

## PROFILE: ADINA IZARRA

Adina Izarra is a Venezuelan composer and pianist. Born in Caracas in 1959 she now lives in Guayaquil, Ecuador, where she teaches at the Universidad de las Artes. She has written for a wide range of media, both instrumental and electro-acoustic, and her music has been widely performed, by Latin American artists includ-



Adina Izarra, photo by-Meining Cheung.

ing orchestras in Venezuela and Argentina, and in Australia and Europe. She was a member of the Venezuelan Society for Contemporary Music and of the Executive Committee of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in the 1990s. She founded the LADIM (Digital Music Lab) at the Simón Bolívar University in Caracas and directed it until 2016 when she moved to Ecuador. She has participated in many collective projects between Latin American composers and also with Nordic composers and has written extensively for the flute and the guitar. She regularly plays in Ecuador with Rubén Riera (guitar and theorbo), often creating live visuals for their performances. Her music is published in the USA by LAFI Publishers ([www.lafipublishers.com](http://www.lafipublishers.com)) and in Germany by Certosa Verlag ([www.certosaverlag.de](http://www.certosaverlag.de)) and has been recorded both by Latin American labels and by Bis Records (<https://bis.se/composer/izarra-adina>). Adina completed a PhD in composition at York University (UK) in 1989.

*What are you working on at the moment?*

At the moment I am working on animating paintings, a project that I will submit as my thesis for a Masters on Postproduction in Video. The sound is going to be binaural-electroacoustic (what else is possible in pandemic times?) and the images are two lovely pictures, one from Brueghel and the other from Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez, a Colombian artist whose work is preoccupied with images of flowers. The idea is to animate the images and produce an environment that surrounds them with electronics.

*You have always worked across the 'boundaries' between instrumental and electronic music. How did this start and do you think the boundaries still exist?*

The boundaries are natural to the genre. At the moment I improvise live with electronics. I have a duo with Rubén Riera; he plays early plucked instruments and I expand the sonorities through electronics. I love our improvisations. Of course this is a completely different scenario from staff notation, where one has to make compromises between the characteristics of the instrument and the conventions of making an impeccable score. With the electronics I feel far more free. It is more like a game; staff notation is so serious!

How did I get involved? I studied different ways in which the performer could control the electronics: pedals, sensors, microphones, pitch-trackers. And one day Rubén said, 'Why don't you take care of all the electronics and I simply play the music?' and that is how it started. I ended up learning my own pieces by heart, because I cannot follow the scores and deal with the electronics. Of course some of the scores are incomplete. I change things every time I play. Fun, so much fun!

*Venezuela has a rich musical culture across so many different genres. How easy is it to draw together aspects of these different music traditions and is it something that interests you?*

I think all non-European classical musicians tackle the identity issue at some point of their lives. I did this many years ago, in the 1980s at York University. It comes and goes all the time. It is, as you say, a very rich cultural heritage. I still take from there, now and then. But I also love to take from early music. The noise of pre-classical instruments fascinates me! Because I am Latin American people sometimes seem to expect from me rhythms like in 'I want to live in America', in hemiola fashion, but I have many other interests. With Rubén I love to re-mix the theorbo music of Robert de Visée and John Dowland with electronics, for example. But at the same time I also love the city noises so typical of each location: local vendors announcing their products, or the clang of the bus, or the sounds made by the knife-sharpener.

*For many years you were involved in the ISCM, both as a delegate for Venezuela and as a member of the Executive Committee. Do you think such organisations still have a role to play in our internet-enabled world?*

I am sure it has an impact. I do believe in collectives, and organised collectives are fantastic. The thing is that now we have social media so the exchange is far easier than it was in the 1990s. And some virtual organisations gather more intensity than their more formal predecessors. I have been away from the ISCM for many years; I don't really know how they have developed in the new age of social media and the pandemic. Certainly the fee each country has to pay to belong to the ISCM is way out of context in a world where we can promote our own work in many cases for free. This is especially true in third world countries.

*I am very conscious of how little European audiences get to hear of music from Latin America. How can we change this? Do you think there is anything that one might regard as distinctively different about this music?*

Well, it has to do with performers, conductors and promoters. There are many Latin American composers living and working successfully in Europe. They have more chance to be heard than the ones working in my part of the world, inevitably so because they know the performers and interact with the performing world over there. In the same way many contemporary European composers do not get to be heard in Latin America. It is the same with Latin Americans living in the USA: they get more performances over there than the ones in the south, but some of them are not known south of Mexico.

The issue of what we might call 'typicality' – what audiences expect to hear from a Latin American composer is also important. Living in Ecuador I can be a composer, full stop. I do not have to prove that I

am Latin American . . . If I lived in Europe or the States that becomes kind of necessary. But the same could be said of women's music. There certainly are distinctively different things about our music.

That, I think, was one of the missions of the ISCM, a rather polemical topic discussed many times during the 1990s when I was involved: should the ISCM present the music of the world, or 'the best music' (meaning music from Europe and North America)? But nowadays one can choose to hear everything without panels and juries and fees!