

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Newcastle University
Unit of Assessment: 35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
Title of case study: <i>Misa de Corpus Christi</i>: its Impact on Instituto Laredo and the Wider Community in Cochabamba and Bolivia
1. Summary of the impact

Misa de Corpus Christi, a choral-orchestral composition by Agustín Fernández, has been of seminal benefit to Instituto Laredo, a specialist music school in Cochabamba, and of key significance to the wider community in Bolivia. As the focal point of a major music-educational project developing instrumental, vocal, choral and orchestral practice, the composition has had a direct influence on the personal and professional development of 220 students and teachers from the school. Performances of the piece to several capacity audiences in large (1000+) venues were received with enthusiasm and acclaim. *Misa* is viewed as an emblem of both Instituto Laredo's success and Cochabamba's musical achievements, and represents a pertinent example of the role of musicking in the articulation of cultural identity.

2. Underpinning research

Background

A forerunner of this work, also entitled *Misa de Corpus Christi* (hereafter *Misa*), a musical composition by Agustín Fernández (Lecturer 1995–2000, Senior Lecturer 2000–2007, Professor of Composition 2007–present), was first produced and performed in 1978 in La Paz, Bolivia. At that time, requests to mount the work in Cochabamba, then Bolivia's second largest city, went unfulfilled, as the city lacked the infrastructure to put on a concert of this magnitude. Some of the children who performed in the 1978 concert are now professionals, with some in positions of leadership; their generation has effected a shift where levels of orchestral and choral activity in Cochabamba are now comparable to those of La Paz. In 2010 a group from Cochabamba's Instituto Laredo (a specialist music school), headed by leading conductor Augusto Guzmán, approached Fernández to request a performance of *Misa*. The performance was to showcase the new musical status of Cochabamba and was to be part of the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations of the school. However, the score from the original composition, deemed by Fernández to be immature, was destroyed by him in the 1990s. The offer of an alternative composition was rejected, as the group wanted to revive the work they had performed as children, which, they claimed, had been a factor in their career choice as musicians. These requests caused Fernández to reassess the significance of his earlier work, and he made the decision to compose *Misa* again. The process of negotiation that led to this decision promoted a sense of collegial ownership of the work at Laredo, even before the onset of the 2010 performance project; as expressed by the director of the children's choir: 'The years went by, and this beautiful work went to sleep. It went to sleep until we gathered the courage to awaken it, for the fiftieth anniversary of the Instituto' (**IMP1**).

Underpinning Research

The 2010 version of *Misa* is a new rendering of the 1978 composition, with important differences. The new composition had to be considered in the light of all that had occurred since the original was written. While preserving the spirit of the 1978 composition, the new one resolves the latter's imperfections through greater technical competence, and addresses the old research question in a new context (see next paragraph), making it a richer work that is much more complex and allusive.

Fernández was intrigued to explore how the materials he had handled in 1977–8 would mix in the new piece being composed in 2010. Part of this involved retesting the assumption that Andean folk-rooted materials could coexist with post-romantic influences to produce an integrated whole. The core issue is the viability of Bolivian music – which for most of the twentieth century had been consensually defined as folk music – on the concert platform in a universal 'classical' context. By adopting the trappings of ambitious European compositions – e.g. orchestra, choirs, large-scale format and structures, and extensive contrapuntal treatment of material – *Misa* invites scrutiny as a classical work. By staying close to folk roots in rhythm, melody and some of the approaches to

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orchestration, it breaks some important assumptions in both genres, and posits a syncretism that in other parts of the world (e.g. Eastern Europe) had been tested decades before, but in Andean America was new. In a current national context of social turmoil in Bolivia, characterised by hegemonic ideas of nationhood along racial lines, it was important to make a statement reminding the nation of its mixed cultural heritage and interdependence. An international context where the development of parallel strands of postmodernity – some of which vindicate local ethnicity (Volans), while others reassess romantic legacies (Adams), and yet others revisit a heritage of modal liturgies (Pärt, Taverner) – seemed to provide a fresh context where *Misa* could make a meaningful utterance.

As well as providing Instituto Laredo with an emblematic work written by an alumnus to showcase its musical achievement in its interface to the world, *Misa* was also to serve as an educational tool in instrumental, vocal, choral and orchestral practice. This required Fernández to write the new piece in a way that would be accessible for young non-professionals. It was through the process of rehearsal and performance that much of the impact was achieved. The new première included choristers who had been in the 1978 children's choir, as well as children from Instituto Laredo.

3. References to the research

Agustín Fernández, *Misa de Corpus Christi* (2010). Musical composition, REF2 output: 168683.

4. Details of the impact

Fernández's solo-authored *Misa de Corpus Christi* achieved its greatest impact via the collaborative venture with the Instituto Laredo in Bolivia. As the focal point of a major music-educational project developing instrumental, vocal, choral and orchestral practice, the composition has had a direct influence on the personal and professional development of 220 students and teachers from the school. Performances of the piece to several capacity audiences in large (1000+) venues were received with enthusiasm and acclaim.

Impact in the rehearsal process

The new *Misa* occupied two large choirs and a large orchestra for the best part of four months in 2010. This was the predominant experience throughout the Instituto Laredo during this time, as the reach of the project extended deeply (and with growing intensity) into the daily practice of students and teachers there. The performers involved were challenged; some of the young players had to acquire skills they had not possessed before. Before rehearsals began, the orchestral parts of *Misa* were used as texts for instrumental lessons. Weekly choir sessions also focused on *Misa* during this period, and the sessions grew in frequency to three times a week in the last month, and daily in the last week. Melodies from *Misa* could be heard being practised, hummed and whistled across the school during this period (**IMP1, IMP2, IMP6**) – which was symptomatic of the impact the work had on the personal and professional development of the young musicians. The director of the children's choir recalls: 'When they succeeded in understanding it, the attachment, the love, the devotion they felt would lead the children to sing it in the school corridors; they wouldn't sing their songs from the *top ten* or from Facebook; they would sing their sections from *Misa*. Wherever they were, they would lie down, or sit down; it was one continuous *Misa* (**IMP1**).

As a direct result of the rehearsal process, singers experienced improvements in their vocal technique, young string players who had not played in higher positions before learned them; brass players extended their range; and percussionists learned new instruments (**IMP6**).

A benefit to personal and professional development was also experienced by both students and teachers as a direct result of engaging with this research output. As one student states: 'I learned a lot about working on detail in a score ... to listen to the orchestra and choir for better link-up ... I learned ... discipline, responsibility, technical work, demanding more of myself' (student, Y5 secondary) (**IMP6**). The choral director of the youth choir also outlines how "Prof. Fernández and his music inspired an entire generation of teachers, students and other professionals in the music field. For me it was an experience that changed the course of my professional life in many ways. To begin with, it enticed me to enthusiastically seek a Master's degree... One of my projects is a

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presentation of a paper about Agustín Fernández's "Misa de Corpus Christi." It symbolizes the progress my city and country has made in the last decade" (**IMP3**).

There were also benefits on the wider school community. The Rector of Instituto Laredo attests: '[The *Misa* project] gave rise to a series of very special phenomena. These phenomena accelerated the internal dynamic in the institution and among the people, and were of great usefulness for the development of team relations, as well as academic and technical; trust, love of collective and mutual work, development of personal confidence. Although students pass through and the student body constantly renews itself, there remains in the memory of the teachers and in the collective memory of the community and of the institution ... a symbol of what we can do when we pursue things for their own goodness.' (**IMP2**). The community that supports Laredo – logistically, morally and as concert audiences – gained in cohesion (**IMP2**). Even non-participating students were inspired; as one such student reports, 'that year was the best Still now I remember the words, the melody, the entry of the voices, the entries of some instruments, and even though I wasn't in the orchestra or the choir I knew everyone's parts. My favourite was *Agnus Dei*; pity I wasn't singing, but all the same I repeated everything and it was exciting each time it started again. Three years have gone by and I still love this whole thing' (student, now 5th Year secondary) (**IMP6**). And another student states: 'At playtime you could hear people singing bits of *Misa* [Three years on] when we at school start remembering various moments, it always gets in that we sang in *Misa de Corpus Christi*. I don't think this experience will be forgotten for a long time, since even on the streets you hear people talk about *Misa*' (student, now 5th year secondary) (**IMP6**).

Impact of the performance

Total audiences of c. 3,400 people attended six performances of *Misa* in 2010 and 2011. The première, conducted by Fernández, was held at El Campo [conference hall]. People queued for hours to gain admission, and the normal seating of 800 had to be increased to 1000. Further performances were conducted by Augusto Guzmán. For the second performance, on a Sunday morning in the historic village of Tarata, traffic came to a standstill beforehand and afterwards, the local restaurants ran out of food, and the church had large numbers of people standing in the corridors (**IMP2**). For the third performance at Cochabamba Cathedral, the presence of people standing in the wings and central corridor suggest an attendance of c. 1,700. Footage of the performances shows a high level of audience engagement, with queues forming to greet the performers, as shown in a documentary specially made about the event by a local production company, Terranova Audiovisual (**IMP7**). As one student remembers, 'People who were total strangers to us all rose to their feet to applaud us and idolised us' (**IMP6**). Building on the success of these earlier performances, *Misa* went on tour in 2011 leading to performances at three additional venues in La Paz and Cochabamba, promoted by Cochabamba's Philharmonic Society.

Instituto Laredo as a whole benefited from a sea-change in the quality of interpersonal relations. As one students recalls, '[it] created ties between us all ... we became more than friends ... you could say we considered ourselves as each other's brother or sister' (**IMP6**). See also Rector's statement quoted above (**IMP2**). The benefit to collegiality is perceived by many to be matched by a noticeable contribution to the development of musicianship and music appreciation: 'Now, my thinking about music is that no matter how complicated or "senseless" a work might seem to us, once you let yourself be enveloped by it it's the most beautiful thing, and it is accepted by others when you show this' (student, now 5th year secondary) (**IMP6**).

Misa also affected a wider network of around 2,000 parents, friends, supporters and alumni (**IMP9**), and it had a recognised impact on the community: '[*Misa*] led people to rethink the participation we allow art music [to have] in our lives Suddenly, this art music no longer is the exclusive heirloom of the Bolivian elites; we cast off the idea that it is boring or incomprehensible or inaccessible; it becomes democratised in the act of putting itself within reach of everyone ... I have not the slightest doubt that *Misa de Corpus Christi* contributed to the formation of the aesthetic sensibility of our society and to social harmony' (Paula Muñoz, then Culture Editor of national broadsheet *Los Tiempos*) (**IMP4**).

Press coverage was unusually generous before and after the event. The national broadsheet *Los Tiempos* put up an audio-visual clip of the première in its online edition; while the print edition

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contained a large photograph of the performers (front page) and a review article, 'Fernández Surprises and Conducts his Own Mass'. The review stated: 'A journey, the journey, life in three beats, dreams, solitudes, nostalgias and hopes, every feeling, sigh, moist eyes and explosion of applause. Such is the summary of the experience of an audience on its feet, smiling and euphoric, which last night shook the hall of Conventions Centre El Campo at the performance of the composition *Misa de Corpus Christi* by Bolivian composer Agustín Fernández. With this work Instituto Laredo celebrated 50 years of music, voice and spirit alongside a humanistic education' **(IMP8)**. An article in *Los Tiempos*'s supplement states: 'Agustín Fernández, one of Cochabamba's prodigal sons, has been able to construct a space of his own outside the trends of classical or contemporary music. In his works he integrates diverse instruments and sounds, many of them Bolivian, from a universal perspective. His music is of a great versatility. For the uninitiated, we could say that "he transcends beauty". More than universal, he is a composer who is planetary and without borders' **(IMP8)**.

Coda: continuing impact

Misa de Corpus Christi looks set to sustain and extend the reach of its impact. Augusto Guzmán, Director of Instituto Laredo's Youth Orchestra, has stated his intention to institute a tradition of annual performances of *Misa* in Cochabamba and beyond **(IMP5)**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- (IMP1) Video testimonial from choral director of the junior choir, Instituto Laredo.
- (IMP2) Factual statement [with English translation] from Rector of Instituto Laredo.
- (IMP3) Factual statement [with English translation] from choral director of the youth choir, Instituto Laredo.
- (IMP4) Factual statement [with English translation] from former (current in 2010) Culture Editor of national broadsheet *Los Tiempos* (now editor of magazine *Poder y Placer*).
- (IMP5) Video testimonial [with written English translation] from Director of Instituto Laredo's Youth Orchestra.
- (IMP6) Dossier of 75 hand-written feedback from Laredo students [with sample English translations].
- (IMP7) Documentary [unedited] by Terranova Audiovisual featuring video recording of rehearsals and two performances (disc 1), and interviews with key actors (disc 2).
- (IMP8) Sample of press coverage from national broadsheet *Los Tiempos*, 28 October 2010 and 21 November 2010 [with English translations].
- (IMP9) Dossier of written and video-recorded feedback from Laredo alumni [with sample English translations].