

# Audrey Ochoa: “I Just Like to Write Songs!”

By **Raul da Gama** - June 14, 2019



Audrey Ochoa has designs on her career. “Deep down,” she says, “I just want to be a pop star!” She’s much more than she looks every bit the part and is mostly up for playing it too. But don’t be fooled by her flippant attitude; she’s a serious musician who sees herself – and *is* indeed – not only part of a long line of musicians and despite a very busy schedule she never fails to do the right things right.

Whether she’s writing music, or playing it in scores of settings on stage or in the studio, she never stops creating. Her inventions of a phrase that she sculpts seemingly out of the air with her trombone, or seductively bending a breathtaking glissando she has discovered on the spot... No matter what she is doing on any given time of day, she stays away at the façade that is standing between her and where she wants to be.

## ...TODAY I’M DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO IDENTIFYING MYSELF AS AN ARTIST”

So if you felt that Miss Ochoa sets about creating feelings you’ll find a large measure of truth in that. All the tempo, dynamics and emotion, activated by the vibrations as her lips engage the air from her lungs singing into the gliding tubing. This is the means by which Ochoa creates fine texture and timbre; her sense of spatial scale and rhythmic energy, and pure emotion in a kinetic response to combative, hair-trigger dynamic musical contrasts.

For proof of all of the above, look no further than the present recording, *Afterthought*, a mesmerizing album full of beckoning genius. Audrey Ochoa’s inventions are redolent of light-handed glissandos and mercurial arpeggiated charm and wit. The disc consists of eight works of unsurpassed beauty. Each song is alive with personal and imaginative possibility. Ochoa’s compositions are graceful, fluent and affectionate. Of course there is a lot that Ochoa does. She recently revealed much of it in this freewheeling interview with the Toronto Music Report.

**Toronto Music Report:** You know that you’re part of a very small tribe – Melba Liston and the women trombonists to have cut two albums as leader?



**Audrey Ochoa:** There are a few female trombone leaders music. Melissa Gardiner and Karin Hammar, to name a couple don't know any in Canada but admittedly I haven't looked talk Melba Liston in a bit but to answer the second part of felt like a declaration of my existence to the world, the second people to get to know me.

**TMR:** What's the response been to *Afterthought*?

**AO:** The response has been overwhelmingly positive and it's unbelievable. I was able to get some play on US college radio (via Chronograph records) in the US too. I was also booked Greensboro and Wilmington and elsewhere.

**TMR:** What was it like making the album? Did your experience when going into the studio the second time around?

**AO:** Making *Afterthought* was relaxed. It had no deadlines, no producer, so there were no expectations. The successful grant application and we didn't (dare) veer from my written proposal. I had a producer, the great of the shots and I like to describe my experience on that as being a spectator for much of it. And rightfully so and had quite a bit to learn. Tommy was so decisive and experienced.

The second time around on *Afterthought*, I self-produced and financed it myself and had more of an interest felt entitled to take a few more risks. For example, when I recorded "Afterthought" (track 6) it was originally my logic was, "Who cares if this is a bad idea... it's my money I can do what I want." Instead of a clear and experimented and took turns.

**TMR:** Did you have to produce as well? What was that like?

**AO:** I still don't totally understand what a producer's role is on a jazz album- I feel like it's just a sober third second take the best" without any skin in the game. So to that end I liked being producer. But seriously, all product. And that collaborative approach, where I could ask Sandro for something and Mike could change it or could discuss changing the form to better suit a drum solo or whatever.. All of that was great.

### Raul da Gama

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just these two brass-masters playing with reckless abandon sound "like a saxophone". Just great. I also love Ray Anderson not perfect playing, but no matter what they're doing they are people who can tell a story. Wycliffe is amazing, as is Mars' technique.

I also love vocalists, and am constantly trying to emulate Beyonce and Rihanna fan. And I would love to sound like Keith a trombone if I could.

TMR: Where do you see yourself in the (music) continuum you're going?

AO: 5 years ago I would have said, "I'm a jobber..." today identifying as "an artist". I'm going to keep writing music and a third album that's going to be released in March (2020). I'm working with bigger ensembles as well. I'm working bound to happen eventually). And I created a ska-orchestra in Edmonton and we did a show of ska-arrange

All I want is to write and play music with people, for an audience that enjoys it. I'll go wherever I can get there

TMR: Do you have a game plan to get you there?

AO: All the best things started happening when I stopped planning and just started saying yes to different projects. My plan is to say yes to as much as I can without burning out.

TMR: Do you write music? Enjoy it?

AO: I love writing music. I think it's a part of the tradition of jazz.

TMR: Writing... on the piano or another instrument?

AO: I write with voice, piano, guitar and lastly trombone. A lot of what I've written has lyrics as deep down

TMR: Where do you think your music comes from?

AO: I think it's an aggregate of my musical diet from the last 34 years. It's also something that is in my family of musicians, that is. I feel like I'm carrying the torch for them too. My father was a trumpet player with the Edmonton before that in the Manila symphony, his uncle was principal trumpet, his other uncle was principal trombone "Where I come from, the name 'Ochoa' is known as 'musician'". So it's important to me.

TMR: Is there ever a spiritual moment?

AO: Yes. Every once in a while you'll have a moment when playing where everything lines up; the musician is rare. So I chase after those moments. No one person can take credit for those moments.

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**TMR:** Where do you stand on: Composition or improvisation? Structured or Free Improv?

**AO:** Improvisation is just spontaneous composition. I think they're the same thing really. Good improv, even there are rules that are agreed upon- and some music forms have fewer rules, but there's still an agreement just like any conversation, if you're stuck talking to someone who doesn't listen and doesn't care what you say that's what bad free improv is to me.

**TMR:** Are you relatively busy these days?

**AO:** I'm very busy; but busy doing different things. Casinos, musicals, recording whatever. Brass quartets, arranging. Whatever. I say yes to as much as I can. I get regular sideman work. Fun fact: I was the trombonist of "Hadestown" which just won best musical at the Tony's. I got a ton of press and feedback from that gig. In places I find myself working. Engagements as leader are less frequent.

**TMR:** What's a regular day like for you?

**AO:** I teach. I work a fulltime job teaching music in a school and I love it. and it's how I financed the album



**TMR:** Do you do any teaching?

**AO:** Yes (with a big smile), but not privately. In fact I dislike teaching or teaching others "how to improvise" especially as it feels like I'm imposing my voice onto someone who's just starting out.

**TMR:** Is music all you do? Does it pay the bills?

**AO:** I tried to make a living just as a musician in my 20s and 30s I guess and then in 2014 I thought I might just quit music and go to work. I was quite sick of being broke. I always thought teaching for a living was a good idea but then I found out that it was a lot of work and that I'd be some kind of sell-out. Instead I just do music jobs, it works for me.

**TMR:** I know we love our artists and treat them better than the American scene like for you as especially as someone who is a Canadian.

**AO:** The Edmonton Arts Council and Alberta Foundation for the arts are very active. They might not be any government... (fingers-crossed). They support a lot of different projects, and I have nothing but excellent thank you letters from the federal and provincial support of the arts. The number of festivals and arts initiatives is great and we, despite being in a remote area, have a lot of exposure to national and international performers especially with our club, The Yardbird Suite (our jazz club). We have had national and international acts 10 months out of the year. Canada Council is supporting this upcoming tour so there are a lot of things to say about Canada Council too.

## *THE FIRST ALBUM FELT LIKE A DECLARATION OF MY INTENTIONS TO THE WORLD, THE SECOND ALBUM FELT LIKE I WAS TELLING MY PEOPLE TO GET TO KNOW ME*

**TMR:** Do you get around? Vancouver... Montreal... Toronto...?

**AO:** I get around to British Columbia, I played the Montreal Jazz Fest in 2012. I play Toronto with singer-songwriter Kodalum. I also played there with a blues band. I also played there with a Francophone artist from here in Edmonton (Cristina). I played in Mexico with a Francophone group. I mentioned before, Dallas, North Carolina and Memphis.

**TMR:** Do you have an agent and do you get PR help?

**AO:** All my PR help is coordinated through my label, Chronograph, and its president, Stephanie Hutchinson, for the success of my album.

**TMR:** I know the Hutchinsons' do a fabulous job where you are, especially as Kodi is a musician too and Stephanie is a musician too. Tell me what it was like to work with them?

**AO:** I rarely deal with Kodi outside of seeing him on gigs or festivals. Stephanie is unbelievable; she is thorough and very connected. You'd think that having a child would have slowed her (and Kodi) down but they're always available when dealing with my hiccups and mistakes. Your earlier question about "where I see my career going" she has the vision. I just like to write songs.