

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PHONOGRAPHIC-POETIC RECORDING IN URUGUAY

In Uruguay we can find a long tradition of poetic phonographic recordings, the oldest we know of in a chronicle was made in 1901 in a private way, the members of the Montevidean poetic cenacle: El Consistorio del Gay Saber, invited the Argentine poet Leopoldo Lugones (who was sharing a brief stay with them) to record some of his poems on a phonograph cylinder, which was done in the Casa Garesse y Crispo, a well-known business in the capital (1).

The poetic record also formed an early part of the catalogues of commercial phonograph albums available at the time.

The first local record label appeared in Buenos Aires: Royal Record, where, by means of small mobile studios, the musician, singer or reciter performed in front of a large cone (called a horn) that collected the acoustic waves, converting them into vibrations, which were finally transferred by means of a needle to a wax-covered cylinder or plate, printing a spiral groove on it as it rotated at a constant speed thanks to a mechanical motor spring.

These wax cylinders or wax plates were then sent to the head office (Europe or North America) where the quality of the record was checked, after being approved, by means of electrochemical procedures (electroplating) the matrices were manufactured, from which several copies were made and sent back to the country of origin, and if they were finally approved, the industrial pressings were made, both for cylinders (at the beginning they were made of tin and waxed cardboard, then of wax and finally of celluloid) reproduced in phonographs; as well as for the discs (first made of ebonite and finally of gomalac) which were reproduced by gramophones.

Through this complex back-and-forth process, the first Uruguayan poems were recorded. Researching in the DAHR (Discography of American Historical Recordings) database we can find what would be the first phonographic records of our poetry (2).

On 23 July 1906 the Argentine singer, payador and reciter Eugenio López recorded under the description of recitation: "El rumbo" (Victor B-3548) by the Uruguayan poet Elías Regules; the recitation of the poem "Juan Saldau" by the Uruguayan poet Orosmán Moratorio (Victor B-3557) and "Los gauchos" by the Uruguayan poet Conrado Nalé Roxlo (Victor B-3558). On the same day, the Uruguayan reciter, singer and actor Alfredo Eugenio de Gobbi recorded the recitation "La consigna" (Victor E-3551), possibly the first sound recording of a Uruguayan poem in the voice of its author. On 24 July López recorded the text "Sintiendo" by Elías Regules (Victor B-3560) and the recitation of the text "Aparicio Saravia: fragmento del canto" by Conrado Nalé Roxlo, although it is noted that this matrix was destroyed, probably because it did not pass the quality controls. On the same day, the Uruguayan reciter Alfredo Eusebio de Gobbi recorded a recitation of the text "El ranchito" by the Uruguayan poet María Teresa Ledesma de Sáenz (Victor E-3591), although it was also destroyed. On 28 July 1906 Eugenio López recorded a recitative with the text "A Saravia" (Victor B-3636) by Conrado Nalé Roxlo (I presume it was the same text used for the previously destroyed matrix). On 31 July, López records recitations of the texts "Cuento añejo" (Victor B-3662) and "La triste despedida" (B-3663) by the Uruguayan author Alcides de María. On the same day, the Uruguayan Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi records a recitation of his own authorship and with orchestral accompaniment entitled "Los High life" (Victor B-3671). On 1 August 1906, Eugenio López recorded excerpts from Juan Zorrilla de San Martín's "Tabaré" (Victor B-3680). That day, using the pseudonym "Clown Gobbino 76", the Uruguayan Alfredo Eugenio de Gobbi records a recitative of his own with orchestral accompaniment entitled "Qué calor con tanto viento" (Victor B-3689). On 2 August Gobbi again records a recitative accompanied by orchestra with the text "El calotero" (Victor B-3701) by the Uruguayan poet Alcides de María. On 3 August 1906 Eugenio López records the text "¡Patria!" (Victor B-3724) by Conrado Nalé Roxlo. On 4 August 1906 Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi recites with guitar accompaniment his text "Artigas" (Victor B-3728) and using the pseudonym Señor A.G. Campo records the guitar-accompanied recitation "El viaje" (Victor C-3731) by Elías Regules.

From 21 December 1907 onwards, the Victor house set up a record factory in the city of Buenos Aires, which implied a greater dynamic for the recording process, and the Uruguayans

Gobbi and Nava would soon record their own texts and those of other national poets in the brand new studios. On 27 December 1907 Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi recorded several recitals. First a recitative with comic singing accompanied by orchestra: "El aire de mujer" (Victor F-39), then a comic monologue accompanied by orchestra: "El mozo guapo" (Victor F-41), also another comic monologue with orchestral accompaniment: "Aronga, mamita aronga" (Victor F-42) and with the same format he would record "Mejor es ser soltero" (Victor F-43). On 28 December 1907, the Uruguayan poet, reciter and singer Arturo de Nava put voice and music to a text of his own "El carretero" (Victor F-56) which combines song and recitation in the same song. The last day of 1907 also featured a pair of recordings by Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi with the Argentinian Ángel Gregorio Villodo, two comic dialogues with orchestral accompaniment, "Bochinche en un inquilinato" (Victor F-79) and "Bochinche en un inquilinato" (Victor F-79). (Victor F-79) and "Entre motorman y compadre" (Victor F-83).

In Uruguay we have to wait until 1938, when the businessman Enrique José Abal Salvo inaugurates the first national record label called at that time "Son d'Or" (later Sondor), which during the first years would only make recordings directly to private individuals. In 1941 he began to release foreign industrial reproductions, and in 1944 he began to produce commercial productions of Uruguayan artists.

Also in 1938, the first North American Webster wire recorders arrived in the country, mainly used in radio stations, so it is in this way that a parallel record to the commercial one began to take shape, which must also be taken into account in the history of recording.

Ten years later, the American company Ampex revolutionised the market with its model 200 open reel tape recorder, which became very popular. The cheapening of these systems would allow our artists to participate directly in the experimentation of the sound field, as they would no longer have to hire a recording studio, but could work from their own homes or studios.

The most paradigmatic example of this selection is the recording made by Amanda Berenguer at her home in the winter of 1970. The author wrote: "I was sitting in front of the recorder (...) I came up with these unrepeatably "dictions"" (3).

The recorder used was the classic Philips EL-3534, which allowed stereo recording and, according to the record of the album finally released, used a Philips EL-3757/00 microphone and Philips EL 3915DP tape (Ø 18 cm).

This tape was mastered at Sondor Studios in December 1970. The cutting and processing for vinyl was also done at Sondor, but only in May 1973. Finally the single record was released on the Ayuí label, for: Bolsidiscos Ayuí - Serie la palabra - Monophonic - AD/10.

These "unrepeatably" improvisations were possible thanks to the fact that the author had a good quality commercial recorder at home, then the material was processed and edited by a commercial label.

The recordings made by Conrado Silva or the Accame brothers were probably also edited in private studios. This is an important advance, the commercialisation and accessibility of new technologies will allow incipient sound artists to explore and develop increasingly complex works in this field.

The digital technology that began to become popular in the nineties, and from 1994 onwards the commercialisation of the Internet by the State, allowed for the improvement of independent production and distribution. Uruguayan sound poetry, which had limited spaces for its dissemination, suddenly acquires, thanks to the Internet, the possibility of being shown in the Global Village. The development of streaming as a tool for storage and diffusion has improved widely, allowing to improve the volume and quality of what is exhibited.

CONTEMPORARY SOUND POETRY (*) IN URUGUAY

The poetic-vocal experimentations of the mid-twentieth century were preceded by the scarce echoes barely reverberated from the historical avant-gardes; the fleeting and brilliant presence of a single show by Marinetti in Montevideo in 1926 (4), was not enough to set an example. Moreover,

we do not find that his scarce discography was disseminated in our country at the time, so as to influence local artists to approach this kind of new approaches.

Thus, the interest in contemporary poetic sound experimentation in our milieu must be traced through the promotion of two new, almost parallel paths.

The first appears thanks to the development of concrete music, which under the impulse of the French composer Pierre Schaeffer and his research in the late forties in the study of sound, made it possible to understand sound as a decontextualised object and that, fixed on a support (recording), it would allow its manipulation. Although Schaeffer had begun this work at the end of the 1920s, it was thanks to the development of recording technology in the 1950s that *musique concrète* took off and managed to develop throughout the world.

In our country, in 1961, the young composer Luis Campodónico premiered his work "Misterio del hombre solo" (5) in the Auditorio del SODRE, being the first national work that integrates acoustic instruments, performance, recitation and recorded or amplified electro-acoustic resources.

In 1966, the Núcleo de Música Nueva de Montevideo (NMN) was created, bringing together contemporary music composers inspired by avant-garde trends. In the selection made, we see several names linked to concretist experimentation: Campodónico, Tosar, Silva, Pellegrino and Maggiolo. We should also remember that in 1980 the NMN organised the recital "No two without three" given by W. Rosemberg on Dadaist texts, including the South American premiere of Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*, a show that the NMN reprised in 1986, under the title "Jaque a Dadá" (Check Dada).

The other source from which he draws directly from the new currents of European experimental poetry.

The mythical publication directed by Henri Chopin, the great referent and founder of the contemporary Sound Poetry movement, called: *Revue OU*, began to occasionally include in it, from 1964 onwards, flexidiscs, in which he made known the innovative sound-experimental works of the northern hemisphere: Bernard Heidsieck, François Dufrêne, Bob Cobbing, Brion Gysin, Sten Hanson, Gil J Wolman or Henri Chopin himself, among others. Assembly techniques, cut up, superimpositions and distortion effects were part of the novel techniques applied to the human voice.

The exchange between South American and European experimental magazines made it possible to establish "networks" by means of postal exchange, in which the novelties of the new trends were shared.

The Argentinian Edgardo Antonio Vigo, in order to disseminate these new trends, will mount a travelling exhibition, to which more and more works and new proposals will be added.

Between 18 March and 13 April 1969 he organised the so-called "Expo / Internacional de Novísima Poesía - 69", first at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (Buenos Aires), then between 18 April and 4 May of the same year, at the Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes (La Plata) and finally he took part in the JOPE (*Jornadas de Poesía*) held at the Facultad de Humanidades, Departamento de Letras UNNE (Universidad del Nordeste, Resistencia; Chaco) co-organised with Elena Pelli (Elena Lucca) between 13 and 15 November '69.

The exhibition consisted of three sections, the first dedicated to author's books and experimental magazines, the second (the most numerous) dedicated to visual and object poetry, and a third section dedicated to sound poetry, which included between 15 and 22 works by paradigmatic authors of the genre.

While this was happening in Argentina, in a very interesting framework of regional exchange of information, the first two sections were exhibited in parallel in Uruguay, between 8 and 21 July 1969 at the Galería U in Montevideo, under the auspices of the magazine *Ovum 10* and the supervision of Clemente Padín.

The third section under the title "1ª Audición de Poesía Fónica" (1st Audition of Phonic Poetry) will be staged only in December of that year, first at the Millington Drake Theatre and then

at the 10th Book and Engraving Fair. It would be repeated again in September 1970 at the Millington Drake, as the "2nd Audition of Phonic Poetry", always under the auspices of Ovum 10, Clemente Padín and Juan Daniel Accame.

In January 1972, with the help of the Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler, the sound show crosses the Andes. It is sponsored by the Department of Letters of the University of Chile, and this time the selection, instead of being heard in a hall, is broadcasted by the Radio Universidad Técnica del Estado (CA - 121) under the name of "1ª Audición de Poesía Fónica", with the material originally selected by Edgardo Antonio Vigo and the layout and additions made by Clemente Padín and Juan Daniel Accame.

As we can see, the phenomenon of experimental sound poetry in our country (and in the region) was observed with early interest by local artists, developing almost in parallel with the metropolises. Unfortunately, the convulsive decade of the 1960s, the 1973 coup d'état and the military dictatorship that lasted until 1984 did not provide sufficient space for experimental practices. Censorship, imprisonment or exile led many artists to postpone or abandon the work they were doing. The whole movement that had begun to take shape was suddenly forced to slow down, to camouflage itself, to measure itself within a framework of self-censorship, in order to survive. With the arrival of the generation of the 1980s, the country's inevitable return to the democratic path brought new hope and the idea of resuming the paths that had been cut short in previous years, which would allow us to build a new identity. The new, less prejudiced generations took up again the multidisciplinary (as well as intergenerational) experimentations, bringing about in a few years an updating with the avant-garde practices of the fin-de-siècle.

The 21st century and the hyper-communication that comes with new technologies and information exchange formats will accelerate the process of adjustment to the current world, also helping to overcome the historical cultural centralism, installed by the idea of the country-port, now knowledge is no longer in the hands of a few who dictate which is the architecture of the dominant canon.

Juan Angel Italiano, July 2021
(Automatic translation)

NOTES

- (1) - Pereira Rodríguez, J. (1965). The Lugones-Herrera y Reissig case. Essays (pp 259-261). Montevideo, Uruguay: Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión Social.
- (2) - Italiano, J.A. (2018) The history of the oral setting in Uruguay. Retrieved from: tancampante.blogspot.com/2018/08/08/tancampante-la-historia-de-la-puesta.html.
- (3) - Berenguer, A. (1973) En Dicciones [Simple vinyl]. Montevideo, Uruguay: Ayuí
- (4) - Italiano, J.A. (2020) Marinetti per Montevideo. Retrieved from: juanangelitaliano.bandcamp.com/album/marinetti-per-montevideo
- (5) - Paraskevaídis, G. (1999) The "Mystery of the man alone". Luis Campodónico, composer. (p.100) Montevideo, Uruguay: Tacuabé.

(*). When I speak here of "Sound Poetry", I am not referring to the whole spectrum of poetry that moves within the field of sound support (recorded or not) but I am alluding to all that production of experimentation that is carried out on the spoken word. An artistic current that was born from the hand of the Frenchman Henri Chopin (1922 - 2008) that he called "Poésie Sonore", works that he also called "audiopoems". He is remembered primarily for his work in the field of concrete, visual and sound poetry, and in the 1950s he produced groundbreaking and original work, creating pioneering recordings using old tape recorders, studio technologies and the sounds of the manipulated human voice. His emphasis on sound is a reminder that language comes from both oral traditions and classical literature, from the balancing relationship between order and chaos. To explore and analyse his legacy, I recommend a visit to www.ubu.com/sound/chopin.html.