

PAULINE OLIVEROS INTERVIEWS ANTONIO ZEPEDA

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PO: Antonio, what is the most interesting thing for you in your work right now?

AZ: Well, right now the most interesting thing or maybe the most important thing is to keep the religiosity.

PO: The religiosity.

AZ: Yes, because many times one can get so professional that one loses that aspect that for me is capital because in working with ritual instruments if I don't have that quality then I don't have anything almost.

PO: What do you think that is, this religiosity or spirituality?

AZ: Well, it is actually directing the forces towards those, if you want to call them supernatural worlds, also supernatural forces, that gravitate around us and inside of us. If I start playing like many musicians or artists in general only because of the playing self, only because of the color itself or the word itself, then it would be incredibly incomplete because I wouldn't be fulfilling that part of the work that allows me to come to reach this state. This means I kind of realize myself through these sounds, was a very good help to know that many times the work goes beyond one's self as a developing factor. Then one has the opportunity of learning about one's self through the work because there is an objective and graphical reflection of the personal life. For example, I could say that the first time I felt completely free, in other words I received the visits of freedom, was about 6 years ago I was and I could see that the surface of the drum became a kind of mirror where my life was reflecting my hands was like the me, the inside of myself, the person moving through this surface that was my life. I saw how they could move sort of in spite of myself and they could go in many directions and they could make any movement, and that everything was so perfect in those moments

you could say that even mistake didn't exist because it was only a point of reference, a mistake didn't exist because you were not forcing anything, you were moving the hands, or the hands were moving themselves according to the natural laws. This means when you accept that you are part of nature and nature itself expressing itself, then everything goes as it should go and everything works by itself. This is a point when one forgets about one's self, because while you are still here as a person thinking and you as a person then of course you don't have the opportunity of reaching other levels because you don't stop being you. When one disappears in a way is when one becomes the essence of the work; this is the essence of sound is expressing through you that are just of medium for that. Then this a realization that can be lost, an achievement that can be lost, and if one goes too much into socialist thought, into professional playing at the professional level, or one believes that one is already there and there is nothing to worry about because one is in a sort of state of grace, then one can lose very easily all this achievement. That translates itself into a sort of enchantment that baits oneself and that produces a kind of luminous life that emerges from the interior and that is what in the end allows the essence of sound to become real and to make it real for the people that are there in front of you, and for you as a person that believes in that light.

PO: In the beginning when I asked you the question, you said that the main thing for you was to keep this religiosity. What threatens it?

AZ: Well, it threatens my mundanity (to be mundane, yes). It is not really that I am afraid of a mundane world because I know that it's a very, very important part of myself. I am like a half sacred and half mundane, and even in the mundaneness I can find also the sacred. But sometimes one can achieve one level ^{or} /one can manipulate the elements and the factors so well that in a certain

moment you don't need to, supposedly you are the same even if you don't do it. You can still play, for example, or you can still think in the sacred forces and still to play incredibly and to be very luminous and enchanted. But this only lasts for a certain period because ^{if} you keep yourself in these self-forgetful attitudes, because it is what one is doing. One is so much into the pleasing of oneself in world terms that one visits less and less the interior until a point that the interior is there forgotten in a corner, and one loses literally the powers that gives you the art and that give those achievements, those personal interior achievements. And then there is, these all mean to worry and that frightens, because then you become to the foremost step, that is the step before freedom, and that frightens me very much; to become again a not free person is a horrible state. Because when you are free you do not have worry practically about anything because everything comes at it should be because all the time internally you are working for it to be, but without almost thinking, just being there in that beautiful state of kind of floating there without problems, disappointments, there are no problems. Of course physical and temporary problems, yes, but nothing personally looking it's so great that even this grace can be a very, very useful factor because as once I remember I was so sad that I started to try to be, well, I knew that that was a moment so full for me that I became tragedy in person there. And I was so sad, I suffered so much that when I noticed it that I had such a capacity to suffer, then I became so happy of having been able to feel so much that that became a fantastic victory, a beautiful state. Something else came, ^{came also} something great else/from these, what you could say, negative factors of suffering.

PO: You talk about the state of religiosity or the process of religiosity. When did you become aware of that?

AZ: Aware? Living in the mountains in Sweden about 10 years ago when in a night of storm through the house was dark--I was living in the upper part of a mountain in the forest. And in a very, very small village, almost not a village, simply some houses in the middle of Sweden. And through the window the light was coming in, the night light, and I saw that my body, because of this light, was divided in two--one side was luminous and the other side was dark. And I saw that my hands were also one dark and one luminous. And I saw that they were in, one was with the palm towards me and the other was with the back towards me, and so they were opposite. But when I put them together I saw that they were the same, and in that moment when the two sides became the same, the dark and the luminous, then I started to go into a series of mental transitions that ended with the words, with the answers if you want to say that came out through my mouth almost in spite of myself. They were like voices that materialized in my mouth, voices saying values that for me were revelations in that moment. And that was my first mystical experience. I realized that I was living that mystical experience. Of course, it was something of many hours and looking for a position for my body and millions of things. But it was the first conscious moment: the first conscious moment was when in several periods of my life when I was very young I received a kind of notice of this possibility, when for example inbetween sleeping, inbetween awake, beside my bed I saw a shadow that was observing me. In that moment I thought it was observing me. It was a dark shadow, sitting beside the bed, that actually was taking care of me in that moment and it was no other person, it was simply a shadow. I was very worried in that moment with not seeing that it was a help from somewhere, a sign from somewhere. Or also when coming down from my store, being like 9 or something like that, I

saw several sparks in the darkness on the way to my house. They were coming from corners, from dark corners. In that moment I didn't pay any attention at all to these sparks in spite of the extraordinary significance that they had. Imagine you are passing through a corridor and suddenly one of the small pathways there towards your house and in the middle of the darkness you see sparks from nowhere. I just saw them as sparks but that's, they were notice ^{they} of some kind of a sign that/were telling me to prepare myself for achieving all mental planes and achieve by myself to become.

PO: What changes have occurred then in your attitude about making music? From let's say before you had these experiences.

AZ: Very, very important changes because from the moment that I was not any more an obstacle to myself when I was playing, then I thought that I could move the atmosphere exactly as I wanted and that I enter a kind of state ⁱⁿ that allows me to provoke anything I wanted to provoke through sound or to achieve any level I wanted to achieve through sound. And that's how the visions started to come since that moment something that I only saw in dreams before, like colors or patterns or messages, little messages, they come to me now in awake life, in the moment while I was playing. As I told some geometrical shapes that would allow me to see how the amience it was, how good was everything, how a moment was everything, what sort of line, mental line or psychic line I was reaching, or even to reach people through the sounds I would play and I would concentrate myself in a certain person, and then the colors of the state of this person would start to appear and I would be able to do a kind of reading about how this person was in general terms in that moment, which was very, very important for me because it gave me a kind of certainty about life, about me as a principal force, as an executive factor, and also gave me ^{the} certainty of the

existence of other worlds, and of magic itself. This is very important because
know
when you/it, when you see that you can joy, then you seem to be
able to manipulate these so-called natural elements through your hands and you
know that you can affect somebody 3000 miles away for good or for bad. I'd
even for a time, I was mad with someone and I used for that, but it is very
different to be playing for good and to be playing for bad. You hear it even
in the sounds. When you play for good the sound gets so crystalline and
, and even the volume goes higher but instantly, instantly and beauty
bathes the ambience. I remember once when a bolt of luminous white steam, a
kind of steam, was created in between my brain and my hands on the surface of
the drum. In the middle this bolt started to pour out a white substance that
bathed and covered entirely the place where I was playing--this was in the studio--
and it created a, well, such a luminous and fantastic experience that allowed me
to travel unto the place of the impossible, if one can call it that. I felt--I
don't know if there is a better name to describe it or another more scientific
name to say, but this place of the impossible was for me only that a place where
the impossible was happening. The impossible was happening through sound. This
is like you were on such a level that how you were going to resolve that, how
you were going to give the way out to the people and to yourself being in such
a high state, that in that moment I realized that the impossible was happening.
But I didn't worry, simply continued playing, and by itself came the answer and
I finished the playing and everything was so beautiful after, and you get a sort
of enchantment state that sometimes--well, before when I knew so much how to
manage myself it took me several days to come back from that place. I was kind
of gone in the beautiful sense but ready to relate to me as person because I was
not completely here. Now when you play for a while the sound gets kind of dense,

very dense, and life is a sort of implosion. It doesn't go out, it stays there. And it is thick, like a paste of sounds. And mistakes come, you feel that sounds are like not really to play sometimes. Because they are hurting sounds, and these sorts of sounds are the same thing I should say as being hurt. And you don't feel comfortable after, because you know that you have done something really bad. I don't know if this is simply a more realistic attitude. Or I don't know but it is very difficult not to feel bad after you have done something bad.

PO: This very high state that you talk about--is that something that you wish for in your work or something that you allow to happen or is there something that you can say about the difference in reaching that state and not reaching it and yet playing, or is there any way to talk about it?

AV: Before I didn't know and I just allowed anything to happen, anything. Fortunately I have never been afraid of myself, so I have the chance of allowing to go into any real without being afraid because I knew that in spite of anything I was me still. I have always felt myself as a friend, not as an enemy. So I could have all the liberty, I could give myself all the liberty to go anywhere. And I when I started to feel these extraordinary happenings, if anything I felt eager, I felt eager to go farther and farther. So in the beginning I allowed it. When I have it, I--of course I wanted to have it, to have more--I look for it after until a point that when before starting to play I concentrate myself so into focus, going to the deepest part or to the farthest part of myself to a place where things are very, very quiet, soft, there is a nice temperature, there is a sort of pleasant sentiment there like an interior sofa, you want to say, a little aquatic one feels there. This means it is not a static place but has a little bit motion and from this place to wait for the right breathing and with the right breathing when you know is the moment/the silence is there.

The first beat, if it's blown, the first blow. If everything has been right then from the first blow you are not anymore here. You are in those planes. And this allows to the essences to pass through you and allow you to become sounds.

PO: So you become the sound.

AV: You become the sound. You become the sound.

PO: So this is your awareness of your attention. Are you aware of your own attention as distinguished from what it is that you play? You play something but there is also your way of attending to what you play. You say that you become the sound, so is there any way to be aware of the difference between what you are playing and the way of how you are doing it?

AV: No, because when I put attention about how I am doing it I lose the level. I lose the level because I become myself as a person. And this not as an essence. And this makes me come back to this plane. It's only--the key for me is to trust somewhat in nature, and the nature that is in me, that is me, that you allow anything to happen with the absolute faith that anything to happen is perfect only because you are according to the essences of nature like a blend. To just go and move as your faith and as your nature makes you do it, and then you fly. It is a flying state. But, yes, when I notice myself, when I pay attention to myself, then I come down. The attention is, the existence of the work is being what you, what is coming out.

PO: Are you able to transfer this knowledge into other activities in your life besides playing music?

AV: Yes. Do you know for me playing music is only one part. In spite of feeling that I am music, I am also--well, everybody's so many other things. And even working in other crafts, in other arts, helps to descend very, very much. I think that if I wouldn't have been involved in many, many other activities I

wouldn't be as complete a musician. If I would only have make through all my life I would feel that I would be so incomplete. For me just being here with you can have, can be one of these levels, when we speak about these things, can take me to this enchanted place and make me feel more complete, make me enjoy more this life. To see the animals many times I use what is existing around to play it. This is when I play with the eyes open, there is a big difference to play with the eyes open and with the eyes closed. With the eyes closed you are going into the essence of the forces. You see the darkness, the darkness makes out light. Your dark side provokes light. You see the light in the shadow. When you play with the eyes open--well, I prefer to play with the eyes closed because I am so visual that it distracts me very much when I play with the eyes open. But sometimes what I do is I concentrate myself, I put my attention in a certain object. And I start to play the object--or the animals or the plants--what comes out of the person, what comes out from that being is translated into notes through the instruments, through yourself. I can tell you this is real because it is different always. When you play this plant you are going to be absolutely different than when you play the dog. (laughter). It's really a sublime exercise. Sometimes I feel it is so much of a mystic utilitarianism. But it's really good because you really get into things until a point that then you don't become sounds, or you become the sounds but you--else the plants become the sounds, the animal. This is more difficult with persons because person have too many thoughts. A person is going through so many reactions. Animals and plants or stones, landscapes, they have much less thoughts than persons. But what was the question? (laughter)

PO: I asked you if you carried your process over into other parts of your life. The question is are there particular activities that emphasize the process more than others.

AZ: All this matter of living is simply a process for me of making myself more sensitive to everything. I can say that such values as--that I take it for granted or I take it for something that is already in the person who has been born such as intelligence, or sensitivity or intuition--as can be developed. But very, very much--it's not that you have already, well, say one and five of intelligence since the moment that you are born and that's all. If you through the work you make it grow or live--for me that last years, for a long time now, has been making myself more permeable, you want to say, to particularly to beauty. I enjoy very much beauty and tranquility and the happiness, the joy of existing that for me was an old revelation to discover that I could forget completely about all my suicide or self-destruction thoughts, discovering that if there was no other reason to be here, well, the joy of existence was enough to be happy here.

(end of interview)