

Maria De Las Mercede Gómez

## **Creaverbu**

The Swex-Mex connection: thoughts about music,  
life, harp, guts and creativity versus bureaucracy

## **BLOG SUMMARY**

### **“CREAVERBU”**

#### **The Swex-Mex connection: thoughts about music, life, harp, guts and creativity versus bureaucracy**

My blog was built shyly at the beginning, wondering how much I could say and what I would write about, so I instinctively chose topics that share an emphasis on creativity in general and musical composition in particular – from the perspective of the player, and with one focus on collaboration. In the Mexican experience these achievements happen slowly, with plenty of obstacles and in stark conflict with bureaucracy. That is why I chose this title. I add a quotation that I intend to keep in mind as a warning example.

“In the life of the typical bureaucrat hardly a day goes by in which he does not repeat many times the sentence “I am not competent to deal with this matter”...”

**THE HOMELESS MIND, modernization and consciousness,  
by Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner**

The process of writing this blog as part of my master program has been enriching and wonderful in several ways, and I am deeply grateful for the open minds at KMH regarding ways to teach and collaborate.

At this point in life, working for my master degree after more than twenty years of professional life as a harpist and teacher, somewhat surprised and thrilled, I welcomed the suggestion to write a blog as part of my program. It has indeed opened my eyes as for possible ways to use new tools of communication while teaching, and surprised me nicely in connecting thoughts and sharpening them while playing and learning.

One of the very pleasant surprises about writing these posts are the more than seven thousand visits so far to this blog during these past months of life, with a huge amount of useful educational feedback from colleagues and students at schools such as UC (California, USA), Manhattan School of Music (NY, USA), Julliard (NY, USA), Stanford University (USA) and Universidad Simón Bolívar (Venezuela).

Many other composers and harpists following the process from various countries have contributed with their feedbacks, making me learn new aspects of music making while thinking and writing. This all has made my conviction stronger regarding what I

have felt while working in Mexico, where I usually do not have this kind of optimal feedback. I can say now, while finishing the process, that the blog was an excellent glue to put together this collage of initial ideas that further on landed in a very enriching introspective experience of my own music making connected to others sharing similar interests.

To write is a fascinating activity that knits brain wires, body and spirit together in a mystical-almost-magical way. Together with the verbs to play and to learn, it is one of my favorite motors. The connection between thinking, experiencing and writing these months, has slowly merged the general results of my musical work in a deeper way. Therefore, my conclusions have been underlined within this process with various topics and elements that include the great need everywhere for more and better musical education, and an urgent call for collaboration to support new music.

Looking at the feedback from the blog readers, I see that there is a general world wide need for more work in musical education to provide students with new and fresh approaches and a different focus in their learning. In my case, the discovery of the blog tool and the attention to other disciplines, have helped me while teaching harp and music in connection with art in various presentations.

With the experience of the combination of tasks included in this blog coaching composers, learning new pieces and performing them, I am surprised by some of the findings along the way. I am more convinced now that these ideas will open doors in my country. I want to teach my students in Mexico in a more precise way and intend to share parts of this experience with all kinds of audiences. Mexico has such tremendous needs to improve these aspects, in the middle of its constant battle for better and more education, against bureaucracy, injustice, corruption, violence and poverty.

Thanks to this writing process concerned with musical thinking and the preparations for the performance of the final pieces, I have connected my roles as artist and teacher in a more acute way. My thoughts have received a sharper definition thanks to the different tasks of the master program.

With the blog tool – besides strengthening the creative process and the discipline at transmitting my own ideas on the web – I have reached much more readers than a printed thesis would likely get. The short format of posts has been accepted by all sorts of readers, not only musicians. The rhythm of the short articles with a variety of topics, all around creativity, seems to be quite attractive to younger readers and has turned out to favorably surprise professional colleagues from more established generations.

I had not expected these reactions from such a multitude of readers, while at the same time it's been such a joy for me to learn so much throughout the process of giving form to these thoughts. As an artist I have learned that being open to new knowledge – at any stage in life – and to be ready to use new tools improves one's versatility and creativity.

I chose creativity and collaboration between players and composers as a main topic since this is one of the aspects I enjoy the most about my professional work. To me it's a privilege to work with composers and to be part of their process as a coach, helping them to discover what works best for my instrument, to bolster their talent with

full respect for whatever language and aesthetics they choose. I feel this is my responsibility as a player: to connect with composers of my time, and to present their work to different kinds of audiences.

The blog has texts about:

- 1- Mexican composers writing for harp **in** the orchestra.
- 2- Mexican composers writing for solo harp **with** orchestra.
- 3- A piece for solo harp written by a young Mexican (world premiere in my first recital exam in Stockholm).
- 4- Comments about an early orchestra piece by Anton Webern as an example of idiomatic issues that could show young composers some of the challenges of writing for harp.
- 5- Thoughts from my readings of neuroscience articles with an interest to use this information as a music teacher.
- 6- Research into 'silence and sound'.
- 7- Thoughts about a Mexican girl composer from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.
- 8- Composers and poets talking about each other.

My blog also includes comments to the vast literature of orchestra excerpts, and an argument for open doors to other disciplines, underlining the importance of input from other artistic languages and forms of expression that artists need while conducting our daily life in music.

Parallel to my blog writing, and the exchange with five young composers in Stockholm I have been preparing a recital introducing Mexican music to a Swedish audience. It will contain repertoire pieces from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, my own arrangements of folk music exemplifying the strong relation between music and social life in general, especially in indigenous communities, and original new harp music written under collaboration with Mexican composers, music that I have premiered and recorded. It was interesting to choose material that may convey an idea of the many eclectic cultural manifestations of my homeland. This is one part of the process of shaping my ideas while writing about these young Swedish composers, since the contrast with the Mexican material has brightened both programs due to the tools required in order to play such different material: music that is tonal or non tonal, rhythmically free or strict, long or short, intellectual or utilitarian, constructivist or intuitive, very old or extremely new. Only now do I realize how enlightening the preparation of both programs has been, all thanks to the time between the spaces between the tasks performed while writing the blog and playing-learning the music. It seems as if the phrasing in writing and in the music itself thrived on the natural pace that my brain gave them in the process. I guess I had never given so much time before to my own musical thoughts and my interest in creativity as a fundamental part of artistry.

Prominently the blog contains some of the correspondence with the young Swedish composers as they were writing the pieces for me.

Here is some of what I have learnt from them. Their pieces are for solo harp, harp duo and harp with electronics. I have also written about their process, always trying to be careful with possible creative triggering while learning from each individual style of composition, ideas, communication relating it all to my playing and my ideas.

The step by step collaboration with these Swedish young composers Maria Horn, Mira-Linda Håkansson, Thommy Wahlström, Leo Correia de Verdier and Joel Engstrom has given me new aspects of my playing while learning their pieces.

**IN THE CENTER OF AN EYE, 4 EPISODES FOR HARP** by **Maria Horn** has reinforced my experience in improvisation, a skill that was not taught when I was a student at the Mexico City Conservatory. I have picked this up gradually and in a sort of accidental way, from Mexican folk traditions and whenever professional work asked me to do so with a new score on the stand. Maria's new way of presenting a framework for improvisation, together with her chosen poetry, actually embraces the main topic of the blog – creativity – in a very personal way. It underlines the inner aspect of both the verses of Octavio Paz after which she conceived her piece and my musical translation and my approach to Maria's suggestions for improvisation. The relationship on stage where she performs at the computer has triggered a special interest in me about new concepts of sound to which I must react *in situ*, a situation that challenges my concentration while playing. Some resemblance to a theater performance should be present along with the musical aspects of the piece.

**14 SKISSER TILL EVIGHETMASKINER for 2 harps**, by **Leo Correia de Verdier** to be performed with Stina Hallberg – a harp student majoring in jazz at KMH. It has been an interesting challenge and I have learnt to work in new and different ways, with a prepared instrument – with rather alien objects applied on the strings, such as paper and plastic slips, clips, erasers, etc. This has confirmed what I always remind my own students of, that it is possible to play difficult scores that look completely different from the usual repertoire. Some ideas of the neuroscience texts that I read while writing the blog have been close at hand while trying to coordinate the different patterns in this piece full of non conventional harp sounds and skill combinations that Leo chose. I have also learnt to analyze a score in a deeper way, not only from the individual harp part but for the musical entirety, in this case for the two harps and their interaction, always trying to make useful recommendations regarding the idiomatic aspects without compromising his musical ideas. The intricate rhythms of his piece have been an intense but joyful challenge which I want to share with the audience.

**FROST** by **Mira-Linda Håkansson** is written mostly for the uppermost register of the harp which poses considerable physical/anatomic reading and playing difficulties. This choice of the high register for an entire piece was new to me, and has taught me new skills of focusing on how to overcome physical difficulties while musical expression still is the main concern. I have also learnt to tie musical ideas together within a landscape of vast and completely free tempo, in which poetical ideas have the main weight. It has been a joy to discover a young composer that has the same interest in other creative people as I have. This feeling has enhanced my interest in the topic of creativity and even makes me enjoy the learning aspects of my work still more.

**2011 INVENTION FOR HARP AND EA # 3** by **Thommy Wahlström** offers technical challenges from which I have learnt to be creative about fingerings, changes of register and to keeping an inner beat that should match with the EA, played live by Thommy himself at the concert. I have had to use a lot of imagination to picture what rehearsals and the final concert will be like with the EA part. This has made me

realize the importance of preparation for the entire situation on stage, as an emotional process that can also be “rehearsed” in my own mind, reinforced by what I have experienced by the side of theater people at work.

**LUNA STICIA for two harps by Joel Engström**, also played with Stina Hellberg, is a very clear score with two well balanced harp parts from which I have learnt better ways to improve precision in relation to the other instrument. It has renewed my awareness of the importance of precision with the percussive attack of the harp – especially difficult with two harps – in this case particularly in the slow tempo of the final section. I have learnt to focus on the sharpness of attacks in the fast section of his piece, when the rhythmical challenges demand constant preparation to overcome the difficulties, and a very solid working relation to a metronome and a good deal of patience.

Again the common interest that artists share regarding themes of creativity has enriched the general process of writing while learning, learning while studying the scores, thinking while playing, imagining while performing, preparing while thinking, and fantasizing about the best way to communicate this all. At this point in my life, in this mixed role of coaching while learning has focused me more on both the way I play and the way I conceive my own teaching.

The idea of a concert with the five new pieces is to me a perfect and meaningful way to conclude my master program, together with this entire process of writing and preparing new music while contemplating my artistic role and the future.

The contact with these five young creative Swedish composers has confirmed how much an older experienced musician can learn from fresh young brains still madly passionate about their art, creative music making. Some established musicians tend to forget this. It’s the kind of lesson I would like every day for the rest of my musical life.

*Tack så mycket, igen och igen!*

\*

From **THE BRAIN THAT CHANGES ITSELF, Stories of Personal Triumph** by **Norman Doidge, M.D.**

“In the course of my travels I met a scientist who enabled people who had been blind since birth to begin to see, another who enabled the deaf to hear: I spoke with people who had had strokes decades before and had been declared incurable, who were helped to recover with neuroplastic treatments: I met people whose learning disorders were cured and whose IQs were raised: I saw evidence that it is possible for eighty-year-olds to sharpen their memories to function the way they did when they were fifty-five. I saw people rewire their brains with their thoughts, to cure previously incurable obsessions and traumas. I spoke with Nobel laureates who were hotly debating how we must re-think our model of the brain now that we know it is ever changing.”

Drawings: my three youngest Mexican students: Alondra Mainez, Aline Romero and Astrid Aguilera,  
CONSERVATORIO NACIONAL DE MÚSICA, México.  
¡Muchas gracias, preciosas chamacas!