

Switched ON

The Dawn of Electronic Sound
by Latin American Women

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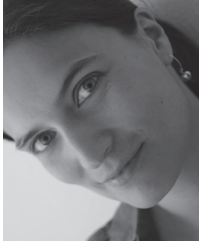
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Voices of Memory in Leni Alexander's (1924-2005) Experimental Radio Dramas¹

Daniela
Fugellie

My works are all against oblivion. Because that's terrible: when you forget something, it disappears.
— Leni Alexander²

The year 2017 marked the celebration of the 100-year anniversary of the birth of singer-songwriter, artist and researcher Violeta Parra (1917-1967). In connection with this symbolic date for Chilean musical culture, the III Colloquium of Ibero-músicas entitled "Music and woman in Ibero-America: making music from the condition of gender" was held in Santiago de Chile with the participation of female researchers from various

¹ This essay was written in the context of the research project "Serialism in Latin America as a cultural technique" (Fondecyt 1220792), founded by the Chilean National Research Agency (ANID). I also thank the support of the associative research projects "Chilean Art Music: Practical Cultures as Heritage" (Anillo, ATE 220041) and the Millennium Nucleus in Musical and Sound Cultures (NCS 2022-016), both sponsored by ANID. I also thank María Paula Torres Anabalón for the translation of the first draft of this essay from Spanish into English.

² Interview in: Miriam Stumpfe, „Musik zwischen den Diktaturen. Die Komponistin Leni Alexander pendelt zwischen Chile und Paris,“ *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 133. *Münchner Kultur*, June 14, 1999, 16. Translation by the author.

Latin American countries. In this context I presented a work dedicated to the composer Leni Alexander (1924-2005), focused on her condition as a migrant between the Judeo-German and Chilean cultures and the way in which this double cultural belonging is reflected in her experimental radio dramas.³ In my presentation, I stated that Leni Alexander was a little-known composer; her work was not edited or programmed often in concert halls and there were few studies dedicated to her, all of which contrasted with the international reach of her career. At that time, I could not have imagined that only a year later, in 2018, the so-called fourth feminist wave would arise in Chile.⁴ As if the subversive, transformative and female force of Violeta Parra had been awakened during her centenary to shake Chilean society and especially the musical world from its foundations, in 2018, feminist takeovers proliferated in Chilean universities with different demands, including the ending of abuse and gender discrimination, and to make the “other part” of history visible.

I also could not have imagined that, within this context, the work and visibility of the collective of women composers *Resonancia Femenina*, founded in Valparaíso in 2012, would be considerably strengthened, or that a Women’s Orchestra and Choir (*Orquesta de Mujeres de Chile*) would be created, remaining active today, proposing different activities that promote female leadership in music. Beyond specific actions, the feminist wave invited us to analyze the foundations of our research and teaching practices, and from there to thematize the place of women in music. Including publications written by women in our teaching and promoting research projects centered on women performers and creators became topics of concern to several scholars in the musical field in Chile. Naturally, I cannot speak for everyone, but I can affirm that many of us have acknowledged the “impact” of the wave and its legitimate demands.

Interestingly, all this development also influenced the visibility of the figure of Leni Alexander. In January 2019, the XIX Festival of Contemporary Music of the Universidad de Chile dedicated an homage to the composer, in which three of her works were performed: *Tres cantos líricos* (1954), *Concierto de Cámara* (1959) and *Meralo* (1972) for guitar.⁵ That same year, the aforementioned collective *Resonancia Femenina* created the Leni Alexander Festival, which has already four editions and seeks to give visibility to women composers and performers, for the purposes of which it includes the “Añañuca Award” to highlight an outstanding woman in Chilean music.⁶ The festival does not focus on the interpretation of Alexander’s work, but bears her name as a symbol of the female presence in the field of Chilean avant-garde music (Figure 1). In addition, in recent years some of Leni Alexander’s

orchestral works have been programmed by the country’s two main orchestras. In 2021, the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Teatro Municipal de Santiago, under the direction of Rodolfo Fischer, presented *Equinoccio*, a work premiered in 1962 at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and performed by the same Philharmonic Orchestra in 1966.⁷ The same work was programmed by the Chilean Symphony Orchestra in a concert of women composers to be performed for the International Women’s Day in 2022. However, this concert was canceled due to unforeseen circumstances.⁸ In terms of research, in 2020 the singers Katherine Arriola and Cristina Lara recorded two of Alexander’s *lied* cycles in a project funded by the Ministry of Culture. This project, made during the Covid-19 pandemic, was broadcast through YouTube and consists of recordings of the works, as well as information and a round panel about the composer.⁹ For my part, I presented the experimental radio drama *Das Leben ist kürzer als ein Wintertag oder Par quoi? A quoi? Pour quoi? (Life is Shorter than a Winter’s Day, or For whom? To whom? Why?)* in my classes about Chilean and Latin American music history and in meetings with colleagues, constantly confirming that works like this continue to challenge and captivate their listeners, including the young people of the 21st century. In 2023, Leni Alexander is much more present in Chile than I could have foreseen in 2017. Her name is a symbol of the Chilean women composers of the avant-garde, although producing a deeper knowledge and understanding of her work and her particular path in experimentation remains an ongoing task.

In the specific field of experimentation with electronic media, few female Chilean composers of earlier generations dedicated themselves to this sphere. The first Chilean female composer who seems to have explored electronics was Iris Sangüeza (*1933), a fellow at the Latin American Center for Advanced Musical Studies (CLAEM) of the Di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires in the period 1967-1968. The CLAEM had the most prominent electroacoustic music studio in South America and in that space Sangüeza composed *Integración* (1968) for magnetic tape, dance and slides. Later, Sangüeza would create other electroacoustic works, such as *Arica hoy* (1970), *Permanencia I* (1999) and *Permanencia II - Espiral* (2002). For her part, Leni Alexander created two works that include electronics prior to her experimental radio dramas: *Par quoi? A quoi? Pour quoi?* (1971) for mezzo-soprano, instrumentalists and recorded sounds, premiered in 1971 at the Zagreb Biennale by the ensemble of the Domaine Musical; and *Aulicio II* (1985) for four reciters, magnetic tape, slides and video. The third composer linked to electronics of previous generations—Francesca Ancarola (*1968)—is also worth mentioning. For her work *A* (1990), Ancarola received a scholarship from the prestigious Electroacoustic Music Competition of Bourges, France, which allowed her to undertake a residency at the studio of the Queen’s University of

3 See Daniela Fugellie, “Leni Alexander o la migración perpetua,” in *Música y mujer en Iberoamérica. Haciendo música desde la condición de género. Actas del III Coloquio Iberoamericano sobre investigación musical*, ed. Juan Pablo González (Santiago: IberoMúsicas/ CNCA, 2017), 76–91. This colloquium was followed by an International Conference dedicated to Violeta Parra, with the participation of ca. 50 Chilean and foreign researchers of Violeta Parra’s work.

4 See Salomé Sola-Morales and Carla Quiroz Carvajal, “El Mayo feminista chileno de 2018, en la cresta de la cuarta ola. Uso y apropiación de las redes sociales,” *Revista Punto Género*, 15 (2021): 201–232.

5 Rodrigo Alarcón, “¡Bravo, madame!: El retorno de Leni Alexander,” *Radio Universidad de Chile*, January 13, 2019, <https://radio.uchile.cl/2019/01/13/bravo-madame-el-retorno-de-leni-alexander/>

6 See the page of Resonancia Femenina, “Festival Leni Alexander,” <https://www.resonanciafemenina.com/447747787.html>

7 Álvaro Gallegos, «Teatro Municipal recordó a la compositora chilena Leni Alexander,» *ADN Radio*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.adnradio.cl/conciertos/2021/11/11/teatro-municipal-recordo-a-la-compositora-chilena-leni-alexander.html>

8 “Cancelado – La Sinfónica Nacional retoma sus actividades con concierto conmemorativo del Día de la Mujer,” *Sinfónica Nacional.cl*, (March 2022), <https://www.sinfonicanacional.cl/la-sinfonica-nacional-retoma-sus-actividades-con-concierto-conmemorativo-del-dia-de-la-mujer/>

9 See “Cápsula Leni Alexander,” December 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvcc9tv7yrE>

Kingston in Canada, where she composed *Arena* (1994).¹⁰ However, Ancarola later developed as a singer-songwriter in the field of popular music. With an interesting group of experimental radio dramas to her credit, as well as her purely musical compositions, Leni Alexander is exceptional among 20th-century Chilean female composers. While my 2017 article focused on the dual belonging of the composer to German and Chilean culture, in the lines that follow I intend to delve into the musical and sound proposals of her experimental radio dramas, analyzing how different media and supports—recorded music, actors voices, interviews, among others—are integrated into her works as vehicles of memory.



Fig. 1. Encuentro Leni Alexander 2019.

LENI ALEXANDER AND THE AVANT-GARDE OF HER TIME

Chile was a pioneer in electroacoustic composition in South America, although the form lacked stable financing, which hindered the early consolidation of electroacoustic composition and teaching in the country. In the early 1950s there was already a circle of composers interested in these new manifestations; this initial curiosity was consolidated by the visit of Pierre Boulez to Santiago de Chile in 1954. Boulez was traveling as musical director of the Renaud-Barrault theatre

company, while working on the conception of his piece *Le Marteau sans maître*.¹¹ Composer Fernando García (*1930) hosted a lunch in his house for the Frenchman, attended by composers León Schidlowsky (1931-2022), Juan Amenábar (1922-1999) and José Vicente Asuar (1933-2017), in addition to Leni Alexander. At the meeting, Boulez showed pieces carried out in Radio France/developed by Radio France. In a letter written during this trip, the composer claimed that in Santiago he found an audience interested in concrete and electronic music.¹² In the following years, Amenábar and Asuar—both engineers as well as composers—would be the main promoters of electronic music in Chile, responsible for creating the first studios, radio broadcasts, workshops and courses. Joining them among the pioneering composers, we can name Schidlowsky, Gustavo Becerra-Schmidt (1925-2010) and Gabriel Brnčić (1942). The latter would make an extensive career linked to electronics after emigrating to Buenos Aires in 1965 with a scholarship to CLAEM, and later, in exile in Barcelona from 1974.¹³

Although Leni Alexander participated in the meeting with Boulez in Santiago, her relationship with electronic music was not immediate and came from a different source. Born 1924 in Breslau, a German city at that time, Alexander moved to Hamburg in 1932 with her mother, the lyric singer Ilse Pollack, and her second husband. Like many other families of Jewish descent, the family was forced into exile in 1939 and arrived in Chile, where Alexander quickly became part of the circle of German-speaking immigrants in the Chilean capital, as a piano student of Rudy Lehmann and a cello student of Hans Loewe. Alongside studying psychology and specializing in the Montessori education system, she was a private student of the Dutch avant-garde composer Fré Focke (1910–1989), who studied in Vienna with Anton Webern and was also a distinguished pianist in contemporary music. In his compositions, Focke worked with free atonality and with his own interpretation of the dodecaphonic system. The chamber music composed in Chile by Focke is characterized by its expressiveness and extreme brevity. Alexander was a private composition student of Focke from 1949 to 1953. During this period she came into contact with the avant-garde group *Tonus*, of which Focke was both founder and performer, and it was in that context that some of the young composer's first works were premiered. Leni Alexander was one of the first women to premiere her works in the Chilean Music Festivals organized by the Universidad de Chile. Starting with the premiere of her *Cinco Epigramas para Orquesta* in 1952, subsequent festivals always included chamber or orchestral works by the composer, who stands out as the biggest female avant-garde presence in the Chilean scene of the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴

In 1954, shortly after meeting Boulez, Leni Alexander was granted a scholarship that allowed her to study with René Leibowitz and Olivier Messiaen

¹¹ For Boulez's travels in South America, see Edward Campbell, "Pierre Boulez: Composer, Traveller, Correspondent," in *Pierre Boulez Studies*, ed. Edward Campbell and Peter O'Hagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 3-24.

¹² Campbell, "Pierre Boulez: Composer," 17.

¹³ For a general overview of the development of electroacoustic music in Chile, see Federico Schumacher, *La música electroacústica en Chile. 50 Años* (Santiago de Chile: Fondart, 2005).

¹⁴ See some performances of Leni Alexander's works in the concert database "Intérpretes y Conciertos Doctos en Chile," http://basedeconciertos.uahurtado.cl/public/search?update=search&compositor_name=513.

¹⁰ Information on these pieces from the composers' catalogues published in: Raquel Bustos Valderrama, *La mujer compositora y su aporte al desarrollo musical chileno* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2012). For Ancarola, see also the catalogue of Pueblo Nuevo, <https://pueblonuevo.cl/catalogo/50ea/>.

in Paris. From this moment on, she would stay in touch with some of the leading figures of the avant-garde of her time. In Paris and within Boulez' circle, the *Domaine Musical*, Alexander met Luigi Nono. Nono invited her to Venice, where he introduced her to Bruno Maderna, a composer who, in Alexander's own words, would greatly influence her compositional development.¹⁵ In a press release, the composer claimed that in Paris she also met Edgar Varèse and made contact with the electronic music scene.¹⁶ Her interest in these developments shortly after her return to Chile in 1955 is documented. Thus, in August 1955 an article in the newspaper *El Mercurio* reported that Leni Alexander offered an interesting concert of "concrete music" at the Chilean-French Institute of Culture.¹⁷ In turn, a critique by the composer and researcher Pablo Garrido, also interested in the musical avant-garde, narrates in detail a lecture on concrete music given by Leni Alexander in July 1955 within the context of the last extraordinary session of the National Association of Composers (ANC).¹⁸ According to Garrido, the talk focused on electronic music, with examples from recordings of magnetic tapes given to the composer by French Broadcasting. According to Garrido, in her lecture Alexander defined three phases in the development of electronics: primitive (since 1948), impressionist and expressionist (1950 to 1952) and serial (1952 to 1955), and she focused particularly on the second group. Among the works heard, Garrido mentions Pierre Schaeffer's *Étude Pathétique*; Pierre Henry's *Vocalise*, and Messiaen's *Timbres durées*, among others.

After her return to Chile, Alexander continued traveling, with short stays in the United States and Europe, establishing contacts and friendships with important figures in the international musical world. In 1960, she visited Germany to attend the premiere of her cantata *De la Muerte a la Mañana*, chosen by the jury of the 34th Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Cologne, where she was the only South American composer other than Mauricio Kagel,¹⁹ who was already resident in Germany. During this stay Alexander also visited the XV Summer Courses of Contemporary Music in Darmstadt, in which she attended the conferences and courses of Boulez, Nono and Maderna. During this festival she was able to participate in the premiere of *Dimensioni II* (1960) by Maderna, an electronic work in two channels that Alexander later described as the most original work of the festival.²⁰

A few years later, in 1969, the composer received a scholarship from the Guggenheim Foundation and returned to Paris with her youngest son, Bastián Bodenhofer. Alexander was in France at the beginning of the Chilean military

coup of 1973, which motivated her decision to extend her stay in France until the 1980s, as her sympathy was with the Chilean left, even though she had not been militant within a political party. Besides giving lectures, courses, private piano and improvisation lessons for children, during her long European stay, Alexander received commissions from prestigious ensembles that premiered her works in various international circumstances. In parallels, she worked making programs on Latin American music for French and German radio. In 1986, Leni Alexander returned to Chile to be closer to her family, and has split her residence between Chile and Europe ever since. It is in this latter period that she produced her *Hörspiele* or radio dramas.

HÖRSPIELE BY LENI ALEXANDER

In an interview with Leonardo Martínez,²¹ Leni Alexander translates the German concept of *Hörspiel*, literally, as "*teatro para escuchar*" (theater to listen to), adding that: "It is a theatre in which you close your eyes and see the action in front of you." The idea is to sit listening to the radio carefully—a habit that, in her opinion, Chileans do not have.²² During the 1960s in Germany, radio dramas evolved into an experimental musical genre involving important composers, including Mauricio Kagel and John Cage, with whom Alexander had direct contact. One of the main promoters of this genre, known in Germany as "the new Hörspiel," was Klaus Schöning, producer of Radio Cologne (Westdeutscher Rundfunk/WDR).²³ Cologne was an important center for German electroacoustic music, so it is not surprising that the city hosted this new form of experimental music.

According to Alexander, it was Cage who gave her the idea to write a *Hörspiel* after he listened to her work *Par quoi? A quoi? Pour quoi?* (1971), which made use of tape, as previously mentioned, and recommended transforming it into a radio drama. Cage himself introduced her to Schöning in Paris, who offered her a first assignment with the WDR. Her first radio drama, *Das Leben ist kürzer als ein Wintertag—oder Par Quoi? A Quoi? Pour Quoi?* had a successful reception, prompting new assignments. In total, Leni Alexander composed five *Hörspiele* between 1989 and 1996, in addition to music for a radio drama by Jules Renard. At least two additional works were left unfinished.²⁴

15 Leni Alexander, "Luigi Nono. 1924-1990," in *Revista Musical Chilena* 173 (1990): 118-119.

16 "De la Muerte a la Mañana. Dodecafónica Chilena al Festival de Colonia," *Ercilla* 1300, April 20, 1960, Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

17 "Interesantes Características de la Música Concreta, en Concierto," *El Mercurio*, August 21, 1955, Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

18 P. G. [Pablo Garrido], "Música Concreta," *La Nación*, July 18, 1955, Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

19 "De la Muerte a la Mañana. Dodecafónica Chilena al Festival de Colonia"; "De la Muerte a la Mañana. Dodecafónica Chilena al Festival de Colonia." See the concert's program in <https://iscm.org/wnm/1960-cologne/>

20 Leni Alexander, "Aspectos del XV Curso Internacional de Nueva Música, patrocinado por el Kranichsteiner Musikinstitut en Darmstadt," in *Revista Musical Chilena* 74 (1960): 67-72.

21 This interview is preserved in Leni Alexander's collection at the Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. The source's name is missing in the documents. Since the interview was conducted on 31/12/1991, 1992 is indicated as publication's year. See: Leonardo Martínez, "Entrevista con Leni Alexander," [1992], pp. 154-164.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 161. Translation by the author.

23 See Mark Kory and Barbara Haggh, "Hörspiel as Music – Music as Hörspiel: The Creative Dialogue between Experimental Radio Drama and Avant-Garde Music," in *German Studies Review* 4/2 (1981): 257-279; and Richard Kostelanetz, "John Cage as a Hörspielmacher," in *The Journal of Musicology* 8/2 (1990): 291-299.

24 The scripts of two other radio dramas, *Die Geschichte des Wagens / Merkabah, historia de una carroza and Aulicio II ou la musique que Freud n'a jamais écoutée*, are preserved in Leni Alexander's collection at the Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

LENI ALEXANDER: RADIO DRAMAS

TITLE	YEAR AND BROADCASTING
<i>Das Leben ist kürzer als ein Wintertag oder Par quoi? A quoi? Pour quoi? (Life is Shorter than a Winter Day or For whom? To whom? Why?)</i>	WDR, 1989 Goethe Institut Santiago, 1991
Music for <i>Poil de carotte</i> by Jules Renard	WDR, 1991
<i>In Frage stellen. Von Menschen, die kämpfen, die träumen, die fliegen (Questioning. On people Who Fight, Dream and Fly)</i>	WDR, 1991
<i>Chacabuco-ciudades fantasmas (Chacabuco-Ghost Cities)</i>	Goethe Institut Santiago, 1993
<i>Chacabuco, die Geschichte einer Geisterstadt in Chile (Chacabuco, the Story of a Ghost Town in Chile; German version)</i>	WDR, 1993
<i>Balagán</i>	Radio Universidad de Chile, 1994
<i>Schatten der Seele. Der Schlaf (Shadows of the Soul. The Dream)</i>	WDR, 1996

Five of Alexander's radio dramas were broadcast by the WDR, undoubtedly an important recognition within the genre, but the works were also broadcast in Chile. Three were presented at the Goethe-Institut Santiago, a significant space for Chilean-German culture and cultural resistance to the military dictatorship in the country.²⁵ *Chacabuco-ciudades fantasmas* was commissioned by this institute within the framework of the project "Reflections on Chacabuco," which invited various artists to commemorate this abandoned city in the desert, also the location of the nation's largest concentration camp during the dictatorship.²⁶ *Balagán* was composed with the participation of Chilean actors and was broadcast by the Radio of the Universidad de Chile, in addition to being issued as a cassette. As highlighted by the composer, the radio dramas were also performed at universities and other institutions, and were received with interest, despite being seen "as something that came from another world."²⁷

In her radio dramas, Leni Alexander not only acted as a composer, but also wrote the libretti and proposed a sound collage based on recordings of art music, popular music, ambient sounds, and effects. In fact, with the exception of *Balagán*, Alexander did not write new music for the *Hörspiele*, but worked mostly with recordings of her own works. Her libretti also include quotations from various

25 Several press reports are preserved in Alexander's collection at the Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

26 See Carlos Cerda (ed.), *Chacabuco. Voces en el desierto* (Santiago de Chile: Goethe Institut / Ediciones Pehuén, 1994).

27 Martínez [1992], 165.

poems and texts. In their combination of textual and musical sources of multiple origins, as well as documentary and historical materials, her radio dramas challenge the traditional separations between art and popular music, creation and research, documentation and fiction, expanding musical composition to new possibilities, approaching sound art. This creative style may be related to Leni Alexander's experience in the radio environment. As previously discussed, in France the composer worked producing radio programs. Her documentary collection preserved in the Music Archive of the National Library of Chile includes several scripts of programs dedicated to diverse topics, such as street singers in Chile, the music of Alban Berg, the Argentine pianist and composer Carlos Roqué Alsina, and the music of Peru, suggesting that she was interested in different themes. The editing techniques used in the radio dramas are similar to her work on radio programs, where spoken texts and different musical sources are constantly combined. In the radio dramas, the boundaries between the musical work and the radio program are blurred.

Undoubtedly, the *Hörspiele* reflect Leni Alexander's simultaneous belonging to different cultures. Beyond taking a typical German genre and transporting it into the Chilean context, the themes and music sources are also carriers of a variety of cultural identifications: some combine quotations in French, German, and Spanish, presented together with her own avant-garde compositions, as well as Chilean popular music and traditional Jewish chants. Alexander's libretti, with a strong social content, sometimes merge Latin American and European events. For example, *In Frage stellen (Questioning)* combines impressions of the murders in Chile since 1973 with passages from Franz Kafka's novel *A Country Doctor* (1919), illustrated with music by Alexander and her son Andreas Bodenhofer, the Chilean band Sol y Lluvia, and poems by the Uruguayan Mario Benedetti, among other sources.

THE RADIO DRAMA AS A VEHICLE OF MEMORY—*LIFE IS SHORTER THAN A WINTER DAY* (1991) AND *CHACABUCO-GHOST CITIES* (1993)

As in the quote at the beginning of this essay, Leni Alexander herself refers to her radio dramas as an exercise of memory, in which different experiences, languages, and stories originated in different cultural spaces intersect. The tenor and interpreter of contemporary music, Hanns Stein, whose migrant biography is very similar, refers to his exiles and migrations as layers that add up in a network of meanings:

It is about how exile, migration and everything related to it marked us: old languages, new languages, old landscapes, new landscapes. . . . Each of the experienced cultures builds a layer, which together with the others are influencing each other. And in addition comes the element that fuses them together: the peculiarity of the Jewish destiny of our generation. The often desperate search for a cultural belonging, which can rarely be fully reached.²⁸

28 Hanns Stein, "Las raíces de una voz desenraizada," in *Revista Musical Chilena* 200 (2003): 88-95, 94. Translation by the autor.

Elisabeth Jelin uses a similar vocabulary to observe that memory, in the context of the South American dictatorships, is generated as a need to search for meaning. The meanings of the past are transformed in line with new historical events and are conditioned by the age, gender, and life circumstances of those who remember. Thus, various readings of the past can overlap and coexist, in the form of “layers of memory.”²⁹ While an encounter with these “layers of memory” is evident in Leni Alexander’s radio dramas, a similar exercise is found in the works of others whose biographies were marked directly or indirectly by anti-Semitism and the Chilean military dictatorship. For example, the Chilean composer Leon Schidlowky, son of a Jewish emigrant and resident of Israel since 1969, dedicated his *Misa sine nomine* (1976/77) to the memory of actor and singer-songwriter Víctor Jara, murdered at the beginning of the military dictatorship. In the work, written in graphic notation, texts in Hebrew, Latin, German, and Spanish are intertwined with the missive “Chile no se rinde” (Chile won’t give up) and the photograph of a person attacked by armed forces, in a meta-message of humanity that merges his Jewish and Chilean identity.³⁰ In this sense, Leni Alexander works with an archive of both personal and collective memory, which we can comment on through two representative works.

Alexander’s first radio drama, *Life is Shorter than a Winter Day*,³¹ begins with narration from “Discha,” the nickname her stepfather gave her in real life. Through Discha, Alexander remembers her youth as a Jewish student at a school in Hamburg, where she suffered discrimination and prohibitions: noT sitting on park benches, not going to the movies or concerts, not reacting to the insults she received in the street. The radio drama then evokes the event known as the “Night of Broken Glass” (November 9–10, 1938), during which thousands of Jews were killed and taken into custody. The memories of the experience lived in Hamburg, narrated in German, intersect with a second section that evokes the disappeared of the Chilean dictatorship (13’15”). From this point, memories of youth will be interspersed with sounds of planes, protests, and complaints in Spanish reminiscent of the bombing of the Chilean presidential house and the days following this event. In this section, the composer works with historical recordings, corresponding to communications between the Armed Forces in 1973. Voices in German and Spanish ask about the disappeared, without receiving an answer.

In this *Hörspiel*, Leni Alexander worked with recordings of three of her own works, three Chilean popular songs, and three Jewish chants. 24 of the 34 minutes of the radio drama contain her own works, either as background music or solo.³² The composition that becomes more prominent is *Par quoi? A quoi? Pour quoi?*, originally intended as a critique of the authoritarian French school system, where a teacher, represented by a singer, fights a group of young children, recorded on

29 See Elisabeth Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2002); Elisabeth Jelin, *La lucha por el pasado. Cómo construimos la memoria social* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2017).

30 Daniela Fugellie, “La ‘música gráfica’ de León Schidlowky. *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen* (1979) como partitura multimedial,” in *Revista Musical Chilena* 218 (2012): 7–37.

31 See the recording of the work at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ3FL6zilbs&t=7s>

32 Alexander’s compositions are: *Par quoi? A quoi? Pour quoi?* (1971); ... *ils se sont perdus dans l’espace étoilé* (1975) for orchestra; and *Maramoh* (1972) for mezzo and seven instruments. The popular music sources are: Raúl Salinas Cuyano, *Corazones partidos* (1925); Mauricio Redolés, *Triste funcionario policial* (1987); and Los Cuatro de Chile, *Para que no me olvides* (1968).

tape. The children laugh at her and chase her, triumphing in their struggle against authority. In the radio drama, this theme gains new meaning with its transfer to a new historical-cultural context: Now the conflict is transferred to the experiences of a Jewish girl oppressed by Nazism. The second work with the greatest presence is *Ils se sont perdus...*, an orchestral work by the composer, who takes the title of Víctor Jara’s last poem (“They were lost in starry space...”) before his murder at the Estadio Chile. The phrase alludes to the prisoners of the stadium, who “jumped into the void like meteors at night.”³³

The Chilean songs gathered in this experimental radio drama are of a popular nature and bring with them various intertextual relationships: Mauricio Redolés’ savage irony directly alludes to the torturers of the Chilean dictatorship and their impunity, while the song “Para que no me olvides” (So you won’t forget me) connects with the existence of the detained-disappeared. As for the Jewish songs that appear at the beginning and in the last third of the work, they are linked to memories of childhood and the synagogue in Hamburg. Finally, the sentences with which the *Hörspiel* concludes recall the importance of not forgetting, both from the point of view of exercising personal memory, and also thematizing the horrors of the holocaust and the Chilean dictatorship.

LIFE IS SHORTER THAN A WINTER DAY—FINAL PART OF THE LIBRETTO

„Discha“: Heute sieht man von alldem nichts mehr. (You don’t see any of that today.)

Leni Alexander: Nada ya se ve ... (Nothing is seen anymore.)

Leni Alexander and Chilean women 1, 2, 3: ... nada ... (nothing)

Mujer chilena 1: ... queda solamente la memoria ... (Only memory remains.)

German woman 1: ... noch einmal alles nachvollziehen ... (...once again understanding ...)

Mujer chilena 1: ... recordarse ... (remember)

Leni Alexander: ... tenemos que recordarnos ... nada ya se ve ... (We have to remember ... Nothing is seen anymore)

German woman 2: ... nichts sieht man heute mehr von allem. ...

Mujer chilena 5: ... las huellas ... (the traces)

Discha: ... die Er-ri-ne-rung ... (the me-mo-ry)

Man’s voice (calling): Discha!³⁴

Alexander highlighted the importance of memory in this work in a note for *El Mercurio*, where she states: “Thus, violence, persecution and the desire to keep memories alive are the main motives of this radio theater [...] in which music not

33 Information mentioned in the booklet to: Leni Alexander, “Introducción y Notas sobre las obras,” *Jezira*, independent edition, CD, 2000.

34 The libretto is preserved in Alexander’s collection at the Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

only underlines dramatic situations but has also an independent function.”³⁵ The creative process of the work is also related to memory, since the composer mixes autobiographical mentions and recordings of her own works with other people’s songs, creating a collage of textual and sound memories.

The radio drama *Chacabuco-Ghost Cities* (1993) was composed within the framework of an interdisciplinary project of the Goethe-Institut Santiago that involved the support of the German institution for the partial restoration of this “ghost city.”³⁶ In this case, the radio drama represents an exercise in memory that has no direct relation to the composer’s biography. The common thread is the history of the city of Chacabuco in the Atacama desert. Alexander begins her narration in the city’s golden age, during the rise of the saltpeter industry at the beginning of the 20th century. The narration opens with a recording of famous opera singer Enrico Caruso, who actually visited the city of Iquique, near Chacabuco. The composer denounces the deplorable conditions in which the saltpeter laborers worked at that time and recalls the workers’ massacre at the Santa María School in Iquique in 1907. In documentary-style language, the libretto accounts for the fall of the saltpeter industry as a product of the invention of synthetic saltpeter. Subsequently, the narrative evokes the use of the abandoned city as a concentration camp where workers, university students, and professionals were imprisoned from October 1973. The music of this part of the radio drama corresponds to historical recordings of songs by prisoners from Chacabuco, in addition to traditional music from the north of Chile and fragments of the work *Campo minado (Minefield)* by the Chilean composer Guillermo Rifo. Added to this are verses from Pablo Neruda’s poem “Men of Nitrate” and stanzas from Goethe’s *Faust*. Additionally, Alexander worked with resources characteristic of the documentary genre, as the radio theater includes audio recordings from two interviews; one with a former saltpeter miner and another with a former prisoner of the Chacabuco concentration camp. The real voices of both witnesses of the history of Chacabuco are joined by the voices of actors—men, women and a child—mixing elements of theater, journalistic reporting, and historical chronicle.³⁷ This particular way of combining history and fiction again highlights memory as a fundamental element. At almost the end of the libretto, this is affirmed: “Although ghost cities began to emerge little by little again, in the desert the sequels persist, memory arises, forever indelible.”³⁸

The experimental radio dramas addressed here represent different ways of thematizing memory. Common to both is the denunciation of the violation of human rights under the Chilean military dictatorship, but while this theme is intertwined with a layer of autobiographical memory linked to the persecution of Jewish culture in *Life is shorter...*, the history of a small desert town is addressed in *Chacabuco-Ghost Cities*, giving space to the memories of two real men and

35 Quoted in: “Latinoamérica y Alemania unidas por L. Alexander,” *El Mercurio*, June 20, 1990, C 15.

36 See the recording of the work at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvSlgEUSCdU>

37 The actors were Damian Bodenhofer, Cristián Cáceres, Andrés del Bosque, Camila Hernández, Sandro Larenas, Sara Pantoja, Elsa Poblete, Juana Rubilar, Coca Rudolphi, Gonzalo Sarmiento, Frida Sharim and Pedro Vicuña. Both their names and the literary sources used in the work are mentioned at the end of the recording.

38 “Aunque las ciudades fantasmas comenzaron de a poco a surgir nuevamente, en el desierto persisten las secuelas, surge la memoria, indeleble para siempre.” Transcription from the recording.

their experiences. Undoubtedly, the experimental format of the radio drama is suitable for Leni Alexander’s personal creative style; in both works the composer avoids traditional formats and freely integrates history and fiction, avant-garde, popular and traditional musics, voices in German and Spanish, deconstructing classifications and aesthetic limits. Alongside the autobiographical experiences in the scripts, the composer’s voice is present through the use of recordings of her own works and the traces of her experience as a producer of non-experimental radio programs in Europe. By combining texts and sound layers, linked to various memories, her radio dramas build a space that constantly challenges us to remember, to become participants in a gesture of “not forgetting” in which a political-social denunciation and a demand for humanity resonates, transcending specific personal or historical experiences.

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ARCHIVES

Leni Alexander's collection, Music Archive, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. Contains libretti, press articles, letters, and manuscripts of musical works, among other sources.

MUSIC WORKS

Leni Alexander, *Das Leben ist kürzer als ein Wintertag oder Par quoi? A quoi? Pour quoi? (Life is Shorter than a Winter Day or For whom? To whom? Why?)*, 1991,

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