

## The experience of sonority: the dangers of a journey into the unknown

Valéria Bonafé

### Abstract

In this article, I discuss the notion of *sonority* from the perspective of musical composition. I place the notion of *sonority*, not as a concept circumscribed in analysis and composition theories that take sound as a *thing* and handle it from its parameterisation, but rather as an idea of a more dynamic and holistic nature. Thus, sonority is repositioned from listening: not a reduced one, but instead an enlarged listening; not purely cochlear, nor tympanic, but sensitive, affective, and imaginative. *Sonority* is understood, thus, from the notion of *experience*. To build upon this reflection, I engage, in particular, with the work of three Brazilian researchers/composers: Denise Garcia, Rodolfo Caesar and Silvio Ferraz. Throughout the article, the notion of *sonority* is reflected upon through comments on my piece for orchestra, *A menina que virou chuva* [The girl who became rain] (2013).

### Keywords

composition, listening, sonority, sound image, imagination, experience

### Introduction

This article is constructed from the articulation of two distinct textual layers. In one of them (sections labelled using Arabic numerals, e.g. 1, 2, 3...) I discuss the notion of sonority from the perspective of musical composition. To build upon this reflection, I engage, in particular, with the work of three Brazilian researchers/composers: Denise Garcia, Rodolfo Caesar and Silvio Ferraz. In the other layer (i, ii, iii...) I make some analytical comments on my piece *A menina que virou chuva* [The girl who became rain], a composition for orchestra created in 2013. Listening to this piece is required in order to understand this article.

While the layer dedicated to the discussion of the notion of sonority presents a more extensively theoretical approach, the other one (dedicated to the piece) has a more literary character and evokes a large number of elements generally considered to be exterior to music, such as metaphors, aspects borrowed from other arts and a whole imagistic and multisensorial universe that permeates the sonority field within my creative process. Each of these layers can be read independently, but the text was designed to a linear reading, thus provoking a sense of alternation between the two layers.

It is important to emphasise that the purpose of the article is not to use *A menina que virou chuva* as illustration of a theoretical debate about the notion of sonority, but rather to make the notion of sonority itself emerge and expose its contours from of a singular sound experience.

### i. *A menina que virou chuva* [The girl who became rain]

*A menina que virou chuva* may be listened to as the continuous chaining of three particular atmospheres, which I call here sonorities: *Evaporação* [Evaporation], *Condensação* [Condensation] and *Depois da chuva* [After rain].<sup>1</sup>

***A menina que virou chuva* (2013), for orchestra, by Valéria Bonafé – Orquestra Sinfônica do Paraná and Marcio Steuernagel (conductor)**



#### 1. Sonority as experience

In recent years, the term *sonority*<sup>2</sup> has gained prominence in academic research, resulting in an extensive bibliographical *corpus*. Part of this bibliography is committed to legitimising *sonority* as the compositional paradigm of a “new era”, but, for this purpose, it reproduces a *modus operandi* similar or identical to that which was used in the past. With this in mind, if one wants sonority to be understood as a new compositional paradigm, and not only as a surface element, it is necessary to understand how it can be thought within the perspective of *musical structuration*, i.e., how it can articulate *material* and *form* at the core of composition. In this case, it is necessary to subject sonority to the laws of valuation already established in the canonical discourse of music theory and composition, guided by laws of *logic*, *coherence* and *comprehensibility* – just to maintain some of Schoenberg's emblematic expressions. Therefore, it is necessary that *sonority* attests its capacity to operate as an objective element of formal organisation, a task formerly assigned to pitch, as demonstrated by the many statements about *overcoming* the *paradigm of the note* by means of what is conventionally called the *paradigm of sound*. This kind of discourse is not about a breach of the hierarchic logic of the elements in the compositional context; far from it, it is only about the exchange of the “monarch”. Composition – and also listening – continues to be understood as a space of dispute and of power games, in which certain elements subject others and others are subjected. From a parameterised, quantified, and fragmented listening, the sonority is instrumentalised: it becomes an abstract and operational entity, closing itself to the *experience*.<sup>3</sup>

In *A espessura da sonoridade: entre o som e a imagem* (2013), Rodolfo Caesar considers the following question: “what would be the limits of sonority's tessitura?” Caesar's questioning is more of a provocation than an actual query. Going against part of the current bibliography on the subject, Caesar does not pursue possible answers that can establish the limits of such tessitura. What Caesar suggests in his text is, in reality, the widening, if not the complete dilution of any limit of tessitura.<sup>4</sup>

“A large number of composers prefer to circumscribe the sonorous field to a space of determined thickness, known as “sonority” – as if this word could not be expanded to its

most extensive range. It is appropriate to problematize this expression, which, increasingly – for common sense and for the specialist – points towards a single direction, to an “internal” “core” of the sound. Thus, this listening – by diverse injunctions – is confined to an experience, whose gravity centre comes down to the “intrinsic” features, or in the “interiority” of the sound (Caesar, *The composition of electroacoustic music*, 1992). Thus, the amplitude – that is perhaps the richest feature of the sonorous field conquered by Western music in the mid-twentieth Century – ends up being rejected due to filtering (Caesar, 2013, p. 2).<sup>5</sup>

In dialogue with Caesar's approach, as well as with several authors mentioned throughout the present text, I see the notion of sonority not as a concept circumscribed in analysis and composition theories that take sound as a thing and handle it from its parameterisation, but rather as an idea of a more dynamic and holistic nature. Thus, sonority is repositioned from listening: not a reduced one, but an enlarged listening; not purely cochlear, nor tympanic, but sensitive, affective and imaginative. Sonority combined with a *radial* conception of listening.

“The aim is neither to deny, at this late point, the instrumental possibility nor the aesthetic fruition of a “structuring” listening, typo-morphological, etc. Yet, it is simply to try to stimulate the return of the radial vocation of the enlarged listening – as well as all the perception modalities are enlarged. In other words: it is reasonable to accept the possibility of a cohabitation of the two opposing, yet complementary forces: the sound would have – together with its centripetal interiority – a centrifugal radiation pointing towards all directions. From the “core” object of the sound, an omnidirectional radiation emanates and, during its course, reaches and transforms us.” (Caesar, 2013, p. 3)

Caesar's approach is, in many aspects, aligned with Silvio Ferraz' notion of *sonority* developed in his book *Livro das sonoridades* (2005). In this book, Ferraz also made an effort to encompass the notion of *sonority* on the basis of an enlarged listening, centred neither on the capture of form nor the interiority of sound matter.<sup>6</sup> The notion of *sonority*, therefore, would necessarily comprehend a listening, which is also configured as a journey into the unknown, as an *experience*.

“Neither the sound matter nor the form leads the listening. [...] At the risk of misconceiving it, I say that: what we hear, and what leads our listening is not so much in the materiality or the form, but exactly in what it would be in the in-betweens of the form; thus listening to music would be simply to let oneself go to places that are created, by moments that turn matter into expressive material, and whose forces help us make connections (I'm talking about any connections: remembering a place, imagining an image, listening to a sonority, connecting a sound with another one, listening to a drawing, a ratio, any meaning at all) and, from time to time, to be shaken by one cut, a change of place [...]” (Ferraz, 2005, pp. 41-42)

## ii. *Evaporação* [Evaporation]

*Evaporação*, the first among the three sonorities that compose *A menina que virou chuva*, begins with a frictional movement of a mallet on a tam-tam (a percussion instrument from the family of gongs made of a heavy metal). In the score, I have requested a *superball mallet* (a specific mallet used to drag on gongs and other instruments) with a small head in order to stimulate the production of very high frequencies. With a minimal movement of the arm, an

impactful effect can be produced when rubbing a tam-tam of great dimensions. The sound richness of the rubbed tam-tam is the outcome of the combination of pressure variation and mallet speed on its surface, making it possible to obtain powerful sounds with a sufficiently restrained corporal movement. The sound produced rubbing the tam-tam is very unstable and its radiation is extremely diffuse, spreading widely in all directions. In this sense, I was very intrigued by the scenic effect that could derive from the contrast between viewing an entirely still orchestra and listening to a sound, whose source would not be so easily recognisable. The intention was to initiate the piece with a sonority that would refer to a psychic condition of hallucination, delirium, unreality.

The treatment given to the strings during the *Evaporation* sonority – especially in the initial measures – was derived from a more mimetic *sound imagination* than the one implied when using the tam-tam. For the strings, I imagined a rarefied texture of very light, nearly minimal, breathing (of inhaling, to be more specific). The technical performance indications – *alto sul ponticello* (bow positioned exactly above the bridge) combined with *arco flautato, molto soffio* (always maintaining very fast bowing, without pressure oscillation, barely with no adherence of the bow hair on the string, in order to produce a flute-like sound) – that are found just at the beginning of the score were aimed to extract from the strings an absolutely aerated sonority (close to a delicate white noise), the unison on the pitch *A5* being merely a focal point. The limit of intensity for the *crescendi* should be a sufficiently audible air sound, without losing its *flautato* quality and without becoming a clear pitch. The successive rests in these initial measures should frame this aerated sonority, helping to simulate the intermittence of a blow of very thin air. These set of technical solutions aimed to build a sound image that I have heard-formed-imagined: the last gasp; the accurate point of death.

The first sonority is still composed of three other musical gestures – *tremolo veloce, tutto l'arco* and the *glissandi*. They contribute to model the texture, which tends to become gradually denser. The *glissandi* (a continuous and smooth glide from one pitch to another), in particular, collaborate with the widening of the spectrum of frequencies, diluting the initial focal point on the pitch *A5*. In these narrow range *glissandi*, the ancestral sonority of lament is implied, calling to mind the sonority of *carpideiras* (professional female mourners) crying, during their performance at funeral ceremonies (see media example below).



## 2. Listening as experience

In the article *Composição por metáforas* (2007), Denise Garcia delivers a retrospective of her path as a composer, making remarks on all of her work, from her early pieces to the most recent ones. From the beginning of the text, she indicates an underlying trait of her creative process: the use of metaphors.

“I write this text in order to establish my statement, or more accurately some examples of how my creative process often takes place through processes of simulation, transposition, translation, imitation of sound, visions, and other types of images that occur to me, and I would like to and intend to call them metaphors. Metaphor in a wide sense, but with an opposite intent, which I believe is so ordinary in many composers: the music or the sound not being a substitute or a reference or a representation of any other sign [...]. The images or models can be starting points, but not necessarily the meaning of music – the music does not stand for that specific image or another one, and every time that this was intended, what really is the piece was hugely reduced: an open box that allows each listener to have their own individual experience, but above all musical.” (Garcia, 2007, p. 54)

Therefore, one has the possibility of working with different sensory systems: visual, auditory, tactile, proprioceptive, etc. From this perspective, the creative process is essentially multiple, omnidirectional, in the sense of imagination. The idea of metaphor is designed not in the sense of representation, that is, of a thing in place of another one. Instead, metaphors – images or models – are understood as triggers and stimuli of the creative process.

I notice a certain convergence between Denise Garcia's and Kaija Saariaho's approaches. In interviews and program notes, Kaija Saariaho's comments on her own compositions are always full of visual elements such as shapes, colours, lights, shadows, etc. According to Pirkko Moisala, her biographer, Saariaho has always sought to work in a continuity between the experience of the eye and the ear. Moisala's remark could also be extended to touch, taste and smell, as it is not unusual to find comments from the composer herself on the importance of perfumes and fragrances for the construction of determined sonorities. The work of Saariaho could, thus, be understood in the continuity between the experience of hearing and all other senses, in a complex field, where listening is always multisensory.

“I cannot separate these things [musical and visual dimensions] from each other and, in my opinion, one should not even attempt to do so. This differentiation is based on the traditional view, but I am quite convinced that, in addition to the eye and the ear, there are close relationships between the other senses. The senses must not be firmly delineated. Although music is what interests me most and my ways of expression are musical, I do not think of these things as separate categories. (...) Different senses, shades of colour, or textures and tones of light, even fragrances and sounds, of course, blend in my mind. They form a complete world in itself, which calls me to enter into it, and where I can then focus on some details. They are the source from which I draw.” (Saariaho *apud* Moisala, 2009, pp. 53-55)

The works of Denise Garcia and Kaija Saariaho seem to point towards a type of reception, which does not presuppose listening as an act of capturing sound *per se*. There is no

addressing whatsoever of a listening that is established as a filtering, a cleaning process, or a pure sound analysis. Either in the process of elaborating the pieces, or at the moment of enjoying, the body would be open and the imagination would establish itself as a space of interlaced images of diverse natures. There is indeed an idea of a *multimodal listening*.

“The body of the listener is open, there is no lack of entrances nor exits, points in contact with the outside of the body. And these places intertwine themselves, sound is not the ear's priority. Low sounds resonate all over the body, very high-pitched and high energy sounds make the teeth grit. This is how sound goes through almost all the senses; through sight, when I say that a sound is bright, when I talk about a line; through touch, when I talk about its roughness; through my proprioception, when I say that it is heavy, that it is light, that it floats or that it is deep. Sound perception is multimodal. There is no ear privilege.” (Ferraz, 2016, p. 41)

There is no privilege, but neither is there a disadvantage to the ear. This discussion does not intend to hierarchically rank the different sensory systems involved in the action of listening. Instead, this discussion focuses on trying to understand how the *mental images* that we get from listening sprout necessarily from the interaction between these different sensory systems. And, furthermore, it is also important to consider that such mental images are the result of the interaction between what emerges from the different sensory systems and what is constructed in our imagination based on previous references, memories, expectations etc. Listening is thus understood as *experience*.

“The change generated by technological mediation concerning musical listening was not only contextual, but has significantly modified the relation that listeners establish with music. To listen is an exercise, it means to pay attention to something, it is an attitude towards a sonorous content. [...] Though, of course, one can also listen with the body, with the eyes and even more, with memories, with sensations. Although the concert hall boosts an attention focused on the audible, there's much more than sound in the experience of listening.” (Iazzetta, 2009, pp. 37-38)

#### iv. *Condensação* [Condensation]

Regarding instrumentation, the *Condensação* sonority is still branded by the presence of the strings, however with the addition of wind instruments and the subtraction of the tam-tam. Different from the *Evaporação* sonority – characterised by a more rarefied texture – this sonority is built through multiple layers, and proposes a slightly more complex and turbulent listening. From the global point of view, one can segment this sonority in two strata: a more dynamic sound mass, which is carried out by the wind instruments; and a more static sound mass, carried out by the strings.

The sound mass carried out by the wind instruments is composed of fourteen voices (flute, oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 french horns, trumpet, 2 trombones, and bass trombone) and it has a variable density. Over time, it goes gradually from a minimum density (two overlapping voices) to a maximum density (ten overlapping voices). Inside this sound mass, each one of the voices presents very wavy and unstable profiles, marked by melodic zigzag contours, rhythmic *acelerandi* and *ritardandi*, and flexible dynamic curves. Here the sound image was one of a gradual accumulation of incessant and confused murmurs, which are intertwined in a kind of complex texture (through the employment of *micropolyphonic* resources). At first, these murmurs exhibit relative stability, consistently

having some specific pitch that operates as centre of attraction and, around which melodic undulations befall. Further on, when this sound mass reaches its maximum density, these murmurs start to suddenly let go of their respective centres and to head towards the extreme low register of each instrument, causing a global effect of texture draining, which climax with the total silence of all wind instruments.

Opposed to the dynamism and directionality, which constitute the sound mass constructed by the wind instruments, the sound mass carried out by the strings depicts a steadier global profile. This sound mass has a constant density (it is composed of a permanent group of ten voices: violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello, and double bass, all with *divisi a 2*) and it is characterised by sustained long notes. In a certain sense, it can be understood as a harmonic texture that works as background for the sound mass performed by the wind instruments. However, the presence of an almost uninterrupted movement of *glissandi* (increased by variations in dynamic) guarantees a certain degree of richness for this static sound mass. The game of *glissandi* in the strings is very simple: it is only about a process of playing with sound colours, carried out through a permutation of the instruments in a context of a fixed harmonic set.

This permutation process, through a game of continuous *glissandi* between fixed points of a frozen harmony, aims to guarantee a sensation of perpetual movement to this layer composed by the strings, without allowing, however, that it clearly trace any path of directional harmonic displacement. The image that worked in constructing this sound mass carried out by the strings was one of a continuous movement of a gear spinning aimlessly: the anguish created by the conflict between the perception of a time that passes by and the spirit that continues to be a prisoner of memories.

### **3. To listen is to form images; to compose is to think through images**

Traditionally, the term *image* is associated with the sense of sight, therefore it has been restricted to activities that exclusively require the eyes and all the corporal mechanism involved in the act of seeing. This is what Google Images, for instance, tells us. When searching for the word “cicada” on the *images* tab, the Google search platform does not return any audio files with sounds of cicadas.<sup>7</sup> It provides a set of figures, drawings, engravings, etc.; images captured by photography or some that were even digitally generated. The cicada is depicted in a library of visual images, being exclusively perceived by the eyes. The curious thing is how uncommon it is to see a cicada and how ordinary is it to listen to one. At a very young age one learns what is a cicada through sound and not through visual images. It seems indeed to be of great challenge to distinguish a cicada in a set of visual images of several insects. On the other hand, it would possibly be the first insect to be identified if this exact set had been of sound images. After all, what is the *image* of a cicada?

In recent texts<sup>8</sup>, Rodolfo Caesar has discussed the idea of *sound* as *image* aiming to dilute the apparent dichotomy between these two terms. He highlights that, although the notion of image appears in some authors as an attribute of either the visual and sonorous field (Paul Valéry's and Walter Benjamin's fragments are referenced by Caesar), usually the word still “continues to refer to direct or indirect experiences of visuality, whereas sound belongs to an obscure region of perception” (Caesar, 2013, p. 4).

Perhaps the total identification between *image* and *sight* is also related to the fact that the

association between the words *image* and *imagination* is not necessarily immediate. In general, the term *image* tends to be used to indicate what is *outside* the subject, what is liable to be apprehended by the apparatus of vision, and not something that occurs *in* our minds, in an operation that relies on the interaction between subject and object. The idea of *image* emerges as an object, as a *thing*. A photograph or a drawing, i.e., the stimulation sources for the creation of mental images are already taken as image themselves. Image is then understood as a category conceived externally to the subject: the notions of *image* and *imagination* do not appear to be implied in one another.

Coming back to Caesar's texts, what can be observed is not only the defence of the dilution of the sound/image dichotomy, but also an effort to recover the exact sense of *imagination* inside the notion of *image*. Thus, Caesar alludes not only to the visual and sound *image*, but also to the visual and sound *imagination*.

“In my proposition the sound is already an image, even when the only available supports are the air and the brain, and when its transmission is from mouth to ear, or from things that are sonorous to the ear. Just as the mental visual image is a mental image, the sound image is also such, and it should not be mistaken for a “visualization”, or visual synaesthesia through the hearing sense. As is seeing, listening is always to form images.” (Caesar, 2013, p. 5)

In a paper developed for the *Charles Eliot Norton Lectures*<sup>9</sup>, Italo Calvino warned about the dangers of a crisis of *visibility* – and therefore of *imagination* – in the XXI century. For this paper, Calvino had a key question in mind: “Will the literature of the fantastic be possible in the twenty-first century, with the growing inflation of prefabricated images?” (Calvino, 1988: 95). After mapping out the value of *visibility* in the history of literature, he suggests a possible crisis of *visibility*, especially on account of the increasing visual bombardment offered by communication media, thus warning about the danger of the total dissolution of such a value.

“If I have included visibility in my list of values to be saved, it is to give warning of the danger we run in losing a basic human faculty: the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut, of bringing forth forms and colors from the line of black letters on a white page, and in fact of *thinking* in terms of images.” (Calvino, 1988, p. 92)

Calvino's forecasts and possible solutions concerning the maintenance of *visibility* as a literary value, it is important to observe the way he articulates this notion in his creative process. In his work consisting of stories, novels, and short text series, Calvino prioritised fictional narratives inherent to the fantasy literary genre. When describing the way he worked, Calvino identifies *image* as a trigger of his creative process.

“In devising a story, therefore, the first thing that comes to my mind is an image that for some reason strikes me as charged with meaning, even if I cannot formulate this meaning in discursive or conceptual terms. As soon as the image has become sufficiently clear in my mind, I set about developing it into a story; or better yet, it is the images themselves that develop their own implicit potentialities, the story they carry within them.” (Calvino, 1988, pp. 88-89)

Even with Calvino working in the key of fictional narratives, it is not from the definition of discursive scripts – that is, a story going on over time – that he makes images emerge in his

creative process. In contrast, it is from a determined image that a story – that will unfold in time and acquire a specific form – is constructed. For Calvino, writing is not a way of thinking through concepts, but rather it is thinking through images.

#### iv. *Depois da chuva* [After rain]

The third and last sonority of the piece – *Depois da chuva* – is marked by the presence of strings, wind instruments and tam-tam. This last sonority has been structured on an idea of choral texture, considering a more vertical listening. Different from the sonority *Condensation*, the sound mass shaped here is not marked by an internal multiplicity of voices, but by a more welded, solid and homogeneous sonority, thought of as a moving mountain. In spite of this, the wind instruments play a different role compared to the strings. Whereas an instrumental grouping sonority is actually meant to the strings, that is, a timbre fusing sonority, the wind instruments act in a little more autonomised way. Individually or in small combinations, the wind instruments execute short fragments that highlight some of the melodic movements embedded in the transitions between the different harmonic sets played by the strings. These short fragments are either completely synchronised with the transitions between the sets, or anticipate/delay certain melodic movements between them. By rupturing the mountain-massive sonority built by the strings, these fragments executed by the wind instruments contribute to the delineation of different topographies inside the essentially homophonic texture.

As a whole, *Depois da chuva* is a more lyrical and serene sonority. This sonority can be associated with the image of quietness after rain: an energy fall and the reduction of the flow-activity. However, different from the previous sonorities, *Depois da chuva* hosts highly accentuated conflicts. Marked by sudden contrasts (of dynamics, orchestration, and especially of register), from a lyric and serene sonority, at certain moments acidic and violent gestures break in, which end up characterising it as a spasmodic sonority.

*Evaporação, Condensação e Depois da chuva*: three sonorities that form *A menina que virou chuva*. The sound image of rain itself, of water falling from the sky – that is, the *precipitation* phase –, would act in the piece in the strongest possible way: for a *present absence*. Framing this climactic point of the rain cycle with images that precede it and follow it, I preferred to not make the rain itself sonorous. For me this is the great power of cutting/filtering that happens over the transition from *Condensação* to the *Depois da chuva* sonority. It is possible to perceive the abrupt conversion from an extremely dense sonority to a sudden calmness. At this point, a kind of gap is established right after cutting/filtering, since it takes a certain amount of time until the oboes can be heard, rupturing the texture with a short melodic fragment, which set off the *Depois da chuva* sonority. Between the abrupt cut of *Condensação* and the gradual beginning of the *Depois da chuva* sonority, only an *Eb2* pitch can be heard, accompanied by some other frequencies in the medium/low register that are provided by the rubbed tam-tam (now with a superball mallet with large head). This *Eb2* pitch, at first, is played by the double basses, but subsequently gains other colourful sounds, moving through the bass clarinet and the bass trombone. This sonority composed by the amalgam of the *Eb2* pitch with rubbed tam-tam sounds can be understood as a possibility of *silence sonification*. From the point of view of the form, I projected these “quiet” measures as a kind of “inside out climax.” From the point of view of sonority, they had been imagined as a black hole inside of the piece, where time and space would cease to exist. Poetically, at this moment, there would be a possible experience of eternity: the overwhelming image of *forever*, of *nevermore*.

#### 4. Where musical thoughts are originated

In the works of Saariaho, besides a complex multisensory field – where listening is modulated by a powerful multimodal perception – it is also possible to realise the importance of incorporating *narratives*. In her creative process, Saariaho recurrently takes literature as a starting point, film stories or even her own personal life situations, i.e., of her own life experience. In any case, it is important to observe that the narratives are also used as spaces filled with imagetic content, and not exactly stories or scripts to be developed over time.

“Unlike many other composers who emphasize the abstract autonomy of musical works, Saariaho does not try to avoid drawing connections. In the program notes, she often describes the literary or visual impulse that led her to compose the work and may have provided both the title and the focal point for the composition. She also sees the connections between her own life and her works: “everything I experience and live, I absorb into myself and there my musical thoughts also originate.””  
(Moisala, 2009, p. 54)

Some might think that musical composition should be completely free from the affection zone, feelings, references, subjectivities, and everything that is conventionally called *extramusical*. From my experience, it is truly complicated, if not impossible, to separate these things. My projects are often initiated by “non-musical” images and it takes a long time until I decide how to spread them in a musical manner. Most of the time, these images are complex multisensory constructions: the image of a liquid piano (*Tátil*, 2007), the image of a lagoon (*Lagoa*, 2008), the images of some imaginary beings (*Do livro dos seres imaginários*, 2010), the image of a spinning top (*LAN*, 2011), the image of a city that grows in concentric circles (*Olinda*, 2012), the images of the different states of matter (*Estudo sobre os estados da matéria*, 2012), the image of death (*A menina que virou chuva*, 2013), the image of the trajectory of a small rock launched with a slingshot (*Forquilha, couro e tripa de mico*, 2013), the modulated images of the “temporality of life” and “temporality of the river” (*A terceira margem do rio*, 2014).<sup>10</sup> What sprouts from experience turns into sonority; sonority itself is also considered experience.

#### v. A sound image for *A menina que virou chuva*

The death of my niece – Heloísa, to whom the piece is dedicated – was deafening to me. My sound memory of that moment always seemed like the sensation of a clogged ear, as if one goes downward through the hills towards the seacoast, or when one listens to the exterior underwater: some sparse, hazy sounds, barely outlined. The images that I still retain from that day are much more visual. On the other hand, my sister, Heloísa's mother, has always explicated in our talks a very lucid sound memory of everything that she went through that day. Thinking these differences through, I have reached an interesting reasoning: she experienced the loss of her child firstly through listening. The mental images that she produced throughout the 40 minutes of Heloísa's life were essentially stimulated by sounds, since the situation was a C-section surgery and there was a cloth that is usually hung vertically between the belly button and the breasts of the woman. My sister could not see it, only listen to it. On the other hand, on the other side of the glass, I had a global view of the surgery centre, but I could not hear. I have experienced the birth and the death of Heloísa in silence, just with the eyes. Yet my sister experienced it with the ears.

My experience was purely visual. Hers was essentially acousmatic.

I don't sleep.  
 I still hear the sounds:  
 Of my hands beating against the dopamine;  
 Of the aspirator suctioning my inside;  
 Of the buzzing of the never used incubator;  
 Of the weeping from of who loved as I;  
 Of the silence in which you came in and remained  
 Of the pain to only see you once.  
 The sound of emptiness.

(*7 Dias Depois* [7 Days Later], by Daniela Bonafé, 2012 - <http://www.danielabonafe.com>)

In *A menina que virou chuva* I freely linked three phases of mourning to the three stages of the cycle of rain. And for each phase/stage I imagined a sonority. In the first sonority I associated the phase of *Evaporation* to an initial stage of mourning: the loss, an immense suction and dispersion of energy, the rarefaction, the emptiness, silence. In the second sonority, *Condensation*, I dealt with the concentration of densities, the accumulation, the image of despair, the upheaval. And then, finally, the image of precipitation, the rain, would follow. But the piece does not allow for this positive outcome: the closing of a cycle that culminates in a rain that washes. So I chose one cut in this cycle, an empty space (“*the sound of emptiness*”). And what brings the piece to an end after this emptiness is a sonority that I have called *Depois da chuva*. This sonority even evokes some lyricism, something that could sprout from resignation, from an after-loss serenity. But it necessarily admits the irruption of screams, spasms and memories; three distinct sonorities that would orchestrate together a slightly more complex sound image: the image of death.

## Endnotes

1. Full score available at: <http://www.valeriabonafe.com/a-menina-que-virou-chuva>. A comprehensive, thorough and illustrated analysis of the piece *A menina que virou chuva* can be found in my PhD dissertation entitled *A casa e a represa, a sorte e o corte: ou a composição musical enquanto imaginação de formas, sonoridades, tempos [e espaços]* (2016).
2. The concept of sonority is grounded and widely discussed by Makis Solomos (2013). According to him, “this notion designates a global entity integrally constructed and composed from the interior, resulting from the dissolution of the classical sound dimensions (pitch, rhythm, timbre...), that is, from the loss of their autonomy. The recomposition and fusion of these dimensions generate sonority as surplus, as emerging quality. It also stems from the fusion of form and material. The choice of the term sonority indicates that we are close to the notion of ‘sound’, but of a compound, articulated, and constructed sound, that is to say, an artefact and not a natural sound (...)” (p. 331).
3. In this article I use the Benjaminian concept of experience (*Erfahrung*), according to the perspective of the Brazilian philosopher Olgária Matos. “What does experience mean? Etymologically, the word that Walter Benjamin uses is *Erfahrung*. *Erfahrung* in German, it means experience and the radical is *fahr*, which originates *fahren*, which means to travel. In Old German, *fahr* means to cross a region during a trip through unknown places. And the Latin word for experience has as a radical *per*: to leave a

perimeter, to leave the condition of the already known and already lived to expand 'lived experiences', circumstances and repercussions of these new circumstances over our lives. And from *per* also comes the word *periculum*: to cross a region during a trip, in which dangers can strike. And for such danger, there is the word that relates to *periculum*, which is *oportunus* which is *portus* which means exit. Thus, the experiences that happened to us during a journey into the unknown, over a trip, are experiences that widen our identity, our knowledge, our sensitivity and our conditions in the world” (‘Tempo sem experiência - Olgária Matos’, 2009).

3. Full score available at: <http://www.valeriabonafe.com/a-menina-que-virou-chuva>. A comprehensive, thorough and illustrated analysis of the piece *A menina que virou chuva* can be found in my PhD dissertation entitled *A casa e a represa, a sorte e o corte: ou a composição musical enquanto imaginação de formas, sonoridades, tempos [e espaços]* (2016).
4. In Caesar's text the musical term *tessitura* is used metaphorically as a synonym for *thickness*. His argument in favour of the widening (or the complete dilution) of any limit of *tessitura* implies, therefore, in the broadening of the comprehensiveness of the concept of sonority.
5. As Caesar points out, in this conception of *sonority* – understood as a space of definite thickness – there is something of a Hanslickian, formalistic nature. He also remarks that within this same perspective, such approaches as those of Schaeffer and Smalley, were, in certain contexts, converted into a translated version of *structural listening*, regardless of their authors.
6. I recollect the article *Som e sonoridade: as imagens do tempo na escuta musical* (2007), of Rodrigo Fonseca and Rodrigues, in which the author carries through a synthesis of the notion of *sonority* displayed by Silvio Ferraz in *Livro das sonoridades* (2005): “It is at this final moment that we fall back on what Ferraz tells us about what defines *sonority*, and on why this is the concept that expresses what the insufficient concepts of sound, of sound object, of sound or music form and matter, would not reach. The suffix of the word ‘sonority’ denotes, generically, qualitative and adjective timbre aspects of the sound. The concept of *sonority* describes firstly the process, the totality of the unfoldings implied in the listening, and not the sonorous thing. The issue is neither about listening to the sound, nor to what is in the sound, but to what is *within* the listening, in the powers that affect us and that move around, that are created by the listening” (Rodrigues, 2007: 82).
7. In March 2016, Google added animal sounds to its search features. Typing “lion sound”, for example, directly on the tab “All”, one can listen to a roar and find some other sounds of different animals. Since then, the feature has not been expanded.
8. Here I especially refer to the texts *O som como imagem* (2012) and *A espessura da sonoridade: entre o som e a imagem* (2013), but also *As grandes orelhas da escuta* (2007) and the book *Círculos Ceifados* (2008).
9. These lectures were to be delivered during the 1985–6 academic year at Harvard University, but the author died just before his departure to the United States. They were posthumously published in 1988 under the title *Lezioni americane: Sei proposte per Il prossimo millennio (Six memos for the next millennium)*.
10. Scores and recordings of my works are available on the website <http://www.valeriabonafe.com>.

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## **Biography**

I am a composer, researcher and music teacher. I was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1984. I studied composition with Aylton Escobar and Silvio Ferraz. I received my academic education – Bachelor, Master and PhD (Marcos Branda Lacerda as supervisor) – at the University of São Paulo (2002-16). I also studied at Musikhochschule Stuttgart (2013-14), with Marco Stroppa. My works have been performed in concerts and festivals in Brazil and in other countries (Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, and USA). Currently I am a teacher at the Sao Paulo State School of Music, a member of Sonora - Musics and Feminisms, and a researcher at NuSom - Research Center on Sonology. My works are available at <http://www.valeriabonafe.com>.