

**EPISODE #30: Patricia Martínez**

Listening to Ladies

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I'm Elisabeth Blair and this is Listening to Ladies.

[excerpt of *tan feliz* plays]

**ECB:** This is an excerpt from *tan feliz*, by composer Patricia Martínez.

[excerpt of *tan feliz* plays]

**PM:** I really love the contra tenor voice, it's one of my favorite registers. I really like this kind of hybridization or mixing about what is really a female voice or a male voice. I really like that.

**ECB:** The piece is based on a poem that she herself wrote. I'll post the original Spanish on the show notes page, but here is the English translation:

as if the body slipped  
into a delicate continuous  
deaf, full,  
movement without act:  
simple beauty of letting go

[excerpt of *tan feliz* plays]

**ECB:** Patricia, who in addition to being a composer is also a performer and a multidisciplinary artist, is based in Buenos Aires. She spoke with me about growing up.

**PM:** I was not in a family of artists or musicians, or even people that they are educated for appreciate art. They even not fully understand what is possible—even it is possible to do like a professional musician—it is not something that they can imagine at all.

I was living with my mother and my father left us when I was a little child, and we lived with my grandfathers.

**ECB:** Although starting at about age 2, she wanted to study music, there really wasn't money for her to do so. But she sang all the time, and created music...

**PM:** I was composing in like, we say maybe improvising or composition in real time, but for me that was very important. It is something that is with me, even until now because I like to sing all the time, I like to be connected with song, something that makes me alive.

**ECB:** When I asked her if she still had any of the music that she'd made up as a child, perhaps in memory or on paper, she had an interesting answer.

**PM:** This is another thing that is crucial. The thing that has to be saved for future, it's not something instant, something very fragile, just for the moment. I didn't have that in mind at that time.

**ECB:** Still, she says when she was a bit older she did record some things.

I asked her whether she had support later, once she was able to start formally pursuing music.

**PM:** I always have the feeling that becoming a musician was disappointing for my family because it's not something that we can say, in a country from Latin America, like being a musician is not really something serious. It was hard, but they did trust me and in a way they supported that. They don't have an option, because music for me was not just something that I wanted to do, it was something that saved my life in a practical way because I was really really sad because many problems, many personal things, for me music was something very vital. I cannot say something like a profession, it's not just like a profession, it's something that is also creating myself. I create myself with music and music I see also inside of me, but I don't know, maybe it's a poetic idea, but it's also very very real, it's something that I was feeling. For example, I didn't want to continue my school education if I couldn't start music studies because for me was no reason to live if I cannot do what I wanted. But then I discovered places to learn for free. Because in Argentina, conservatories are free for people, public education is free, it's not like United States, that you have to pay, you have the possibility, but this is something good, but at the same time it's a problem because it's not the real quality that you can have if you have a private teacher, for example. You have to be like one more person in a group of many people for something that needs maybe some very specific particular attention.

**ECB:** I asked her about her experience studying music, versus studying composition.

**PM:** I didn't separate these things, like this is another cultural and external thing that thinks things separate, like if you perform, you are not composer, if you compose, you are not performer. I don't think that is really that because we are always creating and we are always performing, because I need to perform to create and when I create, I perform, so for me, something very connected.

[excerpt of *La niña helada* plays]

**ECB:** You're listening to a "reel" or a series of excerpts, from an opera called *La niña helada*.

**PM:** In English, it's *The Frozen Little Girl*.

[excerpt of *La niña helada* plays]

**PM:** I can say that, after doing an opera, you can see the world different—because you die or you keep alive!

**ECB:** She produced a series of 10 performances in Buenos Aires.

**PM:** We approached the music to people that they never go to the opera and they never go to the contemporary opera, but the thing is, how to create something that they even don't question about what it is, just be there and just connect with the world.

**ECB:** The opera is based on the story of...

**PM:** The first little girl that the parents, they decided to do a cryonization because the little girl dies. There was a story in Thailand.

[excerpt of *La niña helada* plays]

**PM:** There are different levels of question about this in terms of the history and about the technology, about morality, about what is life.

[excerpt of *La niña helada* plays]

**ECB:** I asked her what prompted her to begin composing with electronics, early on in her career-and she said it was for convenience' sake.

**PM:** That is very funny because in that time, even it was not really big development of the technology, it was much better than the learning of the musician, for example, in Buenos Aires was most difficult to find a musician that wants to perform, for example, contemporary music than trying to find something some synthesizer or some electronic materials to create something. And for that, a lot of composers were composing electro acoustic music because it was like, they don't need another person, they just need themselves. And that was like a cheaper way to be a composer.

[excerpt of *A state of divinity* plays]

**ECB:** You're listening to an excerpt of a piece called *A state of divinity*. It was a commission for a specific trio of instruments.

[excerpt of *A state of divinity* plays]

**PM:** It was a horn, a synthesizer, and a cello. If I want to explain in a simple way, it was like a kind of discover the inner powers of three performers and they become like three super heroes.

[excerpt of *A state of divinity* plays]

**ECB:** The piece works not just with sound but also with visuals—so to get the full picture you should definitely go check out the video on the Show Notes page.

[excerpt of *A state of divinity* plays]

**PM:** I don't want to spoil the piece, but the piece has an interesting development as a kind of history or dramatization inside of it, it's something that you have to, to continue the story, to really understand the whole piece. It's not really something that you can listen a fragment and you have an idea. I don't think so.

[excerpt of *A state of divinity* plays]

**ECB:** I asked Patricia about her priorities when she's composing, and she immediately spoke about the performers.

**PM:** For me, it's very important when the musicians are really inside of the piece. If they can be really connected with the kind of soul, each piece has a particular way to be.

**ECB:** And beyond this, she has even broader priorities.

**PM:** I can sound very idealistic or very crazy, but my primary goal is to change the world for better. I think music has a power that is no possibility of really translating to just words.

[excerpt of *C'est l'amour* plays]

**ECB:** This is an excerpt from the ending of a piece called *C'est l'amour*.

[excerpt of *C'est l'amour* plays]

**ECB:** With this piece as well, you really need to see the piece, and to see it in its entirety, to truly understand the work, or the energy that the performer creates with the instrument.

**PM:** And how he plays with that, not just with sound, also the entire body becomes part of the music, and part of the meaning of the work.

[excerpt of *C'est l'amour* plays]

**ECB:** Patricia spoke a bit about her teaching philosophy and her thoughts on teaching composition in particular.

**PM:** In a way, I don't believe too much in professors because I believe more in the personal search when you are working, because this is the real moment of learning.

**ECB:** She does herself teach composition, but...

**PM:** My teaching is not that they need to listen to me. I just go in the search that they need to do, it's not something that they need to listen to me because I had the real truth, no. I want to know what they want to do and what they need to discover by themselves, and I just help.

[excerpt of *barely the breath* plays]

**ECB:** You're listening to an excerpt from 'barely the breath.' It's a piece about women and their relationship with the arts.

[excerpt of *barely the breath* plays]

**ECB:** Once again, you should check out the video, you'll see that the performance features a great deal of really powerful choreography on the part of the ensemble...

[excerpt of *barely the breath* plays]

**ECB:** Her gender has impacted both her education and her career.

**PM:** For example, piano, almost everyone was a woman, but in composition, almost everyone was a man and that's something that you have on your shoulders your whole life.

**ECB:** Nevertheless, she was determined.

**PM:** I didn't want to have this as a limitation. But I knew at the same time, that I look around and of course, they are all men.

**ECB:** She says sexist attitudes amongst composers in Argentina definitely persist.

**PM:** For example, talking with another composer, he said, "Oh yes, yes, I know, but you never can be as a man." Like if there is something that "be a man", like impossible for a woman, something like that, like like extremely crazy. And they really believe that, they have like, I think maybe it's the way that they've grown, or I don't know, but they seem like they are like superheroes and we are like, oh we're waiting for the heroes, yes, something like that is in their veins. It's difficult being a woman in a developed country, but it's more difficult being a woman and from a undeveloped country and from a South American country and —. It's challenge, more challenge, more challenge, and that is something that people from other countries can't imagine, but I don't think that they fully understand because it's like double invisibilization because also there's canon for men, but also a canon for *European* men, and European *white* men, etc. So, being in South America is really really hard. This is something that I struggle every time in my life because always I ask myself, what is really the place to be, why—something that is always confronting inside of me.

**ECB:** Knowing that she completed her studies at Stanford, I asked if she found that it was significantly different or less difficult when she was in the United States.

**PM:** No. Even if you live in another country, you are always a foreign person in another country. It's not like, ok, I move and okay, now I become. No.

[excerpt of *tan feliz* plays]

**ECB:** Patricia's advice to those wishing to become composers is...

**PM:** Don't pay attention.

**ECB:** She means to the apparent limitations imposed on you by societal expectations.

**PM:** Just be focused on what you really want to do and what you really want to offer to the world.

[excerpt of *tan feliz* plays]

**ECB:** If you wanna know about anything mentioned in this episode, or listen to full streaming tracks of the music excerpted here, just go to [www.listeningtoladies.com](http://www.listeningtoladies.com) and click on the link to this episode. And as ever, thank you for listening.