



César López Zarragoitia

CÉSAR, my Mentor

(I)

César was more than just a very well-informed person; he was a cultivated man. Someone transformed, elevated by knowledge. And he was a Poet. One of those rare people who do not see the same reality as most others. One of those who move about the city to see the shadows, reflections, colors; who make up stories instantly when hearing a phrase, or a song ... who recreate a famous painting in their mind with fragments presented to them by chance during a walk. One of those who see signs, guidance in the game of fate. One always interpreting reality, constantly seeking meaning.

A teacher transmits knowledge; a Master, wisdom. César was living and breathing mastership. To be with him was to be enlightened. He educated constantly. It was his nature, his essence. If his knowledge did not come from his mouth; his person emanated it; his gestures, his actions, his reactions revealed it.

César López approached teaching from a holistic point of view. For him to acquire extensive and thorough general cultivation had the same degree of importance as the hours that the student devoted to his instrument. To express musically with imagination, with conceptual and emotional depth, both things had to go hand in hand. The richer the inner world of the student and the more he acquired command of his instrument, the closer he became to excellence.

César was meticulous, dedicated and patient in teaching. In addition to the classes at school, he would summon me to his house on Sundays where we worked from morning to night. Those classes included analytic listening sessions – from Kathleen Ferrier to Keith Jarrett – lunch with his family, conversations, etc. His imagination had no limits when it came to making himself understood. I remember that once, to help me achieve a certain type of sound on the piano, he let me feel the moss on stones with the tips of my fingers, and the pads of a cat's paws on another occasion.

He constantly compared language with musical discourse and spoke equally of commas and periods as phrases and semi-phrases. For him music was a language to express oneself. He urged me to assimilate a certain distance in the process of performing as an indispensable aspect: Emotions must be transmitted from control, because without control there can be no precision and without this intended emotions would sound unbalanced and without art. As if one were observing oneself and controlling the action while playing.

He advised me to experience life consciously. Live and at the same time observe experiences. While walking; observing, listening, feeling and fixing in memory. In this way he attuned me to nature. Being so young and learning so much about everything and everyone, the mind absorbed everything but also constantly processed everything. César taught me to feel the breeze on my face, to enjoy it; he made me notice that melancholic color of some sunsets on the walls of the city; he showed me the benefit of standing before the sea, the benefit of being aware of breath. He taught me to listen to the silences because all space produces different silences.

"Question everything," he said. Not to create a skeptic but to stir curiosity. Do not settle for what is read, what is said, what is established. Keep an open mind and go further and look for oneself, inquire, to get a wider and deeper idea of things. And above all to form an opinion of one's own. So sometimes he made me come up with two or three different interpretative versions of the same piece. I learned from him that rather than to judge, it is wiser to observe and try to understand. I learned to avoid rigid definitions and categorical opinions because everything has a part that we do not see, a part that is hidden, that we do not know.

As he did not want to get rid of his old pianos to buy new ones, he had two grands and one vertical piano. He bought one of the grand pianos from an elderly couple who, in dire straits, asked for an amount of money less than the value of the instrument; he paid them the true value of the piano. He helped as many as he could. He always saw the best in people and was able to separate harm from the person himself. He gave and had trouble receiving himself. On stage, he was more comfortable in the company of other musicians than alone.

His family called him Pupy, some students, El César. He deeply admired the humble greatness of Saint Francis of Assisi. In his studio there was a single portrait and it was of José Martí. I, on my piano, have always had one of his.