

Patria: The Complete Cycle. By R. Murray Schafer. Toronto, Ont.: Coach House Books. \$22.95. 272 p., ill., music. ISBN 1-55245-109-7

First, a caveat: the publisher's blurb states that this "new, definitive edition of *Patria* contains all twelve parts of the cycle, plus photos, pages from the scores...commentary on the performance of the pieces and Schafer's personal essays on aestheticism." This is misleading: yes, the book does contain at least one essay on each of the twelve parts of *Patria*, as well as pictures or score excerpts (the latter are wonderfully reproduced). But it does not have all twelve parts of the cycle nor is it definitive.

Instead, this essay collection mirrors almost forty years of Schafer's evolving thoughts on a variety of subjects relating to the composition of *Patria*. Some of the essays are presented as they first appeared in other publications with little disclosed editing; others have additional footnotes bearing more recent dates commenting on the conditions that prompted the original effort; still others appear to be wholly reworked. Taken as a whole, the book helps to clarify the issues that preoccupied Schafer throughout the compositional process and presents the articles in a loosely chronological order based on the final sequence of individual sections of *Patria* (although not in the compositional order). In addition, there are included a couple of essays on what Schafer calls the Theatre of Confluence.

The essays centre on two concerns. The first is how to reclaim the more fundamental interactive and sacred nature of art in everyday life, especially in relation to the creative enterprise and

theatrical presentation. The second is to retell in this expanded format a larger-than-life mytho-psychological story of a male principal generally identified as Wolf, but also identified as a dead pharaoh, Fenris, Theseus, DP (i.e., "displaced person"), among others, and a female principal represented as the Star Princess, Aridane, Ariane, and others. In Schafer's words, *Patria* is "a drama concerned with interpersonal communication...and the alienation of the protagonists." The prologue, ten sections, and epilogue follow the course of Wolf's search for his spirit, personified as the feminine Other, through the labyrinths of the world, so that finally he can be transfigured and released.

To enact this journey, Schafer is adamant that conventional theatre, language, and forms like opera—even Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*—are not workable. This is because traditional theatre is passive. The theatrical experience only appeals to sight and sound; the audience does not participate but looks through an imaginary fourth wall at the action. Schafer's conception of theatre requires both active participation by the audience—sometimes with the audience actually enacting parts of the score—and the involvement of the remaining three senses: smell, taste, and touch. Schafer's response to conventional theatre is to create the Theatre of Confluence. Conceived to operate on all sensory levels simultaneously, it forces the audience not just passively to accept sight and sound, as in traditional theatre, but to incorporate smell, taste, and touch

as well. Two examples he provides of this kind of multifaceted, almost synaesthetic staging are the Roman Catholic Mass with its confluence of sight (rich mosaics and clothes), sound (music, chanting, and bells), smell (incense), taste (bread and wine), and touch (wood pews, velvet kneelers, stone floors and statues). Another is wine tasting, where the clink of the glasses, sight, aroma, taste of wine and cheese, and cozy physical venue all contribute to a multi-sensory, synchronic experience.

Following his desire to incorporate the all of the senses more fully, Schafer even develops a spectrum of scents tied to the various characters in the work—a corridor of scents in one case (*Patria 6 – Ra*)—that also is an important element of the spectacle. It is analogous to the role that lighting or sound plays at a conventional theatre in providing additional information about the story. *Patria 6 – Ra* also features two feasts as part of the work, thereby adding the taste component.

The use of language is also problematic for Schafer, and consequently *Patria* is scored for the protagonists to sing or speak in the vernacular of the staging region with either dead or imaginary languages being used for the other parts. That is, the dead or imaginary languages he uses in the works are invariant and if the work is presented in Western Canada, for example, the main action would use English. However, if the work were staged in Holland, the main action would use Dutch instead of English. In this way, Schafer preserves the otherness of the dead or imaginary languages while making it possible for the local audience to understand the rest completely.

Following this line of thought, Schafer also focuses on the physical space(s) of theatre and how it either helps or hinders the creation of an event that may move the audience emotionally and spiritually, or even erase the boundary between audience and performer. He argues there is a need for a more three-dimensional staging that allows the singer-actors and the orchestra to function on multiple physical levels as well as the audience to see the action from various vantage points. He describes several ways he incorporated this concept into his stage directions and venue(s) for each section of *Patria*. One preferred option, which also reflects Schafer's lifetime interests in environmental studies and soundscapes, is to use a natural setting (e.g., *Patria: Prologue – The Princess of Stars*; *Patria 9 – The Enchanted Forest*; *Patria 10 – The Spirit Garden*). The use of nature also furthers his aim of reconnecting spectacle with sacredness and sincerity, as opposed to the banality and artificiality of modern art.

While he does not name the specific culprits in this regard, Schafer does broadly outline what for him is a degenerating cultural history. Art as a path to the divine has become increasingly artificial, detached from its roots in participatory liturgy, and relegated to professionals who, instead of seeking passion, seek versatility as the highest good. He persuasively argues instead that it is difficult not to feel awe when participating in an event where sunrise or sunset or a mountain range is part of the setting and functions as an actor in the drama, akin to the rituals of old that were earth- and sun-centred.

In sum, the book provides a coherent and compact exposition of the philosophy

that underpinned Schafer's composition of *Patria*. It is useful in two ways: it is a guide to all sections of *Patria* and, by articulating what he was trying to do with the individual sections, Schafer provides a template for evaluating their success.

The frustration for this reviewer is that I have not seen *Patria*, and am only familiar with Schafer's string quartets. It is hard for me to conjure in the mind how *Patria's* sections would sound or look, let alone feel, taste, or smell, with only scraps of the score and the occasional photograph or drawing to assist, despite Schafer's careful discussions. Yet, requesting the inclusion of a CD or DVD of samples from *Patria* would be antithetical to all

that Schafer is trying to do, for that would again reduce to passive viewing in two dimensions what he has laboured so long and hard to flesh out into a participatory, multidimensional experience. In brief, by co-opting nature, his accomplishment in *Patria* is to attempt to reverse a centuries-long trend of art as decoration or opiate (think of TV as a potentially worst offender, although Muzak also comes to mind). Only repeated performances will tell whether he has succeeded in his endeavour.

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