

Tato Taborda:

Chico Mello¹

I first met Chico Mello in 1979 in São João Del Rey, during one of the Brazilian editions of the Cursos Latinoamericanos de Música Contemporânea. My first remembrance is of Chico playing Bossanova in a pub after class. In spite of this serious young man's dressing style (at that time Dr. Chico was finishing his medical education), he played and sang the classics of Jobim and Noel with an enjoyment and humor that were as light-hearted as they were refined. Our immediate empathy has extended and deepened over the time, stuffed with bright and long conversations, delicious improvisational sessions (which we call "ragas") and multiple meetings, almost always in different cities, following the trail of the very Brazilian German teacher and composer H. J. Koellreutter, whom we also pursue throughout Brazil.

According to the Uruguayan composer Coriún Aharonián, the course coordinator, that was the opening ceremony of the Curitiba's School (which, unlike other much prolific, has only two members). From here, in the privileged perspective that only one half of a school contemplating the other gives, I saw Chico travel far and dive deep into this adventure of creating and unraveling meanings with sound, silence and gesture. Even more fascinating for me has been to see the development of the existential questions of Chico's life, crossed by the tissue of his art in such a fluid and natural way, digested and transmuted by this "decomposer" – an organism which blends a childish sense of curiosity and expands the boundaries of grown-up disquietudes. The Bossanovas, for example, have been disarticulated at the atomic level, recombined with other molecules, impregnated with silences, assigned new meanings each time they cross, in a delightfully irresponsible way, the border between tone and noise, arbitrariness and chance, sound and gesture, affects and reason.

Chico's departure to Berlin in 1987 in search of another master, Dieter Schnebel, generated a spiral of effects on his work. Firstly, because of the fertile ground and precise interlocutors that received his delicate seeds, and secondly, due to the radically cosmopolite and supranational city that was to cultivate an identity bound to endure detachment. In the first years, Chico's bread and butter came from playing Música Popular Brasileira in clubs. From that experience he was to take away most of the binding material in his future work — like strips cut at random from a melodic line of a song, a syncopé, a weak beat of the marker bass drum (surdo), a matchbox samba, a shrilly timbre of a funeral chant (incelença) from Cariri, a pause (of a thousand bars), a snore of cuíca, a break of samba or an airy accordion phrase. These particles, decontextualized but respected in their own soul and material nature, transformed themselves into mobile pieces of lively and meticulous games that were radically distant from a

¹ Text appeared in the booklet of the three CDs "Chico Mello, 20 anos entre janelas. música experimental de 1987 a 2007".

nationalistic approach (which would not resist subjugation to “high culture” filtering and would dissolve these particles into a viscous and vain broth), bringing to maximum power the signs carried by each one.

From Cage (via Schnebel) Chico inherited the silent and disciplined respect for the method – always new for each piece – as different for different purposes the tools shall be. All of this was done with a sense of humor – this category of high intelligence – as fine and light as 30 years ago in that samba circle at the pub from Minas. The multiculturalism of Berlin’s music scene and the feeling of deterritorialization generated by a life divided between Brazil and Germany resulted in nourishment. In the case of Chico’s work, a concern with relation to the other and specifically the other’s culture arose not through appropriation or digestion but through dialog. In pieces that promote this transcultural dialog like *Upitu*, *Todo Canto*, *Cocar*, *Hui Liu* and *da minha janela*, nothing ceases to be what it is and, at the same time, through processes of fragmentation, edition, superposition and even, as he says, “self-ethnology”, travel far from their original place of inception and send us to another floor, where the codes pulverize themselves and all conversations are possible, even between “the others” from outside and “the us” from within.

By listening to Chico’s original and subtle work, one realizes that besides the effect of restoring our faith in the power of musical composition as a game of make-believe where everything is allowed, this work also makes clear that music, before being sound organization, is foremost the organization of thought, which can even express itself in sounds. The resulting and paradoxically free, yet strictly structured, music from Chico plays inside us a very delicate string and, above all, does not fear the vertigo of approaching a borderline which separates the logic of art from the non-logic of what surrounds us - that which insists on continuing to exist above and beyond our desire for control.

Rio de Janeiro, March 2011