
Silvina Luz Mansilla (Dir.) (2012)

Dar la nota: el rol de la prensa en la historia musical argentina

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The cultural market in Argentina is an area that is still very much unstudied. Within it, the production and circulation of magazines related to the arts is probably one of the most shockingly unattended developments; a whole cultural world that demands further exploration. The kind of content these publications presented, their local and international circulation, the dialogue and exchange with regional and foreign magazines, the circles of readers and participants, the changing patterns of style and speech, the coupling of text and image, or the changes in interests and discourses are but a few of the questions that need more attention and reflection.

“Dar La Nota: El Rol de la Prensa en la Historia Musical Argentina” is thus an important effort to change this situation. The book is a compilation of six articles that study different publications predominantly interested in music, with an introduction by Leandro Donozo reflecting on the importance of music magazines. This thread puts together studies that start in the 19th century—with a set of newspapers under Rosas’ regime—

and finish in mid-20th century with a reading of *La Mujer: Revista Argentina para el Hogar* (1935-1943). The essays are ordered chronologically, according to the period each publication covers; their approaches, however, wander through different perspectives and objectives, making the compilation’s interests a little erratic and scattered. Some focus, for instance, on the strategies and debates regarding the education of musical taste of the audiences. Such is the case of Vera Wolkowicz’s work on the reception of Italian opera in Buenos Aires as seen through the lenses of two newspapers at the end of the rosista period, when aesthetical concerns go hand in hand with political interests (“La recepción de la ópera italiana en Buenos Aires a fines del período rosista: una polémica entre el *Diario de la Tarde* *Diario de la Tarde* y el *Diario de Avisos*. 1848-1851”). Similarly, José Ignacio Weber studies the journalistic debates at the end of the 19th century regarding the audiences’ supposedly wrong appreciation of opera and the attempts to modernize and educate the taste by the introduction and appraisal

of symphonic music (“¿Ópera o música sinfónica? El interés de la crítica musical en la modernización del gusto porteño. 1891-1895”). The essays by Romina Dezillio (“El ojo en la cerradura: Mujeres, música y feminismos en La Mujer Álbum-Revista. 1899-1902) and Silvia Lobato (“El mundo femenino y la música en los medios masivos a través de las páginas de La Mujer: Revista argentina para el hogar. 1935-1943) offer another perspective—that of women’s participation in the music sphere and their assigned and contested places within it. Dezillio focuses on *La Mujer Álbum-Revista* (1899-1902), a magazine directed to, as its title promises, women, but problematically directed mainly by male writers and editors. Dezillio follows the changing discourses corresponding to the development of feminist thinking, and the failed attempts to incorporate a more radical agenda (with the brief participation on the editorial team of María Bahamonde). Lobato studies a similar kind of publication called *La Mujer: Revista para el Hogar* (1935-1943). In her text, the author points to the shifts in the representation of women—both textually and visually—and the ways the magazine attempted to include its readers, their tastes, and interests in its project.

Dar la Nota is the result of a working group directed by Silvina Luz Mansilla, the volume’s editor. Given this collaborative background, they share a quite consistent theoretical framework—that belonging to the field of cultural studies. Raymond Williams is thus unsurprisingly present in a number of the contributions, together

with the Latin American take on cultural studies represented in the work of Beatriz Sarlo and Jesús Martín-Barbero. However, the volume seems not totally at ease with making theoretical or critical readings out of these magazines. The archival work (the gathering and surveying of these publications’ contents) tends to be kept apart from the interpretative dimension, and the reflections that could be learned from this material. This may explain why there is sometimes the feeling that theoretical references are used as a tool applied when most convenient, instead of consistently dialoguing with their assumptions and implications. Juan Bühler’s essay, for instance, brings back to light the efforts by the Italian community to keep Italian music alive in a Buenos Aires, which by the end of the 1920s had a much more disputed arena of cultural models and trends (“Una sinfonia de desagradables sensaciones auditivas. La revista *Disonancias y su defensa de la música italiana en Buenos Aires. 1927-1932*”). Through the analysis of a magazine called *Disonancias* Bühler shows the different claims and strategies that the group of critics here gathered and used to attack musicians, institutions, and other publications that did not follow the apparently obstinate belief that Italian music had been and was simply the best. Although Bühler explains that this group of critics was part of the Italian-Argentinian community and that they showed a clear preference for all of the institutions, companies, and artists somehow related to Italy, the nationalistic impulse is not really taken into account. The author

instead prefers to explain their efforts as part of what Williams defines as residual elements—a concept that is rapidly explained in a footnote and precipitously used to explain all the different forces and interests at work.

The reading of these magazines thus proves, sometimes, to be a difficult task. The researchers did an intense work of gathering and surveying the enormous corpus of music magazines. Each essay carefully details the numbers they could consult, what time frame they belong to, the frequency they were issued, and many other details regarding the materiality and circulation of these publications. There is then a clear intention of putting the archival work forward. This is also reinforced by the inclusion of a considerable amount of images of magazine covers, cartoons, and ads. The difficulty arises when interpreting the facts, characteristics and tendencies they observe. Consequently, the essays offer a number of important and interesting issues, but are usually timid in their interpretation. This can be observed in the structure of the essays themselves, most of them divided into a number of subsections that highlight the recurrent themes and interests in the magazines analyzed, jumping from one point to another, with a usual small conclusion.

While this reviewer would have preferred a bit more interpretive emphasis, overall this is a highly informative study of a much neglected aspect of Latin American cultural studies, that of the cultural market and the influence of specialized publications in the cultural sphere. In

spite of its shortcomings, *Dar la Nota* is an important endeavor to a disregarded universe of cultural projects, strategies, and debates. Given the wide time frame it covers, its archival work can be of interest to scholars of different specializations. Each essay opens a window to the cultural world of each epoch, and in this sense it is not exclusively directed to scholars of the music world. It remains however a book that, faithful to the mission of its publisher—Gourmet Musical Ediciones—shows the need to further develop the exploration of the music world in Latin America.