

Singing The Music Of R. Murray Schafer In The Soundscape Of Nature

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Resumo: Trata-se de um depoimento de seu trabalho junto a Murray Schafer, que escreveu várias obras especialmente para ela e a colocou como personagem no ciclo *Patria*. Neste trabalho, enfatiza a jornada épica do Lobo e da Princesa que, no seu dizer, refletem-se, de algum modo, na vida de cada pessoa e destaca a importância de cantar junto à natureza.

Palavras-chave: o Ciclo *Patria*; canto e natureza; paisagem sonora.

Abstract: This is a testimony of a work in collaboration with Murray Schafer, that composed several works especially to her and gave her some roles as a personage in the *Patria Cycle*. In this text James emphasizes the epic journey of Wolf and the Princess that, as she says, are reflected in some way in the life of each person; she also highlights the importance of singing in the nature.

Keywords: the *Patria Cycle*; singing and nature; soundscape.

My collaboration with R. Murray Schafer or, OUR Murray Schafer, as he is fondly known, began in 1983 when I auditioned for the role of Hasroet, Goddess of the Necropolis, in the ritual-drama, RA, Patria 6, part of Murray's monumental opus called THE PATRIA CYCLE. This work consists of 12 parts and has an ongoing storyline which leads two protagonists, hero and heroine, through a labyrinthine theatrical journey from Heaven to Hell and back to Heaven. The cycle begins with a fall from the starry sky, a wounding, a separation, and ends with a resurrection, a sacred marriage, or hierosgamos, the union of Heaven and Earth in the form of a Princess of the Stars and a wild Canadian Wolf.

In many ways the Patria cycle emerged out of Murray's own life but there is no question that we all find points of identification with the epic journey of Princess and Wolf, which is why so often people leave these events crying or laughing, above all, transformed. Murray dug deeply into the unconscious with the Patria cycle and was, admittedly, influenced by the thought of the great Swiss psychotherapist, Carl Gustav Jung. Jung's theory of the archetypes, the Anima and Animus, the Hierosgamos and the Shadow can all be found in Patria. The cycle is a journey from brokenness to wholeness, from separation to reunion, from wounding to healing, from hell to heaven.

Auditioning for the role of Hasroet threw me from my own personal hell into the Egyptian Underworld where RA, the Sun God, descends into the deepest, darkest depths to encounter Apophis, the monstrous Serpent/Dragon, intent on devouring all light, intent on taking the soul of the participant forever captive. Apophis is also the Three-Horned Enemy in the Patria Prologue: The Princess of the Stars, the Minotaur in Patria 5: The Crown of Ariadne, or the Industrialist, Murdeth (The Murderer of Nature) who clear cuts the forest in Patria 9: The Enchanted Forest. Murray presents the eternal encounter between Light and Darkeness, Good and Evil, but knows that Light is birthed out of darkness, that suffering leads to redemption, that tears lead to joy. There can be no side-stepping of the enemy but, in the end, reconciliation and a new creation are born.

In RA the cast worked the night shift. We had breakfast at 6 in the evening and worked until 6 in the morning, went home to sleep during the light and returned to work during the dark. We became night creatures the better to understand how necessary darkness is for creativity and the birth of the soul. Our bodies, minds, hearts, souls and spirits were transformed by living, singing, performing in the dark and our shadow sides were given full rein, at least, as characters in the Egyptian Underworld, but also in our daily lives. We were all fighting with our inner Apophis, sometimes overcoming, often being overcome. Singing at midnight or in the early hours of the morning is not easy, but as we adjusted to the clock of the Underworld we all found a way to perform that did justice to Murray's ecstatic music. After RA, Murray and I moved in together and our lives were changed forever.

In the summer of 1985 I accompanied Murray to the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta, there to sing the part of the Princess in the *Patria Prologue*. This piece takes place at dawn on and around a lake, Two Jack Lake, in this case. The cast had to be up and at their positions before the sun rose. As the voice of The Princess, I was an invisible performer, situated at least one kilometre away on the far side of the lake. I had to dress in yellow rain gear, with scarf, hat, gloves and a cardboard megaphone, a thermos of hot tea and honey at the ready to keep me warm and my voice lubricated. The Princess's Aria is extremely challenging – a 12-tone work that sounds like the call of the iconic Canadian Loon – the forlorn, haunting sound that describes two separated souls calling to one another over a great distance. In Banff, the effect was spectacular because the echoes off the woods and mountains resounded up to four times. The first time I experienced this echo effect I understood Murray's genius in collaborating with Nature. As Robert Everett-Green wrote for the Toronto newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, "Very few people do theatre the way R. Murray Schafer does, with God as co-designer of stage and lighting..." (And, I would add, sound). "The risks are high with such a fickle collaborator, but when it works, the effect is beyond description."

Just what Murray intended – to get beyond words and to enter the state of wonderment, the state of awe where words no longer suffice. Fortunately, this work was recorded by the Banff Centre for their archives and you are able to hear some of the echo effects. Murray generally did not approve of the overuse of technology and he always insisted that an audience be at a *Patria* show IN PERSON. He wanted no distance between you and the drama, no virtual reality. Only the very real moment could satisfy him and he knew that we too were hungry to experience ourselves as part of Nature, not as her observers and controllers. That is another reason that there are few images or recordings of some of the *Patria* works, particularly, of the *Epilogue*, *Patria 12: And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon*. This final piece takes place in the bush of north-central Ontario, without an audience. You have to be a participant in the work to experience the magic. You can't buy a ticket or take a photo. You can't listen to a recording. The experience cannot be stored technically. I stand in complete agreement with him on this. Nothing can capture the mystery of Murray's *Patria* except your own soul. You have to stand in the rain, embrace the hot sun, sing to the hills, dance around the Great Wheel if you want the experience.

While in Banff Murray and I visited a number of different outdoor venues where I sang the work he wrote for me entitled 'Sun Father, Sky Mother.' That was the original title. It is a solo piece with nine verses and consists of nine Invocations to different parts of Nature: Sun, Sky, Earth, Moon, Stars, Forests, Birds, Fish and Animals. It ends with the voice howling like a Wolf. I sat by the side of a murmuring stream and sang softly; stood on a mountaintop and sang to the Sun, walked through a forest chanting to the resonant woods. In each case we invoked Nature, sang her praise, asked her blessing, embraced her, recognized her beauty and her spirit. I

remember the first time Murray took me out to the forest near the Centre and asked me to sing. Being a trained opera singer i was convinced that my voice would be muffled but, on the contrary, it was like singing inside a Stradivarius violin. The sound was so full, rich and resonant that I stopped singing in pure awe. Murray led me and all the team into the realm of wonder, that place that always lies just beyond our normal ways of seeing and hearing. He was constantly trying to provide opportunities for everyone to experience the Great Spirit around us, present in Nature. He set a piece at the time of day when he knew the full moon would flood the scene; he understood how sound carries at different times and seasons; he knew the timbres of each voice and instrument and he 'orchestrated,' literally, an unforgettable and ineffable experience of the Divine for each of us. He channelled the Divine and gave it to us!

There are innumerable experiences with which I could regale you, stories of partnerships with wild creatures who crossed our paths at dawn, with the Northern Lights, with the exhilarating Chorus of the Dawn Birds but, for now, I would like to recall the last five years of Murray's blessed life as I witnessed it. I say 'blessed' because, in spite of the never-ending challenges of getting his works and music staged, he continued to believe in his mission. In 2013 Murray was diagnosed with dementia and in 2016 he had a fall which necessitated the need for me to become his 24/7 caregiver. That was November 11, 2016, but earlier that year, *Patria 10: 'The Spirit Garden,'* was staged by an amateur group in Cold Springs, Ontario, on a beautiful 200 acre organic farm overlooking Lake Ontario. Murray was able to attend this performance and most of the rehearsals, the last performance of a *Patria* work to be performed in his lifetime. Part 1 took place in June, the time of the Planting and Part 2 in the fall, at a banquet of the harvest of the garden. After the banquet, as we sat together watching the garden being set on fire in preparation for the winter season, the glow on Murray's face echoed the glow of the fiery garden. Murray was now in his own winter but the inner glow of his spirit kept on for the next five years. During that blessed time Murray would continue to sing, chant and compose little vocal riffs as he wandered our old country farm house. He gradually forgot all that things that had made his creative life a challenge and he became the Divine Child, the Child of the Sacred Marriage of Spirit and Nature. He continued walking the labyrinth of the soul but he was getting closer and closer to its heart. He wandered the house, tapping on the furniture, singing, moving things, organizing stage 'sets,' but he was always, always, LISTENING! Murray taught me and so many others to listen.' He taught us to have 'Thinking Ears.' He opened us to the soundscapes that brought him joy and, above all, he taught us to collaborate with Nature and with one another. His journey entered its next phase on August 14, 2021 when he returned to God. This summer we take his mortal remains to the Great Wheel of the Wolf Project, the place he loved best. Dearest Murray, we love you, we miss you. Like Shalana, the great,

shining, departed soul of Patria's Epilogue, you are gone to your 'Elsewhere,' but "your voice is everywhere."

Eleanor James

For more information about the Patria Cycle please see 'Patria: The Complete Cycle' by R. Murray Schafer at Arcana Editions.