

Back from Exile: *Nueva Canción* and *Canción Protesta* as Cultural Heritage in Early 1980s Argentina

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Abstract: This article examines the social construction of singer Mercedes Sosa's artistic persona following her return to Argentina from exile. Through a close analysis of her February 1982 concerts in Buenos Aires, I parse the ways in which the music cultures with which Sosa was associated signified aesthetically and politically in the wake of Argentina's last military dictatorship (1976-1983). I argue that, in this context, Sosa's persona was socially efficacious because it embodied an ambiguously valenced form of cultural heritage, one that lent itself to the ahistorical exaltation of shared traditions, as well as to a historically grounded, politicized practice of recollection.

Résumé : Cet article examine la construction sociale de la persona de la chanteuse Mercedes Sosa lors de son retour en Argentine après des années d'exil. Par le biais d'une analyse approfondie de ses concerts de février 1982 à Buenos Aires, je décrypte les significations esthétiques et politiques des cultures musicales auxquelles Sosa était associée à la suite de la dernière dictature militaire en Argentine (1976-1983). J'avance que, dans ce contexte, la persona de Sosa était efficace sur le plan social parce qu'elle incarnait une forme de patrimoine culturel à signification ambiguë, se prêtant à la fois à l'exaltation anhistorique des traditions partagées et à une pratique mémorielle politisée et ancrée dans l'histoire.

In February 1982, after more than three years of absence from Argentina's concert halls, singer Mercedes Sosa returned to Buenos Aires for a series of 13 performances at the Teatro Ópera. A well-known member of Argentina's Communist Party and an iconic figure of a politicized current of folk music known as the *Movimiento del Nuevo Cancionero* (New Songbook Movement, hereafter MNC), Sosa had left Argentina in 1978 after repeated death threats, first, from the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance¹ and, following the 1976 coup, from the country's military authorities. In October 1978, shortly before her departure, the local daily *La Nación* reported that Sosa, along with 300 concert attendees, had been arrested during a performance,

presumably because “her repertoire included protest songs” (qtd. in Marchini 2008: 276).² Although Sosa resisted that categorization of her repertoire (Figueroa 1982), the idea that she was not simply a performer of folkloric song genres, but primarily a protest singer, was a widely held one. In 1970s Argentina, the term *canción protesta*, or “protest song,” conjured up a sonic aesthetic (solemn, emphatic vocal styles, Andean musical idioms and instruments³) and a constellation of words – liberation, revolution, *pueblo* – that, in popular perceptions, were imbricated with both vague notions of political upheaval and specific events, like the Cuban Revolution, with which Sosa and other MNC artists had deep political and affective affinities.⁴

When Sosa returned to Argentina in 1982, the “protest” songs in her repertoire did not seem to hold the same promise (or threat) of radical political transformation that many had ascribed to them only a decade before. In the wake of a succession of violent civil-military coups in various South American countries in the mid-1970s, it was difficult to imagine how to “dar vuelta el viento” (reverse the wind) of political repression and bring about “el triunfo ... del tiempo nuevo” (the triumph ... of the new time),⁵ a time when the land would belong to “los que luchan, / los maestros, los hacheros, los obreros” (those who struggle, / teachers, lumberjacks, workers).⁶ In this context, the tropes of regeneration and change of emblematic MNC songs like “Triunfo Agrario” (Agrarian Triumph) and “Cuando tenga la tierra” (When I Have the Land) could be and were, indeed, construed by many commentators as metaphors of anodyne humanitarian aspirations. Referencing the Nueva Canción repertoire that Sosa performed in her 1982 concerts, journalist Alicia Pereyra wrote, for example, that “[t]he songs with social content, far from belonging to what we used to call songs of ‘protest,’ are an anthem of hope for the peace of mankind and of the American soul” (1982: 3).

Through a close analysis of Sosa’s 1982 performances at the Ópera, this article examines the profound transformation of that musical corpus’s efficacy, a transformation at which Pereyra’s description hints. In the first part of the article, I draw on music and performance studies scholars’ elaborations of Erving Goffman’s frame theory to account for the complex cultural operations through which performers’ artistic personae crystallize, come to be identified with a particular repertoire, and signify aesthetically and politically. Through this analytical framework, I consider the discussions and negotiations, among competing actors, that intervened in the construction of Sosa’s 1982 persona. I then look at how the public discourses surrounding her persona intersected with ideas of authenticity and compromise/complicity that have structured dominant discourses on, and practices associated with, “Argentine popular music.”

The final part of my discussion focuses on the music cultures to which Sosa gave pride of place in her 1982 repertoire. Here, I parse the ways in which the ideology of authenticity – central to one of these cultures (Argentine rock) – became intertwined, through Sosa’s persona, with a societal yearning to recollect, in the double sense of conjuring up the memory of the victims of state-sponsored terror and of congregating to reassemble the fragments of a dislocated community. In this part of my discussion, I analyze the aesthetic and political strategies that underlie the organization and repertoire of Sosa’s performances. I argue that these strategies, shaped by different modes of negotiation, hinged crucially on an ambiguously valenced idea of national cultural heritage, one that lent itself to the ahistorical exaltation of ostensibly shared traditions, as well as to a historically grounded practice of recollection that propitiated the resurgence of silenced voices.

Performers’ “Musical Personae”: A Collective Construction

Writing against the grain of the musicological tradition, in which the score and the authoritative figure of the composer are given pride of place, scholars working in a variety of disciplines have over the past 30 years increasingly focused on the modes of performance, reception, and social interaction through which musical meaning is constructed.⁷ Some of the most productive theoretical models to come out of this approach draw on Erving Goffman’s frame theory, to which ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (1984), sociologist Pablo Vila (1989), and, more recently, performance studies scholar Philip Auslander (2006a) have had recourse in thinking through the signifying processes at work in the discursive domain of music. Frames, in Goffman’s theory, are “the principles of organization which govern [social] events ... and our subjective involvement in them” (Goffman 1974: 10). Both Feld and Auslander put this conceptualization of frames to work in order to account for the social processes through which sonic events are defined, diffused, and received as music.

In Feld’s analysis of the music communication process, frames operate at the juncture between the moment when the listener first recognizes a sound object and the subsequent unraveling and crystallization of a series of simultaneous “interpretive moves” that “act roughly like ... social processing conventions” (Feld 1984: 10) through which listeners “situate, entangle, and untangle this [initial] engagement/recognition” (12). Similarly, Auslander defines frames as the basic social parameters that render experience (e.g., a sonic event) intelligible and decodable in particular ways – as music instead of noise, for instance – but do not dictate the full range of interpretive practices,

nor regulate all the processes through which meaning is constructed. Thus, frames provide “a set of expectations but [do] not in any way determine what will actually happen in a given performance; that reality unfolds through convention-bound but unscripted negotiation between performers and audience in each instance” (Auslander 2006a: 107).

Auslander mobilizes Goffman’s frame theory and analysis of interactions in everyday life to illuminate, in particular, the process through which performers’ “musical personae” are enacted and construed. The concept of musical persona refers, in his theoretical model, to the identity, or version of self, that musicians perform within the social frame of music. This concept, however, does not denote a discrete identity. A performer’s musical persona is, rather, a version of self that overlaps with at least two other forms of identity: “the real person (the performer as human being)” and “the character (a figure portrayed in a song text)” (Auslander 2006b: 4). Multiple selves thus converge in a performer’s musical persona. In the case of an artist like Mercedes Sosa, aspects of her life that are extraneous to the social frame of music, such as her humble origins and regional identity (she is from the Argentine Northwest province of Tucumán), are systematically conflated with archetypal figures – the Andean Mother Earth (*Pachamama*), the Argentine and Latin American “folk” – associated with her public image, and the characters and poetic voices of the songs she interprets.

The multiple dimensions of a performer’s identity coalesce and become socially efficacious through a series of cultural *bricolages* and transtextual practices. The performer and other social actors engage in these practices by deploying interpretive moves and discursive and performance strategies that are shaped by, and also act upon, superposed social frames, not all of which pertain to the discursive domain of music. The construction of a performer’s musical persona can be understood, therefore, as a collective construction that entails the interaction of various social actors and forces. As such, it is a process that condenses a set of claims, expectations, and conventions – concerning musical genre and social, political, and cultural identities, among others – that vary according to the social frames within which the interaction takes place.

The Meaning(s) of Mercedes Sosa’s Return from Exile

When Mercedes Sosa returned to Argentina in 1982, every aspect of her musical persona, from the poster and newspaper ads announcing her concerts, to her repertoire and public declarations, came under public scrutiny and became the locus of a negotiation whose outcome seemed to hold the answer

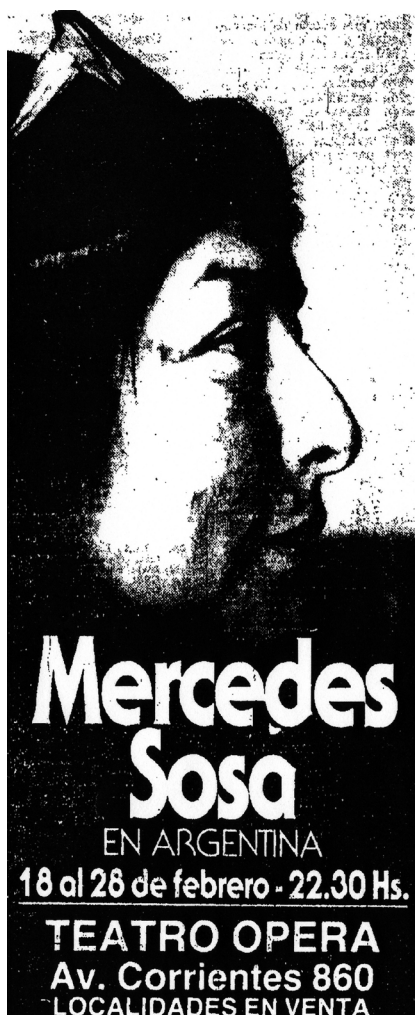


Fig. 1. Publicity for Mercedes Sosa's Concerts (La Nación, 14 February 1982, section 2, p. 9).

to crucial societal questions and, for some, even the promise of political deliverance. To ensure that her return would not go unnoticed, Daniel Grinbank, the rock manager who organized her concerts at the Ópera, undertook a dangerous publicity stunt: he plastered the capital's walls with posters featuring Sosa's familiar face, followed by the words "Mercedes Sosa en Argentina" (Mercedes Sosa in Argentina). A concert ad was also published in the country's major newspapers (see Fig. 1), including the notoriously pro-government *La Nación*, which military authorities and their supporters were likely to read. Sosa's iconographic presence in Buenos Aires did more than just inform potential concert-goers of the dates and location of her performances; it virtually put an end to her exile by embedding her in the country's cultural and political centre.

For a part of Sosa's core audience, made up primarily of university students and militants, her iconographic presence in public spaces evoked an ethos of solidarity and collective, festive forms of political action, which constituted the utopian underpinnings of the emancipatory attempts at refiguring the national community that had been violently disarticulated by the Triple A

and the *Proceso de reorganización nacional*.⁸ While the announcement of Sosa's return to Argentina generated for many a desire to re-member these forms of sociability and communion, the more experienced, politicized sectors of Sosa's audience were both expectant and uneasy about her much publicized return. By 1982, these sectors had witnessed the Proceso's devastating effects on the country's cultural landscape and the ways in which once combative musicians had been compelled to "relieve" their artistic personae of burdensome political

associations. This audience was troubled by Sosa's public hypervisibility, for the proliferation of images of a proscribed artist in the Proceso's public sphere often presaged a fraught aesthetic and political adaptation to the new cultural order. According to historian Sergio Pujol, her sudden, uncensored ubiquity in the Proceso's cityscape raised suspicions about a possible compromise with the junta: "Having some doubts was not whimsical. Had she returned through an agreement with the government? Would she continue singing the songs that had made her famous?" (2005: 209).⁹

As Pujol indicates, the issue of how Mercedes Sosa contended with the military regime was one of the elements at stake in the construction of her 1982 musical persona. The question of popular musicians' negotiation, collaboration, or compromise/complicity with political, military, and cultural institutions is, more broadly, one that pervades discourses formulated by various actors (fans, journalists, musicians, popular music scholars) about the political and social functions of Argentine popular music during the civil-military dictatorship (hereafter CMD). A detailed analysis of the significant role that the notion of compromise/complicity has played in the aesthetic valuation of cultural responses to the Proceso is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I would like to briefly consider the relationship between this notion and two ideas, "authenticity" and "purity," that are deeply embedded in dominant discourses on popular music in Argentina.

Ideologies of Authenticity, Narratives of Resistance

Scholars of popular culture have illuminated the influence that ideologies of authenticity and purity have had in the definition and internal stratification of "popular music."¹⁰ In their shifting iterations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, cultural authenticity and purity were successively conceptualized as the faithful mimesis of folk traditions and the aesthetic commitment to a modernist notion of "creative originality" (Díaz 2009: 161-2). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ideas of purity and authenticity, tied to the myth of Argentina's Catholic, Spanish cultural lineage (Chamosa 2008: 101), were cultivated by a conservative elite preoccupied with preserving the integrity of rural folk traditions – and, thereby, the essence of nationhood – from the spectre of cultural dissolution agitated by the fin-de-siècle waves of European immigration (Díaz 2009: 124). In the 1950s and 1960s, these ideas were retooled and put to work in articulating left- and right-wing discourses on "national culture." Such discourses sought to distinguish between, on one hand, "authentic" folk traditions and, on the other hand, the local avatars

of Anglo-American musical styles (twist, rock ‘n’ roll) and unorthodox interpretations of tango and folkloric musical genres. Characterized by Argentina’s traditionalist cultural establishment as travesties of true national culture and forms of political alienation, the self-proclaimed avant-gardes of tango, folk music, and rock generated their own ethical and aesthetic norms. These norms were also largely predicated on notions of purity and authenticity – understood as “creative originality” – that served, in turn, as the basis for practices of exclusion.

Rock was one of the music cultures in which this logic operated in explicit terms. In the 1960s and early 1970s, *música progresiva* – as Argentine rock was known before it became a “national” genre – defined itself against *música complaciente*, or complaisant music, a style that came to be perceived by the former’s audience and performers as the epitome of *transa*, or compromise/complicity, with the “mind-numbing” musical genres promoted by a profit-oriented culture industry. The idea that *música progresiva*’s purity and authenticity stemmed from its opposition to the industry’s ideology and *modus operandi* was and continues to be a powerful founding myth, even though *música progresiva*’s modes of production, performance, and circulation were, from their inception, dependent on the industry’s technologies of recording and distribution (Alabarces 2008: sec. 4). This myth was used, nonetheless, to stigmatize other popular music genres and rock subgenres, especially in the 1970s. This constant, ever-expanding process of exclusion resulted in a complex internal stratification of Argentine rock (Vila 1985: 139-45) and, in some cases, in a sectarian aesthetics and politics that occluded the various forms of negotiation that shaped its history.

Such sectarian discourses and practices were by no means exclusive to rock culture. They were also formulated and enacted by the inside actors of other music movements and by external commentators. Indeed, many accounts of the history of popular music during the CMD implicitly or explicitly subscribe to an ideology of authenticity and purity that excludes the idea, and the reality, of negotiation. Such accounts tend to inscribe this ideology in a moral narrative that is articulated around vaguely defined notions of resistance and compromise/complicity. By imbuing musical performances with a political meaning they may not have originally had (or, at least, not according to the terms of such a narrative), it becomes possible to remember and retrospectively classify these performances as acts of resistance or complicity with the Proceso. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that popular music events and performers did not partake in the construction of political, cultural, and social subjectivities through which the CMD’s hegemony was contested or, conversely, validated and reinforced. However, rather than

attempting to inscribe the history of popular music in a moral narrative, I am interested in examining the ways in which these subjectivities articulate, and are articulated by, the modes of social interaction and negotiation that musical performance makes possible. My reading of Mercedes Sosa's 1982 concerts in Buenos Aires attempts to complicate the received, often superficial, notions of resistance that underlie many accounts of popular music during the CMD. I argue that while these concerts were the site of important moments and gestures of resistance through which critical discourses were formulated with respect to the Proceso's cultural and political project, they were also the locus of a tense process of negotiation that produced an agonistic form of consensus around a polysemous version of national culture embodied by Sosa.¹¹

(Re)framing Mercedes Sosa's Musical Persona

By saturating the Proceso's highly regimented public space with images of a censored popular icon, Daniel Grinbank's publicity strategy disrupted the logic of silencing and erasure on which that space was predicated. However, this ostensibly transgressive act was keyed in ambiguous terms that attenuated the authorities' reaction to Sosa's return to Argentina and were, therefore, conducive to a negotiation with the government's censorship organs. Auslander (2006b) identifies musical genres as social frames that are critical in shaping the ways in which we perceive sonic events. Genre framing contributed to laying the groundwork for a negotiation and the working out of a consensus before and during Sosa's performances. The concert posters and ads presented viewers with an austere, black-and-white close-up photograph of Sosa, from which all explicit references to her connections with Argentina's MNC and Latin American Nueva Canción were absent. This blurring of the distinctive generational and genre identities, which had been central to the construction of Sosa's musical persona in the 1960s and 1970s, not only rendered the image less confrontational, but also transformed it into a cultural object to which multiple meanings, outside the constraints of a specific genre, could be attached.

Another significant element of the ads and posters was the phrase "Mercedes Sosa in Argentina." While the allusion to Sosa's exile was certainly implicit in this phrase, a less politically inflected interpretation was also possible in 1982: the words "in Argentina" could simply be construed as a reference to the presence of a world-renowned artist in the country. The transformation of Sosa's persona, especially at the international level, brought this meaning to the fore. Between 1978 and 1982, Sosa had done a successful

series of concerts throughout the world, and her artistic legitimacy had grown within a budding world music industry that appealed not only to the European left (her traditional audience outside Argentina), but also to a broader market. Her international prestige was a recurrent theme in the reviews of her Ópera concerts published by Argentine newspapers, which echoed the international press's praise of the "universal" ethical and aesthetic values that Sosa conveyed in her performances:

About her concerts in Paris, one could read a few days ago, in the French weekly *L'Express*, that "at the Bobino [Theatre], [the audience] experiences one of those great and rare moments of *art and truth*." Exactly the same could be said about the night of her debut at the Ópera. (Jubiloso reencuentro 1982: 1; emphasis added)

Sosa's persona could no longer be apprehended solely through the prism of Argentina's recent history, for it now signified within other frames, namely those of an international music industry that was successful in marketing her repertoire, voice, and appearance as symbols of an exotic, telluric aesthetic, an aesthetic that appeared foreign, yet conveyed a visceral truth and atemporal emotions common to human beings across cultures and geographies. In this context, it became possible to overlook or downplay her musical persona's political dimensions and, thereby, transform this persona into the embodiment of "universal" (non-partisan and ahistorical) artistic and moral values.

If we use Auslander's gloss of Goffman's frame theory to understand and describe the cultural and political negotiation over the meaning of Sosa's 1982 concerts, we can characterize it as a series of successive "keyings": a process that involves the imposition of further levels of framing on the basic "event" frame produced, in this case, by Grinbank's publicity strategy. The audience who attended the performances partook of this process early on by rushing to buy the tickets for the announced concert dates. The fact that Sosa could fill, over the course of 13 performances, a 2,400-seat venue in Buenos Aires's central Corrientes Avenue was a clear sign of her popularity and artistic prestige. This public display of respect for Sosa was political insofar as it implied the failure, albeit partial, of the CMD's censorship policy vis-à-vis the musicians that it had identified as "key communicators," a term that was used to refer to those artists who were suspected of surreptitiously carrying out political organizations' proselytizing work in the area of culture (Pujol 2005: 23). The military authorities were fully aware that Grinbank's spectacular publicity strategy and the audience's overwhelming support for Sosa meant

that her artistic return to Argentina was a *fait accompli*. Indeed, censoring the concerts would have further eroded the junta's meagre political capital and overtly politicized an event that was not being explicitly keyed as such. With this in mind, various military bureaucrats decided to engage in a negotiation with Sosa's representatives: her son, Fabián Matus, and Grinbank. They thus hoped to have as much control as possible over the ways in which the event would be resignified, especially by Sosa's traditional audience, during the performances. Their goal was to impose an aesthetic frame on all other possible keyings of the performances, a frame that would enable the government to dilute the concerts' political content, while effectively demonstrating that there was no official censorship against artists like Sosa.

The strategy to reduce this event to a simple musical performance seemed, at first, to work, since Sosa and her representatives immediately complied with the basic conditions formulated by the military authorities. They promised not to transform the concerts into a political act and agreed to remove certain songs from the repertoire, including Violeta Parra's "La Carta" (The Letter) and Susana Lago and José Luis Castiñeira de Dios's "Fuerza" (Force) (Matus). Moreover, Grinbank accepted the presence of policemen on the theatre premises, as long as they dressed in plain clothes and refrained from carrying out "security" procedures that would provoke or offend the audience (Marchini 2008: 302-3). Notwithstanding Sosa and her manager's cooperative attitude, attaining a general consensus on the way in which the government wanted to key her artistic return to Argentina was, in early 1982, an improbable venture.

The Argentine press widely covered Sosa's concerts, keying them – sometimes deliberately, other times inadvertently – as something more than just an artistic event. While *La Nación* refrained from explicitly referring to the censorship and persecution of which Sosa had been a victim since at least 1974, it could not avoid mentioning her three-year absence from Argentina's concert venues and her six-year absence from radio and television stations. After all, her presence in the country was being announced by other newspapers (and received by her audience) as an extraordinary event. Even though the word "exile" was conspicuously absent from *La Nación*'s articles on the concerts (Mercedes Sosa se presentará 1982; Jubiloso reencuentro 1982), the implications of this experience were clearly formulated by Sosa herself in interviews that appeared in this newspaper (Mercedes Sosa, en vísperas 1982) and other publications (Figuroa 1982; Pintos 1982), in which she alluded to the feelings of nostalgia that had become a paralyzing force in her life and work throughout the previous three years.

The theme of nostalgia for the *patria* was an important element in the negotiation over the political meaning of Sosa's 1982 musical persona and

one that was constantly emphasized by the press, albeit in different registers. Diana Taylor (1997) has observed that surviving during the Proceso implied “‘being seen as’ Argentinean” (93), “[b]eing ‘seen’ performing one’s national identity correctly” (105), for “[i]f someone ‘did’ their nationality differently, it was taken as the sign of an antinationalist or unpatriotic ideology” (107). The media’s constant foregrounding of Sosa’s nostalgia for Argentina reinforced representations of her persona as the embodiment of the patria and its “authentic” traditions and values. This particular *mise en scène* of her Argentineness also facilitated the working out of a consensus around her contested musical persona, especially among those social actors that, as Sosa put it, “love me when I sing ‘Alfonsina and the Sea’” but “hate me when I sing ‘Agrarian Triumph’” (Figueroa 1982).

On one hand, by focusing on nostalgia, a subjective emotion, the press contributed to the depoliticization of the experience of exile. On the other hand, few publications could reference Sosa’s nostalgia while entirely omitting the socio-political circumstances that had produced it. Hence, newspapers and magazines with different readerships either alluded to the official censorship that had motivated her departure or relayed her unambiguous critique of the Proceso’s infringement of basic rights and civil liberties:

“Peace shall be recovered,” [Sosa] said, “when all the rights that people are entitled to are guaranteed.” In her declarations, [she] also advocated for the “definitive end of blacklists.” The folk singer ... pleaded for this on her behalf and on behalf of other artists who, like her, “do not live in Argentina but all over the world.” (Anon 1982: 3)

This uncensored mode of discourse and the fact that it was being conveyed by the written press set in motion a dynamic of recollection, not only among Sosa’s core audience, many of whom were in their late twenties and thirties, but also among younger people who had articulated their generational identity fundamentally around rock culture, in a context in which being young was represented as deviant in public discourse (El almirante 1977). Sosa’s honesty was perceived by this audience as the expression of a foundational value of the local rock culture’s ideology: authenticity. This concept encompassed notions of sincerity and integrity and implied the rejection of a mainstream society of *caretas*, or masks, in which hypocrisy, opportunism, and materialism operated as the dominant ideology.

Performing Recollection

Sosa's decision to invite two of the most respected rock musicians of the time, Charly García and León Gieco, to perform with her and include their songs in her repertoire confirmed the perception, within the rock milieu, that she was an "authentic" artist. As Sosa herself noted in an interview, a meeting between rock and folk music would have been unlikely in the early 1970s, when each culture's aesthetic and political premises operated as ideological bulwarks that hindered intergeneric contact or an artist's movement from one genre frame to another (Wullicher 1983). By early 1982 however, there was a strong need among the Triple A's and CMD's survivors to create practices and spaces of recollection, within which the caretas could be dropped as a necessary prelude to the reconstruction of forms of community based on relations of solidarity and trust. Young people who were part of the rock milieu interpreted Sosa's overture towards rock culture as an act of solidarity and respect, a gesture that recreated the ethical disposition to come together as a collective force characteristic of rock concerts. But Sosa's inclusive gesture had a deeper resonance for a generation that had forged its identity against the State's criminalization of youth. By treating rock musicians as her artistic peers and incorporating their songs into her repertoire, she legitimated not only rock culture, but also the generation whose identity was profoundly attached to this culture.

Sosa's 1982 rendition of Charly García's "Cuando ya me empiece a quedar solo" (When I Begin to Be Alone) and León Gieco's "Sólo le pido a Dios" (I Only Ask of God) performs intergenerational and intergeneric unity and respect. In the version of these songs that appeared on the album *Mercedes Sosa en Argentina*,¹² her voice establishes a dialogic relationship with García's and Gieco's distinctive voices and the instruments that operate as metonymies of their musical personae: the piano, in García's case, and the ensemble of guitar and harmonica in Gieco's. Notwithstanding this common dialogic quality, the way in which musical dialogue is achieved in each song is markedly different. Sosa's performance bespeaks her understanding that, while both songs belong to the rock repertoire, they share few thematic, narrative, and musical elements with one another and therefore require distinct vocal approaches.

She recreates the self-reflexive, melancholic narrative universe of "Cuando ya me empiece a quedar solo," an early García song about the vicissitudes of stardom, through subtle vocal modulations that alternate breathy, introspective tones and a euphoric vocal style in verses three and five. In verse five, in particular, this euphoric register is undercut and rendered ominous by the juxtaposition of metaphors of public success – "un millón

de manos que me aplauden” (a million hands that applaud me) – and private loneliness: “el fantasma tuyo, sobre todo, / cuando ya me empiece a quedar solo” (the ghost of you, above all / when I begin to be alone).¹³ Sosa’s vocal variations take their cue from, and complement, García’s piano. His barely audible vocal intervention in the song’s second verse (0:56-1:10) reinforces the meditative, melancholy sound of the piano and Sosa’s vocal line. However, his voice emerges, without her accompaniment, at the beginning of the third verse in the line “un televisor inútil” (a useless TV set), and introduces, along with the piano’s faster tempo, an upbeat register that Sosa replicates as García’s voice recedes (1:25-1:53). By the end of the third verse, his voice once again accompanies her main vocal line, which returns to the introspective style of the song’s first lines. The song’s diegesis is, thus, constructed through images of solitude and decrepitude and the exploration of contrasting vocal and instrumental registers. Sosa’s approach to this song has more elements in common with her rendition of “Alfonsina y el mar” (Alfonsina and the Sea)¹⁴ than with her performance of Gieco’s “Sólo le pido a Dios.” In Ramírez and Sosa’s 1982 rendition of “Alfonsina,” the voice and piano “engage in a dance characterized by a subtle give-and-take and intricately connected melodic lines which constantly compliment [sic] each other” (Cormier 1999: 38), thus establishing a dialogic relationship that is analogous to the interaction between Sosa’s voice and García’s piano and voice in their performance of “Cuando ya me empiece a quedar solo.”

A different dynamic between vocal and instrumental elements and between performers and audience is at work in Gieco and Sosa’s rendition of “Sólo le pido a Dios.” In stark contrast to the reverent silence and applause that precedes and, at times, accompanies her interpretation of García’s and Ramírez’s songs, the performance of “Sólo” begins with Sosa and Gieco exhorting their audience to sing along with them (0:01-0:11). The applause and collective singing that ensue are made possible by, and contribute to, the verbal, melodic, and rhythmic repetition that structures “Sólo.” Rather than engaging in subtle vocal variations, Sosa maintains a uniform, commanding vocal tone. The vocal line’s regularity is reinforced by the repetition of charango and guitar chords and the percussion’s distinct marking of the song’s rhythmical flow. Indeed, the charango, guitar, and percussion have a central emotive and vocative function: through an upbeat tempo, they invoke, and interact with, the audience’s clapping and thus help to build the song’s emotional intensity. These elements of the performance framed the concert space as a political locus, in which the experience of a shared community was enacted through collective singing and a direct, explicit mode of communication between performers and audience. The possibility of collective forms of

political action was inscribed in the articulation of this common voice, which implicitly refused the Proceso's conception of public space as a site of social compartmentalization and political subjection.

The articulation of a collective voice and the construction of a space of recollection were processes that often unravelled unexpectedly during the performances, when the audience initiated a dialogue with certain verses of Sosa's repertoire that did not explicitly convey a message of unity and solidarity. For instance, the fifth verse of Violeta Parra's song, "Volver a los diecisiete" (To Be Seventeen Again), which describes love as a natural force whose power can liberate prisoners, was received by politically charged applause (Sosa 1991c [1982]: 3:33-3:57). This kind of applause was motivated neither by Sosa's decision to frame the song as a political hymn, nor by the audience's misconstrual of its theme and meaning. What was at stake here was the collective reframing of the song as a way of mobilizing public and private memories connected to emancipatory experiences. In this context, it is not surprising that the reference to Chile's "copper and mineral[s]" in the second verse of "Canción con todos" (Song With All), a song that synthesizes Nueva Canción's utopian vision of Latin America, was also received by hearty applause (Sosa 1991a [1982]: 0:54-1:03), as though Sosa had actually engaged in an homage to Chile's political militants. Nor is it surprising that when Sosa sang the verses that allude to the personal dislocation and sense of loss provoked by the experience of exile in "Sólo le pido a Dios"¹⁵ and "Fuego en Anymaná" (Fire in Anymaná),¹⁶ the audience applauded her and, through her, all those who had been forced to leave Argentina. Sosa reciprocated her audience's politically charged reactions to these songs by performing many of the censored anthems of Latin American left-wing culture: "Cuando tenga la tierra," "Triunfo agrario," and even "La carta," which the military bureaucrats had expressly asked her not to sing (Marchini 2008: 302).

Nueva Canción as Cultural Heritage

Notwithstanding these songs, the focus of her repertoire and the album *Mercedes Sosa en Argentina* was not on her traditional "political" songs. This fact cannot solely be attributed to the police's threatening presence on the theatre premises. Her musical persona had in fact changed, and with it, her repertoire, which included by 1982 not only Argentine rock, but also tango classics like Cobián and Cadícamo's "Los mareados"; Cuban *Nueva Trova* songs (Silvio Rodríguez's "Sueño con serpientes" and Pablo Milanés's love song "Años"); and compositions by Brazilian popular music icons Vinícius de Moraes and Chico

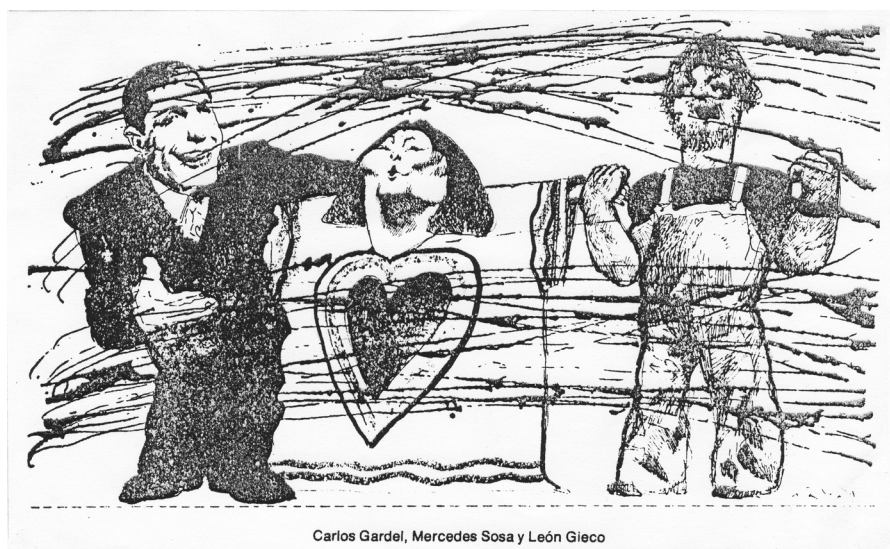
Buarque. Within this heteroclitc cultural patchwork, the political anthems of her earlier repertoire shifted meaning. Even though the messages conveyed by these songs were still powerfully inscribed in their lyrics and musical style, they now operated less as urgent calls for action or heralds of an imminent revolution than as public and private mnemonic artifacts: the constitutive elements of a Latin American and Argentine cultural memory. The status of these songs was, hence, that of canonical works within the repertoire of a performer who incarnated the very concept of cultural heritage. As such, their relationship to the more classical folk music exemplars in Sosa's repertoire, like Virgilio Carmona's *zamba* "Al jardín de la República" (To the Garden of the Republic) and Atahualpa Yupanqui's *milonga* "Los hermanos" (The Brothers), was no longer one of rupture, but of continuity, in a cultural genealogy that also incorporated the songs of censored musicians and prominent figures of the avant-gardes of folk and rock music, including Gustavo Leguizamón, María Elena Walsh, and Charly García.

Scholars of processes of heritage production (Poulot 1998; Maisonneuve 2001; García Canclini 2004) have noted that the construction of heritage involves the selection of works of the past and their articulation in a relationship of continuity and influence with those of the present. The principles of selection and continuity, central to heritage production, characterized Sosa's 1982 repertoire and performances. The concerts at the Ópera staged the encounter between artists of different music cultures and the genres and generations they represented. Aside from the duos with Gieco, García, and Ramírez, Sosa also performed with virtuoso accordionist and composer Raúl Barboza; *bandoneón* player and composer Rodolfo Mederos, whose pioneering work in the 1960s and 1970s combined elements of the tango with the idioms and timbres of jazz, pop music, and rock (García Brunelli and Fernández 1999, vol. 7: 394); and Antonio Tarragó Ros, one of the singer-songwriters who spearheaded the renewal of Argentine folk music in the 1980s. Such encounters operated as important legitimating instances for many of these artists, who acquired prestige beyond their own music culture when Sosa selected their songs and included them in her stable repertoire, alongside well-established standards of the national musical tradition. However, this process of legitimation was not unidirectional. By performing with these artists, Sosa also consolidated her standing within various currents of tango, folk music, and rock. She thus positioned herself as the representative of all Argentine popular music, rather than only of politicized folk music. These collaborative performances constituted modes of heritage production through which different music cultures were transformed into the avatars of a single, continuous, all-inclusive national tradition. In this version of Argentine cultural heritage, which encompassed songs that represented

the Proceso's disappeared and stigmatized Others and songs that celebrated the patria, the struggles and differences between and within different musical genres were subsumed under the idea(l) of a unified, shared national culture, embodied by Sosa.

Throughout 1982 and 1983, representations of Sosa as the vessel of, and bridge between, disparate musical genealogies were conflated with telluric, maternal images of her, in which she appeared as a static, natural element that contained and conveyed the patria's "authentic" voice.¹⁷ This iconography underscored her robust figure, which was paradoxically concealed and emphasized by a loose-fitting garment, generally a poncho, that enveloped her entire body (see Fig. 2) (see Fig. 2). Thus clad, with her arms held wide open as though anticipating an embrace, she appeared expansive: an all-encompassing corpus that, in the cover of *Mercedes Sosa en Argentina*, is depicted as a mountain, in allusion to the figure of the Pachamama, the Andes and, thereby, of Sosa's return to her country (See Fig. 3). In these representations, Sosa incarnated a reassuring version of nationhood that figured the body politic as a pre-cultural entity, impervious to historical vicissitudes and conflicts. Crucially, these images pivoted on an oft-rehearsed nation-building operation: the transfiguration of woman into landscape and the concomitant sublimation of her body into an allegory of normative femininity and nationhood, such as the nurturing Motherland or patria.

This iconography was an ambiguously valenced one. On one hand, its essentialist underpinnings bore the traces of the Proceso's conception of



Carlos Gardel, Mercedes Sosa y León Gieco

Fig. 2. An allegory of Argentine popular music by Sábat (1982): Mercedes Sosa between legendary tango singer Carlos Gardel and rock musician León Gieco.

national cultural heritage as the repository of immutable traditions and values. On the other hand, the images of Sosa as the receptacle of and conduit between diverse, yet intersecting, cultural genealogies resonated with a “structure of feeling” (Williams 1985: 132-33) that traversed and united various sectors of Argentine society after six years of state-sponsored terror and socially devastating neoliberal policies. This structure of feeling took root, initially, in a pluralistic, anti-sectarian ethos and, later, in broad-based demands for basic rights and civil liberties that enabled the convergence of social forces across partisan lines, political traditions, and artistic practices. By the early 1980s, this ethos had crystallized in a wide-ranging consensus around, among other struggles, the combative trade unions’ strikes for “peace, bread, and work,” the demonstrations against human rights violations led by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and the actions undertaken by the *Multipartidaria*, a cross-partisan coalition that advocated for the country’s return to democratic



Fig. 3. Album cover of *Mercedes Sosa en Argentina* (1982) by Jorge Nasser.

rule. Sosa's local and international prestige enabled her to give voice to some of these demands and to enact, in her artistic practice, the disposition toward collaboration and dialogue that undergirded this structure of feeling.

Conclusion

The Janus-faced version of national cultural heritage that Sosa embodied in early 1982 was the locus of a broad, yet precarious, societal consensus. In the midst of a political and socio-economic crisis that would reach its climax in April and May 1982, during the Malvinas/Falklands War, this consensus was, indeed, hardly tenable outside of the spatial and temporal limits of Sosa's concerts. For the military authorities, it was important that the "troubling" forms of recollection mobilized by Sosa's persona not overflow these boundaries, i.e., the concert venue and the public commentaries (ads, articles) on her performances. Such a form of containment was critical, not only in the working out of a consensus with the government over Sosa's return from exile, but also in the articulation and performance of a collective (counter)memory and sense of community. These forms of recollection were performed through a powerful trope of containment, that of national heritage, which operated both in terms of inclusion and control of the nation's silenced history and censored musical and political cultures. Precisely because of its double valence (of inclusion and control), this trope was important in the construction and success of Sosa's 1982 persona: a persona that facilitated the re-remembering of an inclusive (national) community in part by conjuring up an attachment to the nation that rendered the disruptive entailments of this reparative process more palatable – or imperceptible – to the military authorities. 🍁

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Notes

1. The Triple A was an extreme right-wing paramilitary group that threatened and murdered left-wing militants, political refugees, intellectuals, and artists. It was active from 1973 to 1975 (Gillespie 1998: 191-98, 229-32).

2. Here and elsewhere, original text in Spanish is not quoted; all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

3. Andean musical idioms and instruments “came to be highly identified with leftism in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (2008: 146), as Fernando Rios notes in his article, “La Flûte Indienne” (2008). This political identification, which Chilean groups like Quilapayún helped to consolidate among left-leaning youth, partially accounts for the increasing presence of highland Andean instruments and genres in that period’s folk music production, even though much of it was composed and performed by musicians who did not come from the Andean region and whose training and practice were rooted in the traditions of other South American regions.

4. The MNC’s founders conceived of their movement as “literary-musical” (Tejada Gómez et al. 2002 [1963]) and as pre-eminently artistic, rather than political (Braceli 2003: 95). Notwithstanding this characterization, a highly politicized representation of the concept of *pueblo* (people) and revision of Latin American history were relevant in the work of most artists associated with this and other variants of *Nueva Canción* (New Song) (Carrillo Rodríguez 2014: 230-35). Moreover, these artists’ partisan affiliations and the events in which they took part in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the politicization of the distinct, yet overlapping, music movements conflated under the category *Nueva Canción*. The common association between protest music and *Nueva Canción* stemmed precisely from the intense criss-crossing of political and artistic activities during those decades.

5. The phrases in quotation marks are from lines 8 and 10 of Tejada Gómez and Isella’s song “Triunfo agrario” (1973).

6. Petrocelli and Toro 1973: lines 6-7.

7. Although this focus characterized the field of popular music studies since its inception in the early 1980s, McClary (2002 [1991]: ix-xx) and Cook (2001: pars. 1-7) note that the concern with the performance and reception aspects of musical practice did not become relevant in mainstream musicological scholarship until the early 1990s.

8. The Process of National Reorganization, more commonly referred to as *Proceso*, was the name given by the four military juntas that governed Argentina from 1976 to 1983 to their economic, political, social, and cultural project. Recent research on the *Proceso* years (e.g., Perosino, Nápoli, and Bosisio 2013) has illuminated the civil-military entanglements that undergirded what, to many, appeared to be a campaign of political terror led exclusively by military sectors. Over the past 12 years, human rights activists and scholars have increasingly used

the term “civil-military dictatorship” as a means of emphasizing the central role that powerful economic groups and other civil sectors played in the Proceso.

9. Vila notes that not all of Sosa’s politicized followers reacted with the apprehension and skepticism foregrounded by Pujol: “I ... was an active militant as a university student and, after 1976, at the union level I thought that the concerts would be cancelled or that everyone there would be arrested! I never thought that [she] had compromised with the government” (personal communication, April 13, 2010).

10. In-depth analyses of the ways in which these processes have unfolded in Argentine rock and folk music can be found in Vila (1985: 121-36; 1989: 6-10); Kaliman (2004: chap. 1); Díaz (2009: chap. 3); and Carrillo Rodríguez (2010: 250-54).

11. My reconstruction of Sosa’s 1982 performances is based on information available in a range of primary and secondary documents, including the concert program, the album *Mercedes Sosa en Argentina*, and the primary sources cited by Brizuela (1992: 108-11), Braceli (2003: chaps. 19-20), and Marchini (2008: 301-5). The interviews that I conducted in Buenos Aires, in November 2008, with Marcelo Gasió, Claudio Kleiman, and Alfredo Rosso gave me an invaluable first-hand perspective of the changing meanings and on-the-ground practices of “resistance” during the Proceso. I would like to thank them, as well as Leandro Donozo and Pablo Vila, for bringing to my attention primary sources and information that enriched my analysis of Sosa’s performances and the events leading up to them. I am especially grateful to Carlos Molinero and Pablo Vila for sharing their personal experiences of the concerts with me.

12. First issued by Philips in 1982, the album consists of 20 songs recorded during the Ópera concerts. It was the bestselling album in Argentina in 1983 (Marchini 2008: 306-7) and was reissued by PolyGram, in 1991, in compact disc format. This edition does not include Piero’s “Soy pan, soy paz, soy más” nor Ramón Ayala’s “El cosechero,” which were both part of the original edition. Sosa’s stable of musicians for the Ópera concerts were percussionist Domingo Cura; Omar Espinoza, who played guitar and charango; and José Luis Castiñeira de Dios, who did the arrangements for most of the songs, played bass and guitar, and acted as musical director.

13. Sosa and García 1991 [1982] (2:52-3:30). The numbers in parentheses reference the minutes of the quoted verses in each track of the album’s CD edition.

14. “Alfonsina y el mar” is a classic example of a mid-20th-century folksong repertoire that combined elements of academic music with the basic rhythmic and melodic organization of Argentine folkloric genres.

15. I am referring to the end of this song’s fifth verse, which Sosa sings with Gieco (1991 [1982]: 3:13-3:23): “desahuciado está el que tiene que marchar / a vivir una cultura diferente” (hopeless is he who has to leave / to live a different culture).

16. The sixth verse of “Fuego en Anymaná” – “lejos de aquí, / yo no seré yo” (far from here, / I will not be me) – resonated, not only with the fifth verse of

Gieco's song, but also with the feelings of isolation and estrangement that Sosa evoked when she spoke of her life outside of Argentina. In the version of "Fuego" recorded at the Ópera, a wave of applause can be heard when Sosa sings the end of the song's seventh verse (Sosa 1991b [1982]: 1:53-2:00): "Yo quiero ver en mi país / el amanecer" (I want to see in my country / the sun rising).

17. Representations of Sosa as a natural element and a vehicle of popular sentiment carried connotations of passivity that occluded the deliberate, strategic process through which she constructed her canonical repertoire, as well as her active role in the co-creation and popularization of this repertoire.

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