



INTERVIEW from *Horizons Magazine* by Emilio Lovera

Translated and adapted by Federico García

Born in Caracas in 1953, **Eduardo Marturet** has come a long way, a path that many would still be at half the road. His achievements as an orchestra conductor are impressive, and have led him to make out of music a permanent creative activity, because as he himself says, he is a musician above all: conductor, composer, performer, promoter, and, in general, all the range of activities related to this profession, that for him more than an occupation or a trade is an unavoidable passion. We know that he has dedicated part of his time to philanthropy and has been engaged in ecological activities. We see in him a fellow citizen concerned with the national problems, and when confronted with them he seems a qualified speaker.

He has traveled throughout North, Central, and South America, England, Germany, Hungary, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Scandinavia, and Asia, giving in the most important music centers of these countries evident proof of his artistic quality.

We tend to think that musicians live in a galaxy of their own, the conditioning signs of which are harmony and beauty. It should not be believed that this exceptional circumstance is enough to bring them happiness. The life of those men that have left a deep mark in the musical journey of all times was not always pleasant. We can see it by just going slightly through the lives of three great among the greatest: Mozart, “the most sublime”, Brahms, “the most perfect”, and Beethoven, “the closest to man”, according to the definitions of Eduardo Marturet.

Tell us about your career abroad. The fact of having developed an intense activity at international level must be of great personal satisfaction but also must place you in the dilemma of leaving or staying in Venezuela.

I have felt very flattered on every occasion that a foreign orchestra has approached me with a work offer that implies the need to live outside Venezuela. I do not think that exists a tempting enough scenario as to live aside the links that connect me with my people and my country. In any event, at the present time, I am touring abroad, guest conducting, for at least six month of the year and it never feels as if I’m losing touch from my base.

What is your opinion on the problem our country is confronting due to the drain of national talents?

Just as we have learnt to take advantage of the export of our mining wealth, we should understand the need to take advantage of the “export” of our human material and encourage it so that it will not end up in a definite emigration. We are aware of our position as leaders in the whole South American countries with regards to music education and particularly orchestral training. For the last 25 years Venezuela has developed a platform of youth orchestras that has been copied as a model throughout the continent. We are also very proud that so many of these musicians have principal positions in some of the world’s top

orchestras. The work source beyond our national borders constitutes a unique opportunity for intellectual enrichment that, in some way, should revert eventually into our own society. We must not lose sight of the fact that thanks to the technological development, the world is becoming increasingly smaller, and what is important is not so much where do we live, but where do we concentrate our material wealth and our creative energy. However, it is evident that we, Venezuelans, must make a big effort to recover the safety of our economical and living space. Without it, it is very hard to grow and plan a feasible future.

I would like to delve deeper into the role played by artists in our society. How do you see the changes of that role throughout history in comparison to the present?

That is a very interesting subject since the role of the artist has shown big changes. There were times in which they played a role as sad as that of the buffoons of the royalty, others were luckier and ended up being the pampered intellects of the powerful ones; others were burnt as witches; and, in some truly spectacular moments, some have been real revolutionary heroes, such as Beethoven.

Nowadays, art is more than ever a mass consumption product. From the holographic reproduction of the Mona Lisa in \$3 key rings, passing through a Spielberg's movie, to the last Rap of multi million sales. The juxtaposition and overlapping of cultures allows for the existence of different types of artists that, due to their different evolutionary states, have to play the role of buffoons, intellectuals, heroes, and alchemists. In this last group, what I call alchemists, some, in a very conscious way apply technology, and others, intuitively, have become the true transformers of contemporary history, being responsible for the positive and negative changes in their societies. A tangible example is the negative effect caused by the handling of violence as an expression code in the movies and television programs of the United States.

The massification of the work of art implies, as never before, that artists are better actors in the events of history, but simultaneously, their work has never been so ephemeral. Due to the massification of art as a daily consumption object, the Mozart and Michelangelo of today will not necessarily be recorded by history with the same relevance.

If we accept your view that artists are, to a large extent, responsible for fundamental changes in contemporary history; how do you see the position of society with respect to them, and how could we defend ourselves from the irresponsibility of artists?

Until now, society has had little awareness of the role of contemporary artists. During the presidency of George Bush (the father), the US Government and US Congress showed certain concern for the use of the obscene in those artistic manifestations that traditionally are not subject to the official censorship such as art galleries, plays, operas, et cetera.

As a result, the National Endowment for the Arts, official entity of cultural subsidies, issued a regulation on the handling of obscene aspects in the activities of the institutions they subsidize. The United States artistic environment reacted with indignation, but had no other alternative than to accept the reality of being economically dependent on the state subsidies and had to accept what famous drama director Joseph Papp has defined as "the beginning of self-censorship".

Since then, we have witnessed further cases of cultural censorship. Major Giuliani versus the Brooklyn Contemporary Arts Museum on the Saatchi Collection exhibit in 1999, Vice-President Al Gore's

presidential campaign on the moral issue against the use of aggression and pornography in the American film industry.

In my opinion, this is just the beginning of a long confrontation between society (employer) and the individual (artist) who is protected in his freedom of expression by the First Amendment of the American Constitution. Via legal repression, society has very few possibilities of defending itself efficiently from the irresponsible use of artistic expression. Only when artists become aware of the true effect of their work, will then begin to understand the importance of acting responsibly.

You pose quite a futuristic view as for the role artists perform in society. Why don't you place yourself in terms of this role as composer?

Until recent years I have assumed the role of composer with a very low public profile, almost in a private way, been more occupied with promoting and commissioning the work of other fellow composers, since as a conductor I try, whenever possible, to avoid performing my own music. Only on few occasions, like recently with the music I wrote for the film *Manuela Saénz*, Marturet the composer has come out shining as much as Marturet the conductor.

In 1988 I made an exhibit, *Casa Bonita*, at the Caracas' Museum of Contemporary Art Sofia Imber, where I presented an important musical work with a duration of 24 hours of music, jointly with three visual artists, Rafael Barrios, Jorge Pizzani, and Marcos Salazar Delfino.

Casa Bonita is the synthesis of 10 years of experimental work in the use of subliminal information through sound, with the specific purpose of inducing mental relaxation states (alpha waves) in the individual. *Casa Bonita* was my first musical work commercially available to the public, which produced a big change in my awareness as an artist.

Then, continuing with that experimental vein, came the idea of *Las Campanas del Silencio* (The Bells of Silence) a rather unique work that takes 7 days and 7 nights to be performed, using the bells from all the churches of a city or a whole country, or the whole world! It is a work of great mystic and social content. It would be wonderful to unite a whole city with the same music for 7 consecutive days. If we think about it, the only manifestations that massively join people together, besides football and general elections, are bad news, tragic events, earthquakes, floods, wars, and epidemics. Due to the enormous magnitude of this work, the public can only listen to fragments of it. Individually nobody hears the same part, only God would be able to embrace the total sound. The idea in itself, in a very simple way, poses with certain religious mystery the need for the existence of a superior being. *Las Campanas del Silencio* might never be performed in the real physical world, but could be easily imagined by whoever reads the "score", a set of rules and instructions instead of notes on a traditional stave. I find this fascinating, since it opens a totally new possibility, Conceptual Music, one that, thanks to the imagination, can live for ever in our minds!

What you are suggesting is quite extraordinary! Is as if the traditional concept of art might, gradually, fade away to eventually become something totally different.

I would not put it as strong as that. But then, when you come to think of it, is it not the Internet a "space" that has substantially changed our awareness of the physical world? And, thanks to that change, made us feel much more free in terms of what is possible and what is not? The paradox is, however, that nowadays the more we try to expand our possibilities of expression in any art form, the

more we seem to be trapped in a world where we cannot live without the aid of technology. Nobody seems to be bothered by this yet, but that is no reason to ignore the danger behind it.

All comes down to our awareness of what is art and what is not. This has always had a strong influence in the way society relates towards itself. If we were to accept the notion of art as being a subjective science, then artists have been visionaries gifted with the ability to decode the subjectivity of changing times. If they are to continue playing that role, will depend, largely, on that ability. This gift, however, is alien to technology it is just the plain and simple human brain.

In spite of the fact that you explain with conviction your duality in the activities of conductor and composer, it is not clear how a person like you, with such a creative potential, can dedicate so much time to recreate=conductor versus create=composer. I would have thought that, in your specific case, the conductor somehow frustrates the composer.

Not at all. I am absolutely convinced that the artist, the creator, is above all a communicator. It is the imperious need of communicating with the outer world that encourages us to produce and to work. Furthermore, history itself has demonstrated how communication has been the fundamental basis for the intellectual evolution of mankind.

The Orchestral Conductor is a privileged communicator due to the intrinsic quality of the “re-created” work. In addition, within the limits of the score, this process can be highly creative. When I assume the challenge of recording all the Mozart Violin Concertos with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra, or Brahms complete Symphonies, Overtures and Concertos with the Berliner Symphoniker, I think, above all, about my commitment to project the most faithful and clear sound of these masterworks. In other words, I try to find the way to 'order' the notes in the most correct form possible. In the case of writing my own music, from Marturet the composer, I am also ordering the notes that I hear in my brain, which are nothing else than the need to communicate, of decoding the sound of another score: my mind.

Both ordering processes of formal structuring, are creative and re-creative processes simultaneously, which, at the same time, are the response to a fundamental impulse: the need to communicate. I would never say that the conductor frustrates the composer; on the contrary, in my case is the composer who gives the life force to the conductor, the insights to a deeper understanding of the work of other composers. In fact as a conductor I feel very privileged and insist to all my conducting students to strongly consider spending a good deal of their time learning the composer's craft. In as much as is vital for a conductor to have a decent level of expertise in one or more orchestral instruments, the composer's vision is equally if not even more important.

I would not like to overlook the difficult role of the interpreter, the performer, or if you wish, as you have referred to throughout this interview, the “recreator” of a musical work. In your case the question has a specific meaning since you are “recreator” and “creator” at the same time, conductor and composer.

The clear projection of a musical work is achieved when the listener begins to have the perception that performer and composer are one and the same person. This does not mean that when conducting Mozart's Prague Symphony I become Wolfgang Amadeus. I cannot even imagine that transmutation through self-suggestion. Nevertheless, it is necessary to have a perfect decoding between the notes in the score and the notes played by the orchestra.

To give a more visual example, it would be as to take such a clear and accurate copy of a painting or a sculpture, the Mona Lisa for example, that there would be no difference between the copy and the original at the Louvre. Actually there are in the market many recordings of classical music works that for the purpose of this comparison are very similar to a blurry photograph or a cheap post-card of the original. The same thing happens to many public performances, concerts, where we are left with the unpleasant feeling that what we have just listened to is far from the original.

The interpreter, the “recreator”, has to make a great effort to separate his ego in order to let the spirit of the music to unfold and flow through.

Like the great Finnish musician, Ralf Gothóni, has said: *"Musicians are merely a medium for a musical truth. We should be like crystals, through which light is refracted in many different ways. But to do that, the crystal must be clear: it's very easy to make it dirty. That's the problem - how can we develop ourselves to be as clear as possible during this short life."* *Financial Times* (June 12, 2000)

To approach a score is a great demand. Besides many hours of study to get to know it deeply; a very high dosage of creativity is required to highlight details, the way of rehearsing it with the orchestra, and the way of presenting it to the public, without losing sight of its clear projection. It is also clear that behind a Conductor there is a human being, and behind an Orchestra a group of human beings that have their specific way of expression. That is why, fortunately, there will never be two identical performances of the same music and, at the same time, they can both be clear and truthful projections of the original.

To finish, I would like to know your opinion about some masters of universal music, an exciting subject about which little is said. If we assume that Mozart is, as it has been said: the closest to God... then, where would you place Beethoven?

The closest to Man. In my opinion Mozart is the most sublime composer of western music, and I want to make this point clear because I believe that we still have surprises ahead from the East in what concerns ethnic music, specifically from Asia.

Going back to the subject, I think Brahms wrote the most perfect music known, out of what would be the evolution of symphonic music ‘par excellence’, taking as an evolutionary line Bach-Haydn-Mozart-Beethoven-Schubert. With that ancestry behind, Brahms reached the aesthetic summit of the Austro-German orchestral tradition. The evolution of instrumentation in a perfect balance with the fundamental elements of a composition: the symphonic form, the harmony, the counterpoint, the melodic subject matter development, the timbre and tone of his orchestration, the ideal equilibrium between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. In Brahms we find the purity of style, the transparency and minute detail of Mozart, the drama and tempo flexibility so necessary in Beethoven. The sublime and the humane, simultaneously. The restrained Romanticism and the well moderated Classicism. The artist, the creator, who rather than an artist is a craftsman.

After Brahms, the decadence of the western world tonal system begins, through the chromatic evolution of Wagner-Strauss-Mahler-Schoenberg. The traditional symphonic form disappears to give way to a rhetorical and extensive musical discourse of capricious structures and exotic orchestral timbres. The exacerbated Romanticism gives in, finally, to the need of finding a new order, and, new aesthetic guidelines. Concert music falls into a communication crisis between the composer, the

interpreter, and the public, from which, at the onset of a new century we have not been able to recover yet.

Your answer provokes further reflection in terms of the future of music. It would seem that we are going through a transitional stage of great historical transcendence in the evolution of the musical scenario.

Of course this is the case! Above all, we must bear in mind that, for the first time in the history of music, the 20th century has been like a stylistic vacuum from the past. There has been the unusual need to listen to music from other times. What the famous German conductor and musicologist Nikolas Harnoncourt calls “Historical Music”, that is, the museum re-creation of music.

Throughout western history, not only popular music but also elitesque, music was object of contemporary consumption during the lifetime of composers. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, Liszt, Chopin, Wagner, composed for a public that applauded them in life, acknowledging their genius and talent. Until the end of the 19th century, it was not conceivable to listen to music from the past; so much so that when Mendelssohn re-discovered Bach’s music, composed 100 years earlier, and decided to perform *The Passion according to Saint Matheus*, the event was considered an eccentricity by his contemporaries.

At the onset of the 20th century, when Schoenberg composed *Pierrot Lunaire* and Stravinsky premiered in Paris the scandalous *Sacre du Printemps*, the communicational rupture between composer, performer and audience was already evident. Two world wars would emphasize the need the public had to biologically reject music which aesthetics reminded too well the crude reality of the modern world. The arrival of the radio industry, the records, the movies, and lastly television, are a phenomena that did not help, since their subsistence depends, and is based, on the need to create a macro-market, with foundations on massive consumption, the sales principle of which, seduction, is all that is related to senses.

In the case of music, this hedonistic phenomenon still is more notorious since it is easier to identify oneself with something known than with something new. It would then seem that what we call today “classical” music, is something that came to stay. We prefer to listen to Beethoven than to Stockhausen. Undoubtedly, *Le Nozze di Figaro* is “prettier” than *Les Noces* by Stravinsky!

Massification of art forces us to take a superficial and anecdotic position before the artistic fact: we can consume with the same ease that Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* and Ravel’s *Bolero*, are not a product of a voluntary selection but the result of marketing seduction.

Nevertheless, not everything is negative. The juxtaposition of historical times, and musical styles, has forced new generations of composers to expose themselves wider aesthetic principles. There is an awareness of the need to re-establish the dialog with the public. In this sense, we have recovered some credibility in the music of our time. However, we are still in that transitional stage that you mentioned, not only because of the music, but also because of many other cultural, political, economical and social manifestations. The psychological pressure of an ending century is over and the freshness of a new millennium is positively contagious. It seems that the digital era and the Internet have somehow broken some golden rules of the market and mass media providing a more customized, humane scale, where INFORMATION has become a byproduct that sales easily. As a result, the individual seems to have some kind of a chance, otherwise you wouldn’t be reading this interview!