

"The goal is to transmit energy"
(interview with pianist & composer Juan María Solare)

Interview with *pianist & composer Juan María Solare*. The questions were posed by *Amaranta Wright* when Juan Solare was nominated finalist at the LUKAS (*Latin UK Awards*) in Great Britain. The questions were answered (per email) in January 2013. Solare ended receiving the second prize (after singer *Martín Alvarado*) out of five finalists and over ten candidates.

- Introduce yourself. Age. Where you come from? What is your cultural/family background?

(Juan María Solare) Born under the sign of Leo, on 11th August 1966 at 23:40 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In case you want to do my astral chart, you have enough information. So I am 46 years old. My brother is also a musician (viola), my sister devoted to dance (Argentine folklore). My mother was a Philologist and researcher / teacher of Hispanic Literature at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. My father was a lawyer (labor law); he taught me the bitter truth that Law and Justice are different things. Both were active music lovers (mainly classical, since rock and pop were practically banned at home - and jazz barely tolerated). Tango was unavoidable at home. Even if you hate tango music, in Argentina you listen to it permanently in the radio, so it develops like a second nature. I like to think that tango is in my blood but experimental music in my DNA. Or the other way round - difficult to say.

In any case I think of my person, as an artist, as a *bilingual* being: the tension of being at the same time a composer AND a pianist, playing tango AND classical contemporary music, belonging to the Latin American culture AND living in Europe. These tensions, this force field, generates inevitably a quite singular musical language.

- What was your earliest memory?

Nothing spectacular, but memory is a strange feature. You sometimes remember unimportant episodes and filter more important ones. Possibly I was 4 or 3. and it was new year eve (1970). I recall the firecrackers, and I see myself standing close to the window of the flat where we lived at that time, on the street Billinghurst. But wait a minute. It can't be the earliest memory. Now I see myself in that flat of the street Anchorena. Also a second floor. But this was before. And I got hurt. A table somehow hit me in the eye. A visitor was there, Raúl Cortazar, a great person. And my father run with me to the hospital (Hospital de Niños), just a few hundred meters from there. When we were back, the visitor was still there.

- How did you get into the activity for which you won the award? Tell the story of your progression as it were.

Music in general: my mother played piano, albeit not professionally. But there was a piano at home (and still is) and I learned to play short melodies. I was surprised of several things. One, how could a piano work without being plugged, without electricity. Second, how could it be that there were houses without piano. This means that for me the piano is literally as natural as a mother tongue.

- Who has been the most influential figure in shaping you and your art?

In the first steps, and if I have to mention only one figure, possibly my mother, since she was the main responsible for our education (and my father for feeding us - that was their deal). But of course, I am being partial and committing injustice with possibly hundreds of persons that influenced me and my art. If I could mention a second or a third person, they would be Maria Teresa

Criscuolo, my piano teacher for ages, and Horacio López de la Rosa, teacher of theory but also retrospectively my first composition teacher.

- What was it about this activity that you so fell in love with and that you love doing so much – describe this connection and your passion for what you do

You will perhaps be surprised, but when playing the piano, a very important aspect is the *haptic perception*, the concrete feeling of *touching* the instrument. Sometimes the actual acoustic result is not as important as being in touch with the keys. If you think this thought is unmusical, consider that lots of musicians overcome (or relief) the stage fright through touching their instrument - not by playing on it. This action is similar to touching, caressing a horse before riding. About *touching*: sometimes other instrumentalists think that a pianist has no direct contact with the vibrating elements producing sound, as guitarists are in contact with the strings. But for a pianist -or at least for me- the feeling of playing on the keys is exactly as being directly in touch with the strings. Is difficult to explain, since all words require a shared [joint] experience.

- Describe one thing you like about the scene you are in, one thing you dislike

Like: I get surprised when colleagues (musicians in general, not only pianists or composers) do something that I wouldn't expect and that I didn't imagine before. So I learn, open mental doors and keep myself alive and curious. Another point relates to the sense of the whole thing: why making music at all. I recall an important episode. I was in my early twenties and gave a recital in the (not longer existing) *Auditorio Promúsica* in Buenos Aires. After the concert a man in his fifties approaches me, visible moved, and tells me that my music gave him back his will to live. From this episode I discovered that my main function, as an artist, is to *transmit energy*.

Dislike: the "sports" aspect of the musical profession. Competence, winning, getting better positions. Selling oneself, the need of "flirting" with organizers, of convincing others, boasting about triumphs - and the very notion of "triumph" in arts. All this makes one forget about art or music, deforms the soul, and can make you think that this profession is not about speaking to the hearts, but about getting a job or arriving first to the *toppermost*, getting exposure for the sake of it and -if possible- destroying your competitors on the way. Almost the opposite to what it should ideally be. As composer Béla Bartók said, *competition is for horses, not artists*. The irony is that it *is* a part of the musical profession and so we must go on doing it. So your colleagues end up considering you a potential competitor who should be defeated, and not a person with whom you can produce beauty together. Sad.

- What were the most difficult obstacles that you had to overcome to excel in what you do and get to where you've got to in your particular activity?

In a first stage: the main obstacle was to discipline myself in order to learn and develop the necessary techniques, the *know how*. Later: putting order in the *administrative* aspects of the profession such as getting concerts, building an image or a trade mark as a musician, keeping in touch with organizers and performers, "selling myself". I notice now that both things have to do with *discipline*.

- Describe one setback and one breakthrough?

Setback: It was a macro-recital in Tandil, a city in Argentina where I gave music tuition for wight years (and where I still have my best friends). At that recital I had to play ten minutes. I played two preludes by Karol Szymanowski. But I have slept just a couple of hours and gave lessons the whole day. It was my worst recital in my whole life; that kind of things I would like to erase from the Cosmic Memory. Moral: if you have to play tomorrow, sleep well tonight.

Breakthrough: This time was in Göttingen, a cute city in Germany where I gave my first European recital (in 1993). I was studying German at the Goethe Institut, where the recital took place. But: two weeks after that recital I had to move to Cologne and didn't have a place to live - in a foreign country where I didn't know anybody and with limited language knowledge. I tell you: thus I overcame stage fright once and for all: before the real danger of having nowhere to go, playing a concert is not a danger. This experience was crucial for me, but it would be cruel to suggest others to go through the same.

- How do you find the UK audience for what you do compared to others. How have you found British society and there attitudes towards you and what you do?

I can only speak about the audiences I found in London, not UK in general. Among us: I was positively surprised because the audience reacts very warmly and much more spontaneously than, say, in Germany. I must also say that my audiences tend to be heterogeneous (what I find positive). I feel very comfortable with this diversity, since I get the feeling that I can actually speak -musically- to quite different people in their own language. Last but not least: in my recitals I love to say some words to the audience. And I am a witty person, ironic and even sarcastic if needed. Well, this wit and irony are understood without further problems by the British audiences I found. Call it cliché - but it works and I love it.

- What has kept you driven?

The unquestionable belief that I can offer quality of life through music. The belief that my own life and other people's lives get better through my activity. Being a musician means that I help people to smile and allow them to cry. I relieve pain from people's souls (almost always). I strengthen people's belief in life. I improve people's understanding of other souls, of other cultures, of other sounds. I produce the harmonization of antagonistic forces. I exemplify the engagement with an unstable vocation. I increase people's capability of correlating things and therefore -hopefully- their intelligence. I maintain people's awareness awake. I show people that vigour and smoothness are not irreconcilable.

- What makes you happy? What makes you unhappy (in the context of what you do?)

Happy: to be on stage and notice that persons are really enjoying, that they want to be there more than elsewhere. Getting to know that a person had an "aha-experience" through listening to my music.

Unhappy: to have the feeling that people don't give a damn for my music and that I even disturb them (for instance, playing background music). Anecdote (Misselwarden, 29th April 2006): "*Could you really listen to me playing? It was so loud!*" Answer: "*Yes, you could be heard very well, we almost had to scream in order to go on talking*" Or also to play a waltz and being asked, immediately after, why I don't play a waltz (yes, it happened to me). Or having to listen, right after the concert, the unsolicited critic of an audience member with minimum musical background. It is as if I were a professional cook and they spit on the food I prepared for them.

- The Living person you most admire and why?

Strange, I have to really think about this. I'll tell you next year. Maybe most admired people are dead.

- If you could go back in time, where would you go?

Leave this for next year.

- What song would you like at your funeral?

Several of my own compositions must be played at my funeral, as *Nomade* or *Trenodia*. But not only sad music. Also tranquil but optimistic (as *Licha*). And also energetic, deep (non-superficial) music as my *Barro sublevado* or *Dimensión*. I don't want my funeral to be sad, I would like people to go back home with a sense of being charged with energy.

- Tell us a secret.

I use to play, since some years, with a puppet in the pocket, or even on the piano. It is a small snake, some 25 cm. long. My first one was called *Victor*, he accompanied me even to Finland - but got lost in one trip to Argentina. Now *Orlando* has taken his place. Although of course, nothing can replace *Victor*. But *Orlando* is doing his job well, he was already with me in Istanbul, in Germany, and of course in London. When the concert have been particularly good, I realize that *Orlando* is happy.

- Where would you like to do from here? What would you like to achieve? How and where do you see your future?

Two aspects: production and marketing. Production: I want to write more music for orchestra (concretely I am planning a violin concerto) and more film music (until now, I made music for only six short films). Marketing: My first wish is that my pieces be performed -by myself and by other musicians including orchestras- daily, constantly, somewhere in the world. My wish is that the artistic professions are recognized as decent - also financially. My wish is to live 300 lives parallelly, in order to achieve all I want, as composing, reading other people's ideas (some call it "books"), writing down my own ideas.

Juan María Solare

Pianist & composer – tango music – www.juanmariasolare.com

He was born on 11th August 1966 in Buenos Aires, where he studied piano with Alicia Belleville privately and with María Teresa Criscuolo and Perla Brúgola at the *Conservatorio Nacional de Música "Carlos López Buchardo"*; at this institution he graduated in 1989 with title of "*Profesor Nacional Superior de Piano*", concluding his ten-years studies with a public examination.

He also studied Conducting with Mario Benzecry and studied Composition with Fermina Casanova, Valdo Sciammarella and Juan Carlos Zorzi at the mentioned institution, where he achieved the title of "*Profesor Nacional Superior de Composición*" in 1993. Paralelly he studied Music Analysis privately with Francisco Kröpfl. After that, he undertook postgraduate courses in Composition in Germany (*Hochschule für Musik* in Cologne and Stuttgart: Kagel, Fritsch, Barlow, Lachenmann). He received the title of *Licenciado en Composición* in April 2005 (IUNA, *Instituto Universitario Nacional del Arte*, Buenos Aires). He visited regularly the composition courses of Karlheinz Stockhausen in Kürten.

He lives since 1993 in Germany with activities centres in Cologne & Bremen.

As a composer, besides having written tangos "*post-Piazzolla*", is the originator of the musical genre of the *tango deconstruido*, that unites elements of the tanguistic tradition and principles of the avant-garde, using postmodern techniques of musical deconstruction (and reconstruction). Within this musical genre he composed titles as "*Fragmentango*", "*Viejo Fueye Deconstruido*" or "*Atonalgotán*", among others.

The orchestra of the University of Bremen, conducted by Susanne Gläß, performed the premiere of the *Concertango*, for large orchestra, by Juan María Solare, in the German cities of Varrel and Bremen, on 30th June and 1st July 2004 respectively. These concerts (that have been patronized by the Argentine Embassy in Berlin) were visited by some 300 persons each day.

Solare is (musical and artistic) director of the *Orquesta no típica*, a ten members chamber music group devoted to tango, that is financed by the University of Bremen. Bremen is thus one of the few European cities where tango music is taught at University level. In this ensemble Solare makes the arrangements, plays the piano and conducts, besides managing he concerts. The repertory of this group extends from the *Guardia Vieja*, through Gardel, Troilo and Piazzolla, until nowadays tango. The *Orquesta no típica* has premiered works by Juan Solare, Jorge Pítari, Gabriel Senanes, Eduardo Kohan, Gustavo Lanzón, Héctor Maisano, Luis Mihovilcevic and Saúl Cosentino. See www.tango.uni-bremen.de .

Solare has given also seminars and workshops "*hands on*" of tango music in different German cities (Bremen, Bremerhaven). He also published articles on tango topics, especially in his section "*Mordentes*" of the magazine *Doce Notas* (Madrid). His essay about *the notation of tango music* (magazine *L'Orfeo*, Mexico, October 2008) must be mentioned, besides another article about *Tango Deconstruido*, and a series of *Ensemble Exercises*.

On 13th April 2007 Solare gave at the *Departamento de Artes Musicales y Sonoras* (of the IUNA, *Instituto Universitario Nacional del Arte*) in Buenos Aires a course on the subject "*deconstructing tangos*" for composers and performers. On 25th April 2007 he read a paper about the "3 préludes" for piano by Piazzolla at the *Segundas Jornadas Internacionales Astor Piazzolla* in Buenos Aires. On 15th May 2009 he gave a lecture illustrated with cover pages of old tango scores, "*A short history of tango through visual arts*", within the frame of the First festival "*Tango Rojo*" organized by the *rojynegrodub* at the *Latvian House*, London. On 14th May 2010 he gave a lecture about the history of the *orquestas típicas* (up to Troilo), in the frame of the Second Festival "*Tango Rojo*". On 10th December 2010 he gave a lecture about *tango singers* in the frame of the Third Festival "*Tango Rojo*" in London.

He edited for the publishing house *Ricordi München* the album *Arte del Tango*, with tangos by fifteen Argentine contemporary composers, that was presented in March 2006 at the *Internationale Musikmesse* in Frankfurt (Ricordi, Sy 2765, ISBN 3-938809-13-2). Also for *Ricordi* he edited in 2011 an album with tangos for piano four hands (*Tangos para cuatro manos*, Sy 2767, ISBN 978-3-938809-75-4) and one monographic album with works by Saúl Cosentino (*Retrospective*, Sy 2799, ISMN 979-0-2042-2799-0). The fourth album of sheet music was *Tango Piano* (in 2013) with music of the *Old Guard* for piano solo (Sy 2840, ISMN 979-0-2042-2840-9).

During three years (2006-2008), Solare was artistic director of the cycle *Tango Spezial* at the cultural centre *westend* in Bremen (eight annual concerts).

Together with saxophonist Eduardo Kohan, Solare released in August 2006 the CD *Tango Nómade*, that besides traditional tangos features five own pieces. His first CD as piano soloist is *Tango Monologues* (2010), that includes twelve own works and eight traditional tangos.

As a pianist, Solare was part of the *Trío Arrabal* (together with Enrique Martín "Pitu" Entenza, bandoneon, and Claudio Elias, double bass) and integrates currently the piano duo *Dinamitango*, together with Gustavo Lanzón. Solare plays also in the *QuinteTTTango* of Bremerhaven, in the *Dúo Diagonal* (with cellist Gesa Biffio); and mainly mainly in the *Dúo Tangente* (with the violinist Gert Gondosch), that expands up to the *Ensemble Tangente* (with voice, bandoneon, cello/double bass and dance), and in the dúo *Tango Nómade* (together with the saxophonist Eduardo Kohan).

Solare performed at the *Sexta Cumbre Mundial del Tango* (Sixth World Tango Summit) in Seville on 12th March 2005 (as part of the dúo *Dinamitango*), representing officially to the city of Bremen (with the support of the foundation *Waldemar-Koch-Stiftung*). He also played at the *Octava Cumbre Mundial del Tango* (Eight World Tango Summit) in Bariloche (concerts on 6th and 7th March 2009) and at the *22nd Festival Internacional de Tango* in Granada (concerts on 10th and 11th March 2010). He also participated at the *Novena Cumbre Mundial del Tango* (Ninth World Tango Summit) in Seinäjoki (Finland) both with his *Dúo Tangente* and with *Tango Nómade*, on 29th and 30th June 2011 respectively.

Alone or in groups, Solare performed some 500 concerts in several Argentine cities (Buenos Aires & surroundings, Tandil, Córdoba, Zárate, Bariloche, Mendoza, Tucumán, Córdoba), German (Cologne, Berlin, Göttingen, Worpsswede, Verden, Bremen, Munich, Bremerhaven, Hannover, Hamburg, Heidelberg) and European (Amsterdam, Geneva, Seville, Madrid, Granada, Oviedo, London, Graz, Granada, Seinäjoki, etc.).

Besides giving tango recitals, Solare performs classical music of our time (Cage, Schönberg, Scriabin, Liszt, Berio, Pärt, etc.) and his own compositions. Both as soloist or in diverse chamber music line-ups.

As a composer, twelve CDs from different performers include at least one piece by Juan María Solare.

Video links to music by Juan María Solare

<http://youtu.be/uAAEQtsRg9w>

(as pianist of the Ensemble Tangente: **A Fuego Lento**, by Horacio Salgán)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBgtkWNx1fk>

(as pianist of the Ensemble Tangente: **Furor**, by Juan María Solare)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdOETwZafI4>

Southern Cross (Juan Maria Solare) performed by himself

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecZ41otA8kI>

LICHA (Juan Maria Solare) performed by Juan Maria Solare

Valsarín (Juan Maria Solare) performed by Juan Maria Solare

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bvzV7Nx7jQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7B9ysDXGfXE>

Nacimiento (by Juan Maria Solare), performed by the Ensemble Tangente, Bremen 3 JUNE 2010

<http://youtu.be/LE6GBUfJJck>

Temperamentos (nr 4 = Sanguineo) * by Juan Maria Solare.

Performed by the Duo 66: Ibrahim Gunbardhi (clarinet) + Juan Maria Solare (piano). Universität Bremen (Germany), 31 May 2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-UswQl3Nto>

Lo que se fue (Jorge Pitari) performed by the Duo Tangente, Finland 2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5uKKVadHZo>

Furor (Juan Maria Solare) by the Duo Tangente, Finland 2011

Mix from recital **Beyond Tango**, London (Bolivar Hall) 2010

<http://youtu.be/EmzrN9qvufQ>

Pasajera Eterna (Juan Maria Solare)

<http://youtu.be/KBeZFFrVE8g>

Dimensión (Ensemble Tangente)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sd8_vj3BNak

Barro sublevado, by Juan Maria Solare, performed by the Cafe Tango Orchestra (in Stuttgart, Germany, on 24th September 2011).

<http://youtu.be/P5Z-IH42oK8>