specifically, a resident alien for taxes purposes (that's how foreigners who pay taxes in the US are identified). I tried to take the breaking news with lightness – which isn't my strongest characteristic. Although I felt alienated by bureaucratic processes, my American friends and most of my American colleagues made me feel welcomed. We learned about idiosyncrasies regarding our cultural backgrounds, we learned how to overwrite harmful stereotypes, we learned about similarities and differences between our countries and we learned how the idea of “the other” was more of a construct than a reality. However, I never got over the fact that I had to sonically “deface” my name in order to make my name understood in the US. When I said my name with my Brazilian accent, people would never get it.

So, I started saying “it's Fer-nan-da, like the ABBA song (but the feminine version)”. Those who did not know the song would keep looking at me with a blank face, those who knew the song would usually laugh. Latinx knew exactly what I was talking about, regardless of their awareness of that pop tune.

My grandfather was a Fernando. My progenitor is a Fernando. And as praxis in Brazil, the oldest son of a couple should carry on the tradition and perpetuate the all-so-often violent patriarchy. But oops... it's a girl!