

GUSMÃO, PABLO DA SILVA, D.M.A. A Synthesis of Modern and Brazilian Elements: An Investigation of *Variantes e Toccata Opus 15a* by Marlos Nobre. (2009)
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Marlos Nobre (b. 1939), one of the most important composers of contemporary music in Brazil, always fought against labels to define his aesthetic orientation. While resisting the idea of being considered a nationalist composer, Nobre admitted that a composer's style is the result of all his past experiences. Having been exposed to a significant amount of street music during his childhood, Nobre inevitably incorporated elements of Brazilian folklore into his early compositions. Nobre studied with Hans Joachim Koellreutter and Camargo Guarnieri, who defended opposite aesthetic views, and Nobre found himself in the middle of a dilemma regarding the use of national elements in a modern serialist language. In 1963, when he went to Buenos Aires to study with Alberto Ginastera, Olivier Messiaen, Riccardo Malipiero and other important composers, Nobre experienced a shift in his musical language which allowed him to successfully achieve a synthesis of contemporary compositional techniques and Brazilian rhythm. The new musical style was inaugurated with a composition for piano and a percussion ensemble of typical Brazilian instruments, called *Variações Rítmicas opus 15*. In 1997, Nobre arranged the composition for piano solo and titled it *Variantes e Toccata opus 15a*. This version, which consists mostly of the original piano part alone, represents an important addition to the pianistic repertory and allows a close investigation of Nobre's success in achieving a synthesis between Brazilian rhythms and serial language.

After an introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides an overview of Nobre's life and his five musical styles, focusing particularly on the dilemma that Nobre faced in his early

life regarding the combination of modern and national elements. Chapter 3 places *Variantes e Toccata opus 15a* in a historic context by explaining the origins of opus 15 and the reasons surrounding its arrangement for piano solo. Chapter 4 discusses in more detail the relationship of Nobre with nationalism and describes the typical rhythmic patterns that represent Brazilian music. Chapter 5 consists of an analysis of the aspects of the composition that represent modern compositional techniques and identifies Nobre's manipulation of Brazilian rhythmic elements. Chapter 6 provides a brief conclusion, which summarizes the advances in Nobre's compositional technique that successfully led to the synthesis of Brazilian and modern elements.

A SYNTHESIS OF MODERN AND BRAZILIAN ELEMENTS:
AN INVESTIGATION OF *VARIANTES E TOCCATA OPUS 15a*

BY MARLOS NOBRE

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Related Literature	3
Organization of the Text	8
II. MARLOS NOBRE'S LIFE AND STYLES	11
First Style Period (1959-1963).	13
Second Style Period (1963-1968)	17
Third Style Period (1969-1977)	22
Fourth Style Period (1980-1989)	24
Fifth Style Period (1989-Present).	26
III. VARIANTES E TOCCATA, OPUS 15a: CONTEXT.	28
Origins of <i>Variações Rítmicas op. 15</i>	28
Marlos Nobre's Arrangements and Versions.. . . .	34
IV. NATIONALISM AND BRAZILIAN MUSICAL ELEMENTS.	39
The Influence of Mário de Andrade.	39
Brazilian Rhythm	43
V. VARIANTES E TOCCATA, OPUS 15a: ANALYSIS	53
Pitch Organization	53
Rhythmic and Motivic Manipulation	68
VI. CONCLUSION.	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	84
APPENDIX. LETTERS OF PERMISSION FOR THE CITATION OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES	87

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian composer Marlos Nobre was only twenty-one years old when critics declared that “Villa Lobos passed the scepter of Brazilian musical creation to him”¹ – a great compliment that is proportional to a great responsibility. Nobre succeeded in fulfilling the expectations derived from such a comparison and today he is one of the most active and important figures in Brazilian contemporary music. Since 1959, Marlos Nobre has won more than thirty national and international awards and has held important positions around the world, serving as president of the Brazilian National Academy and of the International Music Council of UNESCO.

Nobre’s catalogue of works includes over two hundred compositions, providing examples in virtually every genre and displaying a constantly renewed originality and creativity. Throughout his career, Nobre has been seeking ways to refine his musical language and challenge both his own ideas and the artistic environment surrounding him.

Ever conscious of the metamorphosis of his language, Nobre divides his own works into five stylistic periods. In fact, it is more appropriate to understand such divisions as “stylistic attitudes,” since, as will be described later, a correspondence between chronological and stylistic aspects exists only as a general guideline. Every

¹ Brazilian newspaper *Diário de Notícias*, quoted in Tomás Marco, *Marlos Nobre: El Sonido del Realismo Mágico* (Madrid: Fundación Autor, 2005), 154.

period contains exceptions – manifestations of musical ideas that, according to the composer, belong to a previous style but were not composed until later.

This dissertation will focus on the first major shift in Nobre's musical language, the initial moment when he was able to establish his personal idiom by achieving a synthesis of modern compositional techniques and Brazilian elements. This change in language followed an important event in Marlos Nobre's life: in 1963, he left Brazil for the first time to study with Alberto Ginastera, Olivier Messiaen, Riccardo Malipiero and other important international composers in a two-year long program in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His second style contains compositions between 1963 and 1968 – no less than thirteen opus numbers – and is inaugurated with the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*, a work for piano and percussion ensemble. Among the works composed during this period, there are only two compositions for piano solo, the *Terceiro Ciclo Nordestino op. 20*, and the *Sonata Breve op. 24*. However, while these are important works, the composer classifies both of them as exceptions to the second style, which leads to the conclusion that there are no original works for piano solo representing his second style. This contrasts with the relatively rich production for that instrument during the previous period.

In 1997, Marlos Nobre created a piano solo version of opus 15, titled *Variantes e Toccata op. 15a*, which provides an ideal opportunity to observe how the inauguration of his personal language, Brazilian and modern at once, was manifested in the idiom of his instrument, the piano. Despite representing an important turning point in Nobre's artistic language, this work has never been the object of investigation. Studies and dissertations dealing with his piano music did not approach the original work for it is not for piano

solo. The 1997 version brings this historically important composition into the piano repertory. The work represents an important step towards achieving a new language in Brazilian modern music, since, by the time of its composition, many people believed it impossible to successfully integrate serial techniques with typical Brazilian rhythmic elements. According to Nobre, “the essence of the work is in my intention of attempting a kind of synthesis between the language of serialism and Brazilian rhythm.”² Having studied with important figures representing both traditions, Nobre was warned by both sides about the impossibility of such a task, which only made him more tempted by the challenge: “I heard a lot at the time that this was impossible and such objection from my colleagues only increased my interest.”³ This dissertation will demonstrate how Nobre combined avant-garde language with Brazilian elements in order to create a piano music that represents a much more personal language.

Related Literature

Marlos Nobre has been the subject of articles, papers, and dissertations for several decades: as early as 1966 his name was already part of a catalogue of Brazilian artists published by the Brazilian government and, in 1971, John Vinton’s *Dictionary of Contemporary Music* contained an entry dedicated to Nobre.⁴

² Nobre, e-mail to the author, 17 January 2009. “A essência da obra está na minha intenção de tentar uma espécie de síntese entre a linguagem serial e a rítmica brasileira.”

³ Ibid. “Eu escutava muito na época que isto era impossível e esta objeção dos meus colegas serialistas me aguçou ainda mais o interesse.”

⁴ *Quem é quem nas Artes e nas Letras do Brasil*, Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Rio de Janeiro, 1966 and John Vinton, ed., *Dictionary of Contemporary Music* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1971), 514; quoted in Nobre, “Articles, Interviews and Dictionaries” (2005), http://marlosnobre.sites.uol.com.br/artentdic_i.html (accessed 25 January 2009).

The author has been unable to discover any published studies investigating any aspect of Nobre's *Variantes e Toccata op. 15a*, while the original work for piano and percussion ensemble, *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*, is only briefly mentioned in a few publications.

The issue no. 148 (1979) of the Chilean periodical *Revista Musical Chilena* contains two valuable articles in Spanish by María Ester Grebe: the first one, *Nueve Preguntas a Marlos Nobre*, is an interview with Nobre where he explains the development of his personal musical language during his youth and describes for the first time his compositional style periods – up to the third period, at that moment.⁵ It was in this interview that Marlos Nobre first explained that the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15* marked the beginning of his second compositional phase and briefly described its flexibility regarding serialism. The second article by the same author is an analysis of *Ukrinmakrinkrin op. 17*.⁶ This composition is one of the most important works of Nobre's second style, hence its relevance to this study.

Françoise-Emmanuelle Denis published in 1991 an interview with Nobre in French that is particularly important for the present study.⁷ Nobre discusses the two levels, conscious and unconscious, in which Brazilian rhythms influenced his language. He also explains how his studies with Olivier Messiaen in Buenos Aires provided him with a new approach to rhythmic transformations. Furthermore, Nobre briefly mentions his personal

⁵ Maria Ester Grebe, "Nueve Preguntas a Marlos Nobre," *Revista Musical Chilena* 33, no. 147 (1979): 37-47.

⁶ Ibid, "Ukrinmakrinkrin," *Revista Musical Chilena* 33, no. 147 (1979): 48-57.

⁷ François-Emmanuelle Denis, "Rencontre avec Marlos Nobre," *Les Cahiers de la Guitare* 33 (1991): 33-34.

way of incorporating serial technique into his music, particularly in the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*.

An interview with Nobre by Royal S. Brown, published in *Fanfare* magazine in 1994, does not offer much new information, but it is, nevertheless, interesting to observe Nobre's explanation of his composition process.⁸ In an interview by Francesco Biraghi and Lena Kokkaliari, published in Italian in the April-June 2000 issue of the *Il Fronimo*, Marlos Nobre explains the distinction between rhythmic complexity and chaos, the latter resulting from the lack of a regular frame against which complex rhythms can be perceived.⁹

Ingrid Barancoski's 1997 DMA dissertation is the first major scholarly work to discuss the full range of Nobre's output for piano solo, focusing on the evolution of Nobre's style and its integration of a Brazilian musical language.¹⁰ In *The Interaction of Brazilian National Identity and Contemporary Musical Language: The Stylistic Development in Selected Piano Works by Marlos Nobre*, Barancoski selected and analyzed five piano works by Nobre that represent different moments in his life: *Nazarethiana op. 2* (1960), *Toccatina, Ponteio e Final op. 12* (1963), *Ciclo Nordestino no. 3, op. 22* (1966), *Homenagem a Arthur Rubinstein op. 40* (1973), and *Frevo* (1977-1985). However, it is interesting to observe that not all the compositional styles (as defined by the composer) are represented. Both *Nazarethiana op. 2* and *Toccatina*

⁸ Royal S. Brown, "An Interview with Marlos Nobre," *Fanfare* 18 no. 1 (1994): 60-66.

⁹ Lena Kokkaliari and Francesco Biraghi, "Intervista a Marlos Nobre," *Il Fronimo* 28 (2000): 7-13.

¹⁰ Ingrid Barancoski, "The Interaction of Brazilian National Identity and Contemporary Musical Language: The Stylistic Development in Selected Piano Works by Marlos Nobre," DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997.

Ponteio e Final op. 12 belong to the first period, even though they display sufficient contrast of style to justify the author's choice. The *Ciclo Nordestino no. 3, op. 22* was composed during Nobre's second style period, but it is part of the list of the exceptions to the style of this period. *Homenagem a Arthur Rubinstein op. 40* was composed during the third period and *Frevo*, a movement of the *Ciclo Nordestino no. 4, op. 43*, was also sketched during this time.

In 2005, Marlos Nobre won the sixth *Premio Tomás Luis de Victoria*, in Madrid, which resulted in the publication of the first comprehensive book about his life and works, published in Spanish with the title *Marlos Nobre: El Sonido del Realismo Mágico*.¹¹ Written by Tomás Marco, the book has sections discussing Nobre's production in each musical genre, as well as a biographical essay, a list of works and recordings, and a discussion of Nobre's style.

Bernardo Scarambone's 2006 DMA dissertation *The Piano Works of Marlos Nobre* provides a revised biography of Marlos Nobre while presenting a comprehensive view of Nobre's output for piano.¹² Scarambone analyzes five compositions; three are from the first period, including *Nazarethiana op. 2*. From the second period (but still considered an exception by Nobre), Scarambone discusses the *Sonata Breve op. 24*, which was composed in 1966 and remained unpublished until the year 2000. Providing an interesting contrast with opus 2, the earliest piano composition in Nobre's catalogue, Scarambone analyzes *Sonatina op. 66*, Nobre's latest original composition for piano solo

¹¹ Tomás Marco, *Marlos Nobre: El Sonido del Realismo Mágico*, Madrid: Fundación Autor, 2005.

¹² Bernardo Scarambone, "The Piano Works of Marlos Nobre," DMA diss., University of Houston, 2006.

as of that date. The work was composed in 1984 but only released for publication in 2003. In the chapter about Nobre's second style period, Scarambone discusses how the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15* provide a perfect example of Nobre's flexible approach to serialism. The *Variantes e Toccata op. 15a* are mentioned as being, together with the other transcription, *Monólogos op. 37*, the only solo piano pieces in Nobre's catalogue after *Sonatina op. 66* as of 2005.

Electronic sources were also important for this study. Marlos Nobre maintains his personal website on the World Wide Web at the domain <http://marlosnobre.sites.uol.com.br>. The website is presented in three languages: English, Portuguese and German. On the initial page, Nobre lists his ten Musical Beliefs, the general ideas and concepts that guide his artistic decisions. The website also contains a complete catalogue of his works with a preface by Yehudi Menuhin, as well as a list of theses, articles, papers, and dissertations about his life or works. Unfortunately, these lists are not up-to-date, lacking many publications after the year 2000. Keeping up with modern technology, Marlos Nobre also created his own channel on the video-hosting website YouTube, at <http://www.youtube.com/user/marlosnobre>, where he published videos of performances of some of his works, many of them with him at the piano.

A very comprehensive and interesting interview with Marlos Nobre can be found at the electronic address <http://mbaz.org/marlosnobre>.¹³ The hosting website is called *Música Brasileira* and is dedicated to the presentation of reviews in English of recordings and compositions, as well as interviews with many Brazilian artists. The interview

¹³ Tom Moore, "An Interview with Marlos Nobre" (2007), <http://mbaz.org/marlosnobre/> (accessed 19 September 2008).

conducted by Tom Moore in 2007 discusses Nobre's artistic life since his early years in his hometown. There is an important discussion about his personal and artistic relationships with his teachers, both in Brazil and in Buenos Aires. In addition, Nobre exchanged emails with the author providing significant information that is relevant for this investigation. All the translations into English are by the author.

Organization of the Text

Chapter 2 contains a review of Marlos Nobre's life and his compositional styles in order to provide a comprehensive view of his influences and the context of his compositional aesthetics. The text describes Nobre's achievements and musical education, with a focus on elements that influenced his musical language. There is a stronger emphasis on his first two stylistic periods (until 1968), due to the greater relevance to the composition investigated by this study. The main objective of the chapter is to provide a clear understanding of how Nobre sought to synthesize in his personal language the influences absorbed from his exposure both to regional folk music and to the latest European compositions with which he had contact since his youth. Finally, in Chapter 2, it is of capital importance to assess the effect that studying abroad in Buenos Aires had on Nobre's musical language, particularly regarding how that environment related to the aesthetic problem of nationalism and the avant-garde.

Chapter 3 establishes the historical and stylistic context of the composition. The first part explains the process of creation of the original opus 15. In order to contextualize the aesthetic dilemma of nationalism versus avant-garde, the chapter explains in more

detail the relationships Nobre had with Hans Joachim Koellreutter and Camargo Guarnieri, who represented the two extreme points of view and with whom Nobre studied composition. The second part of the chapter deals with Nobre's arrangements and versions of his own works in order to provide a better understanding of the process and circumstances that led to the creation of *Variantes e Toccata op. 15a* in 1997. The chapter concludes with a list of all the divergences between opus 15 and opus 15a.

Chapter 4 is also divided into two parts. The first section explains Marlos Nobre's relationship with nationalism. It aims to solve the apparent contradiction of Nobre's statements refuting nationalism while claiming to compose music that incorporates Brazilian elements. The influence of the Brazilian musicologist Mário de Andrade is the main subject of this section, since Andrade was a very influential figure for Brazilian artists in general and Nobre in particular. The second section of the chapter addresses the history and characteristics of the Brazilian rhythmic elements that are found in *Variantes and Toccata op. 15a*, through a survey of early examples of Brazilian popular music and of all the major Brazilian influences on Nobre's language. This section explains the importance of the rhythmic pattern known as *tresillo* and identifies its use in music by Ernesto Nazareth, Heitor Villa-Lobos and Camargo Guarnieri.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the work divided into two aspects that are the most relevant for this investigation. The first section discusses the pitch language employed by Nobre in the variations, focusing particularly on the use of tone structures derived from the interval classes 1 and 6. Such tone structures put Nobre's music directly into the context of the modern language practiced by Bartók, Webern, Stockhausen and

many other important composers of the twentieth century. The second section of this chapter discusses the development of motivic ideas and the incorporation of the *tresillo* pattern in the rhythmic elements of the work. Nobre avoids using the *tresillo* rhythm as an underlying metric reference frame, which is its normal context. Instead, the *tresillo* is itself fragmented and manipulated to generate rhythmic momentum throughout the work. The main ideas are reviewed and summarized in the concluding Chapter 6.

CHAPTER II

MARLOS NOBRE'S LIFE AND STYLES

Marlos Mesquita Nobre de Almeida was born on February 18, 1939 in the city of Recife, the capital of the Brazilian state Pernambuco. His family lived in the center of the city, exposed to many public manifestations, ceremonies and celebrations. Carnival groups paraded in the neighborhood, allowing Nobre to experience, from his early years, the popular music and rhythms of northeast Brazil.¹⁴ When Nobre was four years old, he started taking piano and music theory lessons from his cousin Nysia Nobre, who was a professional pianist. Nysia organized public recitals of her students in the Teatro Santa Isabel, where Nobre had his first public performance at the age of five.¹⁵ It would not be long before he was improvising at the piano on popular tunes whereupon his mother told him not to play such street songs.¹⁶

This conflict between classical training and popular music would arise again later, as Nobre entered the local conservatory, the Conservatório Pernambucano de Música in 1948. Although he was still taking lessons from his cousin, the conservatory created more opportunities for him to get acquainted with the traditional repertory, from Mozart and Beethoven to Schumann and Chopin. The young Marlos Nobre kept the habit of

¹⁴ Tom Moore, "An Interview with Marlos Nobre" (2007), <http://mbaz.org/marlosnobre/> (accessed 19 September 2008).

¹⁵ Bernardo Scarambone, *The Piano Works of Marlos Nobre* (DMA diss., University of Houston, 2006), 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

improvising for hours and sometimes he would play some of his own *frevos*. The director of the conservatory called Nobre to his office and told him, “I heard you playing street music. This is forbidden here in the conservatory.”¹⁷

Nobre found a possible solution to this conflict between classical and popular music when he heard Villa-Lobos’s *A Prole do Bebê*. The composition is based on children’s songs, and Nobre realized that it was possible to write original music incorporating street music. At the age of eleven, Nobre decided to seek more information about the music of Villa-Lobos, which eventually led him to the music of another Brazilian composer, Ernesto Nazareth (1863-1934).¹⁸ These were the two Brazilian composers who most influenced Marlos Nobre and both of them were very experienced in combining street music and folklore with traditional forms and styles.¹⁹

In 1954, Marlos Nobre’s cousin, Nysia, founded the Instituto Ernani Braga, where Nobre took counterpoint lessons with Padre Jaime Diniz. Padre Diniz created opportunities for Nobre to hear his own compositions, including a complete Mass, sung by the choir at the Igreja da Matriz.²⁰ In the same year, Nobre regularly attended concerts of the Recife Symphony Orchestra and anxiously sought to know, read, and listen to all the music to which he could gain access. To this end, contact with José Ignácio Cabral de Lima, a violinist in the Symphony Orchestra, was essential. From 1954 to 1959, José Ignácio held weekly meetings at his house, where Nobre had the opportunity to discuss

¹⁷ Moore, <http://mbaz.org/marlosnobre>.

¹⁸ Scarambone, 7.

¹⁹ Ingrid Barancoski, “The Interaction of Brazilian National Identity and Contemporary Musical Language: The Stylistic Development in Selected Piano Works by Marlos Nobre” (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), 40.

²⁰ Nobre, e-mail to Scarambone, in Scarambone, 133.

modern music and to listen for the first time to the works of Stravinsky, Messiaen, Bartók, Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev, Webern, Berg, Schoenberg and the first works of Stockhausen.²¹ Nobre would go to José Ignacio's house to study the score of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, for example, or the copy of *Ludus Tonalis* that Hindemith personally sent to José Ignacio.²² Another source of information for Nobre was the Public Library of his hometown, which not only provided access to literature about composers and recordings of classical repertory, but also presented masterclasses on Sundays, where important works were analyzed and discussed.²³

After graduating from the Conservatory in 1956, Nobre was admitted to the Philosophy department of Recife University. While pursuing a Social and Political Sciences degree at the University, Nobre continued his musical studies at the Instituto Ernani Braga until his graduation from the Instituto in 1958. He had experimented with most musical genres – among his compositions there were works for string trios and quartets, symphonies and masses. His short piano works were mainly influenced by Bach, Schumann, Beethoven and Chopin.²⁴

First Style Period (1959-1963)

At the age of twenty, Nobre started his Bachelor degree in Music Performance at Recife University. He eventually destroyed all his early compositions, with the exception of his *Concertino op. 1* for piano and string orchestra, written in 1959. This work

²¹ Scarambone, 8.

²² Moore, <http://mbaz.org/marlosnobre>.

²³ Scarambone, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 11-12.

received an honorable mention in the First Competition for Music and Musicians of Brazil, sponsored by the Radio MEC. The *Concertino* has three movements, the third of which was made into an unaccompanied version for piano solo, titled *Homenagem a Ernesto Nazareth op. 1a*.²⁵ Not long after that, his opus 2, *Nazarethiana*, for piano solo, also obtained first prize in the National Competition of the German-Brazilian Cultural Society.²⁶

Between January and February of 1960 Nobre participated in the Summer Festival of Teresópolis, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, where he studied with the German composer and musicologist Hans-Joachim Koellreutter (1915-2005). Koellreutter had lived in Brazil for more than twenty years by then, and as early as 1939 had founded the Grupo Música Viva, a group that organized concerts and lectures defending avant-garde aesthetic ideas, particularly the use of serial procedures.²⁷ Koellreutter used to give all his new students a test to assess their knowledge of modern music. The German composer was surprised to discover that Marlos Nobre was aware of even the most recent works by Messiaen and Stockhausen, works that Koellreutter himself had not yet heard.²⁸

Koellreutter was a passionate advocate of twelve-tone technique, and it was during this time that Nobre composed his *Variações op. 3* for solo oboe and the *Trio op. 4* for violin, viola and piano. In spite of strong disagreements between Nobre and Koellreutter regarding aesthetic orientations, the *Trio* ended up winning the Second

²⁵ Marco, 61.

²⁶ Scarambone, 12.

²⁷ In November of 1946 the Grupo Música Viva published its *Manifesto 1946 – Declaração de Princípios*. See Vasco Mariz, *História da Música no Brasil*, 5th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2000), 298-99.

²⁸ Moore, <http://mbaz.org/marlosnobre>.

Competition for Music and Musicians of Brazil, which provided Nobre with a substantial financial reward as well as public and critical acclaim.²⁹ For the first time, Nobre was compared to Villa-Lobos, described by a critic as an “intensely bright star to whom Villa-Lobos seems to have passed the scepter of Brazilian musical creation.”³⁰ Also in 1960, Nobre’s *1º Ciclo Nordestino op. 5* won second prize in a competition by the Municipal Commission of Culture of São Paulo. Nobre’s recognition and success earned his family’s support, contributing to his decision to abandon his performance degree and pursue a career as a composer.³¹

In the following year, Camargo Guarnieri (1907-1993) invited Marlos Nobre to study with him in São Paulo. Guarnieri had been one of the most important defenders of musical nationalism and was the main figure in the ongoing polemic against the musical avant-garde of the Grupo Música Viva; he strongly disagreed with Koellreutter’s principles and believed that research and incorporation of folklore was essential for the preservation of Brazilian identity.³² The culmination of the conflict was Guarnieri’s open letter titled “Carta Aberta aos Músicos e Críticos do Brasil” [Open Letter to Brazilian Musicians and Critics], published in several newspapers in 1950. Similarly to his encounter with Koellreutter, Nobre did not take well to what he perceived to be Guarnieri’s rigid bias in favor of composing in a nationalistic style.

Having studied with the leaders of two extreme and opposite aesthetic orientations, Nobre decided to create his own style: “[Both Guarnieri and Koellreutter]

²⁹ Scarambone, 14.

³⁰ In Marco, 29. “. . . como una estrella de intensa luminosidad a quien Villa-Lobos parece haver entregado el cetro de la creación musical brasileña.”

³¹ Scarambone, 14-15.

³² Ibid..

were very strict in their aesthetic ideologies, a position that was contrary to mine of opening windows and assimilating everything possible from the past and present music.”³³ Therefore, Nobre did not reject any knowledge he received; instead, he “found [his] own path, [and] moved forward, taking from both what was useful to [him] and disposing of what was not, that is, the aesthetic prejudice.”³⁴

During this period in São Paulo, Nobre obtained two more composition prizes: his *Tema e Variações op. 7* for piano solo received first prize in BMI’s Young Composers Award competition in New York and his *Três Trovas op. 6* for soprano and piano obtained an honorable mention in the competition “A Canção Brasileira” in Rio de Janeiro. After he moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1962, more awards followed: his *16 Variações sobre tema de Frutuoso Vianna op. 8, no. 1* for piano solo won first prize in the First International Competition of Musical Youth in Rio de Janeiro and the “Maracatu” of his *Três Canções op. 9* for soprano and piano won first prize in the second edition of the “A Canção Brasileira.”³⁵ In 1963, his opus 7 was awarded first prize and his *Toccatina, Ponteio e Final op. 12* for piano solo obtained an honorable mention at the National Competition of the University of Rio de Janeiro. During this year, Nobre composed the second set of his *Ciclo Nordestino op. 13*, and a three-movement piece for piano and orchestra, the *Divertimento op. 14*.

³³ Nobre, letter to Barancoski, in Barancoski, 42. “Tanto um como outro [Guarnieri e Koellreutter] eram rígidos em suas ideologias estéticas, posição contrária à minha que era a de abrir as janelas e assimilar tudo que fosse possível na música do passado e atual.”

³⁴ Nobre, e-mail to Scarambone, in Scarambone, 16. “Ora, desta dualidade é que eu tirei meu próprio caminho, segui em frente portanto, tirando do dois aquilo que me era útil e descartando o inútil, ou seja, os preconceitos estéticos.”

³⁵ Nobre, e-mail to Scarambone, in Scarambone, 138.

The set of works from opus 1 to opus 14 comprises what Nobre considers his first style period. He perceives that there was an evolution from tonality to modality to polytonality to atonality in the five years between the first and last work of this period. The most unifying aspect among the works is the influence of Villa-Lobos and, above all, Nazareth.³⁶ Nobre considers, however, three “stylistic exceptions” from that period: the *Variações op. 3*, for oboe, for being a twelve-tone-technique exercise, and two experiments with neoclassical style, the *Musicamera op. 8, no. 2* for chamber group and the *Sonata op. 11* for viola solo, both influenced by Hindemith.³⁷

Second Style Period (1963-1968)

In 1963, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded Nobre and eleven other Latin-American artists a scholarship to study at the Latin American Center of High Musical Studies of the Torcuato di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This post-graduate program allowed Marlos Nobre to study with important composers, such as Alberto Ginastera, Olivier Messiaen, Riccardo Malipiero, Luigi Dallapiccola, Bruno Maderna and Aaron Copland.³⁸ Besides composition classes, which were the main focus of the program, the program included courses in orchestration, literary text and music, analysis of fundamental contemporary works, improvisation workshop (individual and group), and orchestral and ensemble conducting.³⁹

³⁶ Maria Ester Grebe, “Nueve Preguntas a Marlos Nobre,” *Revista Musical Chilena* 33, no. 147 (1979): 41, 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁸ Scarambone, 16-17.

³⁹ Nobre, e-mail to author, 17 January 2009.

The last two compositions of the first style, opp. 13 and 14, were composed in Buenos Aires, but the first work that Nobre considers to be in a new style was composed at the end of 1963: the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15* for piano and typical Brazilian percussion instruments.⁴⁰ This work marks the beginning of a new period in Nobre's composition career, not only for being the first practical application of a new approach to rhythm, but also for establishing his flexible use of serial techniques, creating a musical work that is "dodecaphonic and serial, but by no means respecting the famous rule by which all the twelve tones must be exposed before they can be heard and employed again."⁴¹

For Nobre, the twelve-tone technique serves more as a general guideline, a tool that allows the composer to avoid tonal centers: "the most interesting idea about serialism is, for me, the concept of non-hierarchic organization of the notes." Without the functions of tonic and dominant, the result is the democratization of the sound, where "there is only the 'pure' note that one chooses according to the 'rational' need of its utilization; it is the independence of the sounds!"⁴²

Thus, even though Nobre considers the *Variações Rítmicas* and many of his following works to be dodecaphonic or serial, he states that "I do not employ the serial system to the letter; whenever I feel the need of the presence of a tone that is not part of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Grebe, "Nueve Preguntas," 44. "La primera obra de esta etapa son las *Varaciones Rítmicas op. 15*, de 1963, dodecafónica y serial, pero nada respetuosa de la célebre regla de los doce sonidos que deben ser expuestos todos antes de ser reescuchados, y vueltos a emplear."

⁴² François-Emanuelle Denis, "Rencontre avec Marlos Nobre," *Les Cahiers de la Guitare* 33 (1991): 33. "L'idée la plus intéressante du sérialisme est, d'après moi, la notion de non-hiérarchisation des notes. . . . C'est une sorte de démocratisation des sons, il n'y a pas de tonique, il n'y a pas de dominante, il y a la note 'pure' que l'on choisit selon son besoin 'mental' de l'utiliser, c'est l'indépendance des sons!"

the series, I use it.”⁴³ In his compositional process, intuition often overrules theoretical procedures: “my harmonic ear, my several expressive needs impelled me, forced me to find *in my physical senses* the proper sound, but never in the twelve-tone matrix, in its retrogradations, inversions or retrograde inversions and transpositions.”⁴⁴

In November of 1964 Nobre premiered at the di Tella Institute one his most performed works: *Ukrinmakrinkrin op. 17* for soprano, piano and woodwind instruments. The work is based on native Brazilian texts in the Xucuru language and its title translates approximately to “food for the spirit.”⁴⁵ The piece presents a conflict between the logical structure of the first movement and the free and aleatory construction of the second movement, which is resolved in the third movement, achieving a synthesis of the previous movements.⁴⁶ The vocal line does not evoke folkloric patterns; rather, it relates to international idioms of that period – those of Berio or Boulez, for example.⁴⁷ Accepting the flexible use of certain compositional procedures is an important determinant of Nobre’s second style: “dodecaphony, serialism, multiseriálism, ‘aleatory music,’ did not mean rigid, static dogmas rather than stimulation points, open paths, never tunnels of predetermined plans.”⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid, 34. “Je n’applique pás lê systéme sériel à la lettre, si je ressens à un moment la necessite de la présence d’une note qui ne fait pás partie de la série, je l’utilize!”

⁴⁴ Grebe, “Nueve Preguntas,” 44. “Mi oído armónico, mis diferentes necesidades expresivas me impelían, me obligaban a buscar *en los sentidos* el sonido adecuado, pero jamás em la tabla de los doce tonos, sus retrogradaciones, inversiones o retrogradaciones de las inversiones y transposiciones.”

⁴⁵ Marco, 74.

⁴⁶ Grebe, “Ukrinmakrinkrin,” *Revista Musical Chilena* 33, no. 147 (1979): 48.

⁴⁷ Paul Earls, “Marlos Nobre: Ukrinmakrinkrin, Mosaico, Review,” *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 8 (1972): 179.

⁴⁸ Grebe, “Nueve Preguntas,” 44. “Las demás obras seguieron el mismo camino: dodecafonismo, serialismo, multiseriálismo, ‘aleatoriedad’, no significaban dogmas inatlerables, estáticos, sino puntos de estímulo, caminos abiertos, jamás túneles de planos prefijados.”

After graduating from the program in Buenos Aires, Nobre visited the United States in 1965, where he attended the Inter-American Composition Workshop at the University of Indiana at Bloomington and the Third Inter-American Music Festival in Washington. His compositions *Variações Rítmicas op. 15* and *Ukrinmakrinkrin op. 17* represented Brazil at the IV Youth Biennial in Paris, France.⁴⁹ However, his first visit to Europe only took place in 1966, when he officially represented Brazil in the Spring Festival of Prague and presented *Ukrinmakrinkrin* at the International Tribune of Composers of UNESCO.⁵⁰ *Ukrinmakrinkrin* was first recorded that year and was performed in Austria, Hungary, Finland, Ireland, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland.⁵¹ Back in Brazil, Nobre's song *Dengues da Mulata Desinteressada op. 20* for soprano and piano was awarded first prize in the "Cidade de Santos" National Composition Competition (São Paulo).⁵² The year 1966 was also when the Brazilian newspaper "Jornal do Brasil" awarded Nobre the title "Composer of the Year."⁵³

The only works for piano solo composed during his second style period are the *Terceiro Ciclo Nordestino op. 22* and the *Sonata Breve op. 24*, both written in 1966. The former is the third of his four suites based on popular dances from northeast Brazil. The latter is his first large-scale composition for piano, unpublished until the year 2000.⁵⁴

In 1967, Nobre founded the *Sociedade Música Nova* [New Music Society], where he became the conductor of the *Conjunto de Música Nova do Rio de Janeiro* [New Music

⁴⁹ Marco, 31.

⁵⁰ Scarambone, 17.

⁵¹ Vasco Mariz, *Figuras da Música Contemporânea Brasileira*, 2d ed. (Brasília: Universidade de Brasília, 1970), 113.

⁵² Marco, 76.

⁵³ Scarambone, 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

Ensemble of Rio de Janeiro].⁵⁵ Nobre returned to Europe to participate in the first Festival of America and Spain in Madrid. On this occasion, the Conjunto de Música Nova performed his *String Quartet no. 1, op. 26*, which had been commissioned by the Rádio MEC.

In 1968 Nobre visited the United States again in order to participate in music festivals, such the IV Inter-American Music Festival in Washington, where he presented his *Canticum Instrumentale op. 25*, for flute, harp, piano and timpani, composed in the previous year. In Brazil, the Brazilian Ballet Company of Teatro Novo commissioned a ballet, which Nobre met with his *Rhythmetron op. 27* for percussion ensemble and the *Convergências op. 28a* for wind instruments, piano and percussion. Both works were premiered by the company in July of that year. In October, the ballet company performed Nobre's *Seqüência op. 29a*, based on his *Wind Quintet op. 29*, and his *Biosfera op. 26a*, a version for string orchestra of the first two movements of his *String Quartet no. 1, op. 26*. Also from 1968 are his *Tropicale op. 30* for piccolo, clarinet, piano and percussion, his series of *Desafios op. 31* and his song for soprano and guitar *Dia da graça op. 32*.

Curiously, even though Nobre composed eighteen works between the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*, from 1963 and *Dia da Graça op. 32* from 1968, he considers only five of them as representative of his second compositional style: *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*, *Ukrinmakrinmakrin op. 17*, *Canticum Instrumentale op. 25*, *String Quartet no. 1, op. 26* and *Tropicale op. 30*. His explanation for this is that:

⁵⁵ Marco, 31.

the stylistic exceptions of this stage are many and belong to ideas conceived previously but which I had not had time to develop because new experiences pushed me toward different works. . . . Practically all those works are based in northeastern folkloric patterns of harmonic language and they belong stylistically to my first period. Not having written them – I can guarantee – would have been a real mental torture.⁵⁶

Third Style Period (1969-1977)

Marlos Nobre's third period contains works from opus 33 through opus 46.

This period has been referred to by the composer himself as a moment of integration and synthesis of the compositional processes with which he had experimented in the previous period. Seeing many composers "seeking desperately new notations, always the new, the unexpected, with the urge to present 'novelties' at any cost," Nobre thought that some new music was based on rather pretty theory, but "with a result that was . . . poor, disarticulated and lacking structure."⁵⁷ During this stage in his life, Nobre sought to combine freer techniques, such as proportional notation and aleatory music, with strict procedures. The importance of rhythm for Nobre was more evident than ever during this period, and the very combination of free and strict techniques reminded him of the basic rhythmic principle he absorbed from folk music during

⁵⁶ Grebe, "Nueve Preguntas," 45. "Las excepciones estilísticas em esta etapa son muchas y pertenecen a ideas nacidas anteriormente que no había tenido tiempo de madurar porque nuevas experiencias me empujaban hacia obras diferentes. . . . Prácticamente todas estas obras se basan em constantes folklóricas nordestianas de lenguaje armónico y pertenecen estilísticas a mi primer período. No haberlas escrito – puedo asegurarlo – habría sido un verdadero martírio mental."

⁵⁷ Ibid., 45-46. "Pero resulta que yo veía a muchos de mis colegas compositores del Brasil y de todo el mundo buscar desesperadamente nuevas grafías, siempre lo nuevo, lo inusitado, con el afán de presentar 'novedades' a cualquier precio. . . . Alguna vez la teoría podía ser hasta muy bella, pero el resultado era – a mi modo de ver – pobre, desarticulado y carente de estructura, como un devenir sonoro en un *ad libitum* continuo, sin siquiera la presencia de un pensamiento musical aparente o perceptible."

his youth – rhythmic freedom and polyrhythmic accents framed by an underlying rigorous metric pulse.⁵⁸

Coincidentally, just as the first period ended with a piece for piano and orchestra, *Divertimento op. 14*, Nobre's third style was inaugurated in 1969 with his *Concerto Breve op. 33* for piano and orchestra.⁵⁹ This work won second prize in the Guanabara Festival in Rio de Janeiro. *Ludus Instrumentalis op. 34*, for chamber orchestra, was premiered in the same year at the Contemporary Music Festival of Tanglewood in the United States.

During the next years, Nobre participated in many festivals and seminars around the world: II Festival de América y España (1970) in Madrid, Spain, where he performed his *Concerto Breve*; the Festival of Contemporary Music (1970) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where his *Mosaico op. 36* was performed; and the 5th Festival of Interamerican Music in Washington, U.S.A (1970), performing again the *Concerto Breve*. Nobre also had some of his works recorded in these years: *Biosfera* and *Mosaico* were recorded with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in Geneva and Philips recorded the first album dedicated exclusively to his works, containing *Rhythmetron* and *Mosaico* in 1972, and an album of eight of his works in 1975.

Nobre also received several commissions, such as *O Canto Multiplicado op. 38*, for voice and orchestra, which was written per a request from the Artistic

⁵⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁹ The composer can be seen performing this work with the Simon Bolívar Symphony Orchestra on his personal YouTube channel.

Committee of the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, and *Sonâncias I op. 37*, for piano and percussion, commissioned by the Goethe Institute of Munich.⁶⁰ In 1973, Nobre was invited to become a member of the International Committee of the Arthur Rubinstein Piano Master Competition in Tel Aviv and he wrote the *Homenagem a Arthur Rubinstein op. 40* for piano solo.

While during the years 1974 and 1975 Nobre only composed a few short works for guitar solo, the next two years brought to light his *String Concerto op. 42*, for string orchestra, the *Homenagem a Villa-Lobos op. 46*, for guitar solo, and three works for piano solo: the *Quarto Ciclo Nordestino op. 43*, *Quatro Momentos op. 44*, and his *Sonata sobre um tema de Bartók op. 45*, which derives its theme from the opening of the *Concerto for Orchestra*.

Fourth Style Period (1980-1989)

Nobre did not compose between 1978 and 1979. He was convinced that his language needed to undertake another shift, and he deliberately took his time “in order to breathe,” despite, or perhaps because of, having many musical ideas urging him to compose.⁶¹ In addition, his activities as a conductor and performer, as well as his other professional engagements, occupied much of his time and did not allow him much room for composition.⁶² The language of his fourth period was marked by a “gradual freedom from atonality and serialism, and the adoption

⁶⁰ Marco, 33.

⁶¹ Grebe, “Nueve Preguntas,” 47.

⁶² Scarambone, 36.

of an extremely expanded and free tonality.”⁶³ Nobre believed that the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale could be explored in novel ways, without necessarily resorting to twelve-tone technique or serialism. Some of the procedures he employed during this period include the use of tone clusters and superimposed tonalities.

Regarding the rhythmic aspect, Nobre detached himself from the earlier influences of Brazilian folk motifs, while simultaneously abandoning traditional pre-conceived forms.⁶⁴ To Nobre, specific forms should derive logically from the musical ideas, instead of following a standard formula. An appropriate example of such an approach to form can be found in *Sonâncias III op. 49*, for two pianos and percussion, which the Bartók Ensemble of Geneva commissioned in 1980.⁶⁵

Music for solo piano gradually became less frequent within Nobre’s output. He composed only two original works for the instrument during the fourth period: *Tango op. 61* and *Sonatina op. 66* were both written in 1984. Neither composition represents the fourth style period: *Tango* was written as a commission and is heavily influenced by the music of Astor Piazzola, while the *Sonatina* was inspired by and dedicated to the Brazilian pianist Nelson Freire, “whose sensibility and touch on the piano induced me to create the atmosphere of the work.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Nobre, letter to Barancoski, in Baracosky, 56.

⁶⁴ Scarambone, 36.

⁶⁵ Maria Luíza Corke-Nobre, “Sonâncias III, Opus 49 de Marlos Nobre,” *Latin American Music Review* 15, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1994).

⁶⁶ Nobre, e-mail to Scarambone, in Scarambone, 111. “Escrita para o Nelson Freire, cuja sensibilidade e toque no piano me induziram a criar a atmosfera da peça.”

Fifth Style Period (1989-present)

In 1989, Nobre decided to abandon the time-consuming administrative positions he had assumed in order to dedicate more of his time to composition. In this period, his musical language displays a return to tonal structures and the “use of broader forms, greater emphasis on melodic elements, and a constant mixture of traditional and contemporary elements, resulting in [his] own personal language.”⁶⁷ Nobre revisited his early influences, particularly the folk music of northeastern Brazil. The first work of this period is the *Concertantes do Imaginário op. 74* for piano and string orchestra, which was premiered in the same year with the composer at the piano.

The 1990s included numerous performances, recordings, and academic activities throughout the world. Nobre became the first Brazilian artist invited to conduct the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of London, at a concert dedicated to his works. The orchestra performed *Biosfera op. 35*, *Concerto for Strings no. 2, op. 53*, *Desafio VII op. 31, no. 7*, and *Concertante do Imaginário op. 74* with his wife, the Brazilian pianist Maria Luíza Corke-Nobre, at the piano. He was decorated as the Official of the Order of Arts and Letters of France in 1994 and was named Visiting Professor at several American universities: Yale University (1992), The Juilliard School of Music (1996), the University of Arizona (1997) and the University of Oklahoma (1997). Moreover, Nobre was invited as Guest

⁶⁷ Nobre, letter Barancoski, in Barancoski, 56. “Franca adoção de estruturas tonais, com a utilização de formas mais amplas, uma maior presença melódica e uma mistura constante entre elementos tradicionais e contemporâneos, fundidos e sintetizados em minha própria linguagem.”

Composer to the University of Georgia, Athens and to Texas Christian University in 1999.

In his fifth style, Nobre displays much more control over larger forms. Some successful examples are his *Concerto Duplo, op. 82* (1995) for two guitars and orchestra, the *Passacaglia, op. 84* (1997) for full orchestra (which was also transformed into a Ballet titled *Saga Marista op. 84a*), the *Concerto for percussion and orchestra, op. 89* (2000) and *Kabbalah, op. 96* (2004), which despite its brevity employs the largest orchestration among Nobre's works.

Works for piano solo became rare in Nobre's output: since 1984, Nobre returned his attention to his native instrument only recently and produced *Toccata, op. 102* (2006) and *Frevo no. 2, op. 105* (2007). Differently from his first *Frevo*, this new composition does not belong to one of his *Ciclos Nordestinos*, but was composed in celebration of the 80th birthday of the Brazilian writer Ariano Suassuna.

CHAPTER III

VARIANTES E TOCCATA, OPUS 15a: CONTEXT

Origins of *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*

Marlos Nobre's opus 15 is a particularly meaningful work in his output, for it inaugurates the new approach to compositional procedures of his Second Style Period, representing an important step toward the development of his personal language. As Nobre was studying in Buenos Aires, his distance from Brazil contributed greatly to solving the aesthetic dilemma of nationalism vs. the avant-garde that Nobre faced in the months prior to his departure.

On one hand, his short – however important – period of study with Hans Joachim Koellreuter in 1960 had effectively confirmed that Nobre's artistic position was not compatible with orthodoxy, as he disliked composing music that follows a strict system to the letter, such as twelve-tone technique. Nobre's *Variations op.3* for oboe solo, composed in that period, follows the precepts of twelve-tone technique and Koellreuter sensed that Nobre had a facility for writing serial music that he should continue to develop. Nobre disagreed, explaining that he did not like orthodoxy. For Nobre, “dodecaphonicism was a technique, not an esthetic – just another technique that [he] could use. . .” His flexible use of the twelve-tone technique is exemplified in his *Trio op. 4* for piano,

violin and violoncello, in which he mixes a twelve-tone theme with patterns that are characteristically Brazilian. Koellreutter considered it a compositional mistake, an inappropriate mixture of a “serial, twelve-tone concept, which abolishes tonality and tonal series, with a neo-tonal, Brazilian concept, which accepts tonality.”⁶⁸ Nobre refused to force Koellreutter’s ideas into his music, and the divergence between their points of view culminated with the German composer refusing to speak to Nobre by the end of the music festival.

Nobre’s studies with Guarneri the following year provided him with a completely different point of view, but Nobre refuted Guarneri’s point of view on nationalism as strongly as he had refuted Koellreutter’s strict dodecaphony. Nobre complained that “[Guarneri] wanted me to write music that was Brazilian in a nationalistic way. I didn’t like his music. I thought it was extremely repetitive, with national clichés, imitating themes from the Northeast from a music that he did not know personally.”⁶⁹ Such a statement exposes Nobre’s perceived distinction between Brazilian music and nationalistic music, the latter of which he strongly dislikes:

I was never nationalistic, I detest nationalism. If you want to offend me, just say that my music is nationalistic. I will take it as a personal offense. My music is the result of my personal experiences. It happens that I was born in Brazil, I was born in Recife – if I had been born in the Congo, things would have been different. My experience of sound is this. It incorporates all this.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Moore, <http://mbaz.org/marlosnobre>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Nobre had experienced two opposite aesthetic orientations, and he could not accept being on the extreme end of either point of view. He did not believe that a composer should emulate musical clichés in order to sound nationalistic while at the same time he disagreed with a strict and rigid compositional system such as twelve-tone technique. However uncomfortable Nobre felt with serial techniques during his time with Koellreuter, he later acknowledged that he was not yet ready to assimilate them properly. He admitted that such an expansion toward tonal limits would take its natural path once he was in contact with a different environment, away from the ongoing debate in Brazil about nationalism versus avant-garde. The two-year program at Buenos Aires was fundamental in this regard, not only because of the distance from Brazil, but also because the composers with whom Nobre studied shared his aesthetic perspectives.

At the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, Ginastera was Nobre's main composition teacher. Instruction was divided between daily group classes (three hours in the morning) and individual sessions every two weeks.⁷¹ The Argentinean composer contributed strongly to Nobre's conviction that music that derived from one's past experience with folklore need not necessarily follow a nationalistic aesthetic:

The period in Buenos Aires, 1963/64 was the most important one for my definitive career as an international composer. Even before, in Rio, I dreaded NATIONALISM as something absurd in our music or in any other musical school. In spite of my northeastern roots, of my contact with Recife's street music, I always refused to use that as the starting material for my music. I abhorred, rejected nationalism, as I still do

⁷¹ Nobre, e-mail to the author, 17 Januray 2009.

today. My music was never nationalist, NEVER. In Buenos Aires I could only confirm this conviction, with the direct contact with Ginastera. Even when composing pieces such as the Ciclos Nordestinos, I never thought of myself doing anything ‘nationalistic’. It was music, my music, based on those pieces in my auditory and sonorous experiences from childhood.⁷²

The tonal expansion that Nobre’s work underwent in the previous years found its natural development in serialism and twelve-tone procedures with a freer approach. Nobre considers the maturation and assimilation of this compositional technique the result of his studies with Ginastera and Malipiero. Nobre’s method of applying serialism was

not the German dodecaphony of Schoenberg, Berg or Webern, which never attracted me, but the Latin dodecaphony, a la Italian, a la Argentine, a la Brazilian. Free, ‘disrespectful,’ neither dogmatic nor extremist, beyond the logical consequences of a theoretical system, sacrificing the theory – if needed – to expression.⁷³

Olivier Messiaen presented a course on Greek and Hindu rhythms at the di Tella Institute between June and July of 1963, in addition to masterclasses where he analyzed

⁷² Nobre, e-mail to Scarambone, in Scarambone, 138. “A fase em Buenos Aires, 1963/64 foi a mais importante para minha definitiva carreira de compositor internacional. Já desde antes, no Rio, eu abominava o NACIONALISMO como algo absurdo em nossa música e em qualquer escola musical. Apesar de minhas raízes nordestinas, minha vivência com a música de rua de Recife, eu sempre me recusei a usar aquilo como partida para minha música. Eu abominava, recusava como até hoje o faço o nacionalismo. Minha música nunca foi nacionalista, NUNCA. Em Buenos Aires eu só tive como reforçar esta convicção, com o contato direto com Ginastera. Mesmo compondo peças como os Ciclos Nordestinos, eu nunca pensei estar fazendo qualquer coisa ‘nacionalista’. Era música, minha música, baseada naquelas peças nas minha experiências auditivas e sonoras de infância.”

⁷³ Grebe, “Nueve Preguntas,” 44. “Pero no el dodecafonismo germano de Schoenberg, Berg o Webern, que nunca me fascinaron, sino el dodecafonismo latino, a la italiana, a la argentina, a la brasileña. Libre, “irrespetuoso”, no dogmático ni extremista, al margen de las consecuencias lógicas de un sistema teórico, sacrificando la teoría – si era necesario – a la expresión.”

works by Stravinsky and his own.⁷⁴ The French composer had a significant impact on Marlos Nobre: “Messiaen was a revelation for me. He made me aware of the richness of Brazilian rhythm, not only with his intuitive approach, but above all through a more intellectual and analytical work.”⁷⁵ In particular, Nobre explains that Brazilian rhythm influenced him on two levels: an “unconscious” level, which comes from his immersion in Brazilian culture since childhood and which is not evoked intentionally, and the “conscious” level (which he studied with Messiaen), where the possibilities of rhythmic transformation are analyzed actively and rationally.⁷⁶

With Riccardo Malipiero, Nobre studied contemporary forms and analyzed Italian serial compositions. One of his assignments was to create an orchestral version of Luigi Dallapiccola’s *Quaderno Musicale di Annalibera* for piano solo. In 1964, Nobre studied with Dallapiccola himself (focusing on the relationship of text and music through the analysis of his opera *Il Prigionero*), and with Aaron Copland (concentrating on orchestration techniques).⁷⁷

Every student had to present a composition at the concert at the end of each year, and it was for the 1963 concert that Nobre conceived the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15* for piano and Brazilian percussion instruments. The specific form and instrumentation of the piece was decided by Nobre himself, and Ginastera happily accepted the idea. The work was composed in a short period of time between the end of November and the concert,

⁷⁴ Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone, *Messiaen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ Denis, 33. “Messiaen a été une revelation pour moi, il m’a fait prendre conscience de la richesse de la rythmique brésilienne, non seulement dans son approche intuitive, mais surtout par le biais d’un travail plus intellectuel, plus analytique.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Nobre, e-mail to the author, 17 January 2009.

which took place on the 15th of December, and was dedicated to Riccardo Malipiero, for it was with him that Nobre studied the variation form in contemporary music. The pianist, Geraldo Gandini (who was also a student composer at the Institute), received the score from Nobre only six days before the performance, but was able to play it to the complete satisfaction of the composer.⁷⁸

This was the first work in which Nobre utilized a combination of percussion with other instruments. Examples of later works that explore percussion instruments include the ballet *Rhythmethron op. 27*, composed exclusively for percussion instruments; *Sonâncias I op. 37*, for piano and percussion; and *Sonâncias III op. 49*, for two pianos and percussion, the instrumentation of which bears a meaningful reference to Bartók's *Sonata for two pianos and percussion*. Besides the piano, *Variações Rítmicas op. 15* requires eight typical Brazilian percussion instruments: *cuíca aguda* (a friction drum which the performer plays with his hand inside the instrument), *xocalho* (maraca), *afoxê* (also known as *cabaça*, it is a maraca covered with a network of beads), *reco-reco* (a scraper also known as *guiro*), five *agogôs* (cowbells), *pandeiro* (tambourine), *tamborim* (very small high-pitched drum), and three *atabaques* (conga drums). This unusual percussion set requires a total of six performers, but that has not prevented the work from being recorded four times.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Nobre, "Discography" (2005), http://marlosnobre.sites.uol.com.br/discografia_i.html, (accessed 19 January 2009).

Marlos Nobre's Arrangements and Versions

Marlos Nobre has a very fluid relationship with instrumentation and orchestration in his compositions. This flexibility is particularly reflected in the substantial number of arrangements and versions that he created of his own works. Through a survey of his catalogue, it is possible to identify many instances of works that have been transformed or transfigured to create new compositions. However, the relationship between the original work and its new version can take different forms.

In some cases, the musical material is kept the same and only the instrumentation is changed. The best representative of this category is the series of works called *Desafio op. 31*. Ranging from opus 31 no. 1 to no. 33, the same material is displayed in an impressive multitude of configurations, as for example string orchestra (no. 6), voice and guitar (no. 18a), guitar and harp (no. 21), guitar ensemble (no. 24), mixed choir (no. 28), and flute and marimba (no. 33). Since the material is the same, Nobre keeps the same opus number.⁸⁰ The same procedure occurs with all of his *Ciclo Nordestino*; the original medium is the piano solo, but the works can also be performed by a string orchestra. In these versions, the compositions retain the same opus number, but with a different title: the orchestral versions are called *Suíte Nordestina*. A special case is the fourth *Ciclo Nordestino*, which includes an arrangement for flute and orchestra titled *Concerto Armorial* in addition to the string orchestra version.

There is no consistency regarding Nobre's decision to retain the title of an original composition. In some cases the work receives a completely different title

⁸⁰ Nobre, e-mail to the author, 17 January 2009.

depending on the orchestration, as with the *Cantata do Chimborazo op. 56* for tenor, baritone, mixed choir and orchestra. The work has three other versions: *Festiva op. 56a* for symphony orchestra and two versions based on part of the original opus 56, *Monólogo do Tempo op. 56b* and *op. 56c* for baritone and orchestra and baritone and piano, respectively. In other instances the version retains the title of the original work, for example, with the *Poemas da Negra op. 10*, *Praianas op. 18*, *Poema I op. 94*, and the already mentioned series of *Desafio op. 32*.

Besides the instances in which previous compositions undergo changes solely in instrumentation, some works are simply based on previous compositions and assume a new musical meaning. The most remarkable instance of this case is the series *Desafio op. 31*, in which the musical material is based on a single idea derived from *Sonata Breve op. 24*.

The two arrangements produced in 1997 belong to the first category – versions for different instrumentation that retain the same musical material and keep the same opus number. The Uruguayan pianist Humberto Quagliata wrote to Marlos Nobre in that year, explaining that he needed to perform a world premiere of a composition for piano solo. The concert was in Saint Martin in the Fields, London, and was to take place in two weeks. Nobre was very busy and did not have time to write a new work, so he proposed to create a version for piano solo of his *Sonâncias I op. 37*, which is originally for piano and percussion. The original work had been commissioned by the Artistic Committee of the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, and requires only one percussionist. Nobre's version for piano solo consists simply of the original piano part by itself, which the

pianist approved immediately; thus, *Monólogos op. 37a* was premiered in London on September 5, 1997.⁸¹

A short time after, Nobre determined to do the same with *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*. According to Nobre, he does not know how to explain why he did it: “I just wanted it – one day I began playing the piano part by itself and I liked it so much that I thought and decided: it is good with solo piano and that is how it is going to be, an opus 15a.”⁸² The new version received the title *Variantes e Toccata op. 15a*, and consists mainly of the original piano part alone. There are very minor alterations in the piano part:

- The theme of opus 15 receives the title “TEMA” but opus 15a lacks this indication;
- The metronome marking remains the same (half note = 80), but the indication “Veemente – violento” [vehement – violent] of the original work is substituted by the ambiguous indication “Variantes” [variants];
- In measure 11 of opus 15, the percussion instruments create a crescendo effect with rolls and glissandi, culminating in an accent on the last eight-note pulse of the measure – opus 15a recreates the effect by sustaining the bass D of the previous bar and performing a trill and crescendo, but with no accent on the last eighth-note pulse;
- In measure 57, the F-sharp in the right hand becomes F-natural;
- In measure 92, the accent on the high A disappears;

⁸¹ Nobre, e-mail to the author, 17 January 2009.

⁸² Ibid. “Não tenho como dizer o porque fiz isso, é que me deu vontade, simplesmente isso: um dia eu comecei a tocar somente a parte de piano da obra e gostei tanto que pensei e resolvi: fica bem com o piano solo e assim vai ser, um opus 15a.”

- The sixth variation receives a metronome marking of half note=100 in addition to the *Quasi Presto* indication;
- In opus 15a there is an indication *poco trat*⁸³ at the end of the last bar of the seventh variation;
- The eighth variation was cut completely, for it was exclusively for the percussion instruments;
- The bass note A on the first bar of the eighth variation that ends the musical idea of the seventh variation was transported to the first bar of the coda;
- The coda was renamed *Toccata* and indicates the metronome marking of half note = 112, considerably faster than the *L'istesso tempo* of the original coda (half note = 80);
- Instead of *f*, the coda begins with the dynamic indication *p*;
- There is a hairpin marking < in the third measure of the *Toccata*, which is not present at the equivalent measure in the original coda;
- The *cresc.*, *mf*< and *f* markings in measures 170, 171 and 172 respectively of the *Toccata* are not present in the equivalent measures of opus 15, and neither is the *f* in measure 178;
- The two dyads played by the left hand in measure 187 of the *Toccata* received 8^{va} lines. Similarly, the preceding dyad, which had an 8^{va} indication in the original, is indicated *in loco*;

⁸³ *Poco trattenuto*: Italian for “held back” or “sustained.”

- Measure 189, which begins the *Più Mosso* section, is one of the most re-composed parts of opus 15a: the last three eighth notes of the measure consisted of a general pause in opus 15. Additionally, the dyad on the seventh eighth note pulse included a C natural, similar to the preceding chord;
- The *Più Mosso* section receives a metronome marking of half note = 120 in opus 15a, while there was no metronome marking in opus 15;
- There are numerous different dynamic markings in the *Più Mosso* section of opus 15a;
- In opus 15a, measure 227 receives an indication *con fuoco – stringendo*;
- The 8^{va} indications in the last three measures are somewhat different; and finally,
- The cluster symbols in the last measure are notated with white noteheads in the original opus 15.

CHAPTER IV

NATIONALISM AND BRAZILIAN MUSICAL ELEMENTS

The Influence of Mário de Andrade

Nobre's refusal to accept the label of "nationalist composer" may seem contradictory when one considers the multitude of Brazilian elements in his works. In fact, it is only possible to appreciate the distinction between his artistic approach and the school of thought he opposed by understanding the context of nationalism in Brazil. No discussion of modernism and nationalism in Brazilian music is meaningful without reference to Mário de Andrade, who had a substantial impact on Brazilian twentieth-century music in general, and on Marlos Nobre's personal artistic orientation in particular.

Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) was a poet, writer, critic and musicologist who influenced many generations of Brazilian artists. His role as an intellectual leader for musicians was expressed in many venues, one of the most important of which was the organization of the *Semana de Arte Moderna de 1922* [The Week of Modern Art of 1922]. The movement encouraged the quest for an indigenous aesthetic and the establishment of a national creative attitude.⁸⁴ Andrade wrote many influential books on music, among which is the *Ensaio sobre a Música*

⁸⁴ Barancoski, 45.

Brasileira [Essay on Brazilian Music], written in 1928. In *Ensaio*, Andrade

exposes his position on the phases through which musical nationalism must pass:

In the countries where the culture is commonly borrowed from foreign influences, as it is the cases with the countries of the Americas, both the individual and the national art must pass through three stages: 1) national thesis; 2) national sentiment; and 3) national unconsciousness. Only in the last stage do art and artist feel the honesty of their habits and the honesty of their conviction coincide. We [Brazilians] are not there yet.⁸⁵

Marlos Nobre asserts that Mário de Andrade represented a decisive moment in and a deep influence on his musical education.⁸⁶ This influence was concentrated in two distinct instances: the first moment took place when Nobre, at thirteen, faced the dilemma of being exposed both to a rich variety of street music and to the academic environment of the conservatory where only traditional classics were accepted. According to Nobre:

It was then that, by Divine Providence, I got a copy of Mario de Andrade's *Ensaio sobre a Música Brasileira*. . . . By reading it I realized, fascinated, the existence of Brazilian Music, that is, that there was not, in principle, separation between popular music and classical or traditional music; rather, it was the composer's task to combine them in a consistent product. For me, it was the solution to a problem

⁸⁵ Mário de Andrade, *Ensaio sobre a Música Brasileira*, 3d. ed. (São Paulo: Vila Rica, 1972). Available online at <http://www.ufrgs.br/cdrom/mandrade/index.htm>. "Nos países em que a cultura aparece de emprestado que nem os americanos, tanto os indivíduos como a Arte nacionalizada, têm de passar por três fases: 1ª fase da *tese* nacional; 2ª fase do *sentimento* nacional; 3ª fase da *inconsciência* nacional. Só nesta última, a Arte culta e o indivíduo culto sentem a sinceridade do hábito e a sinceridade da convicção coincidirem. Não é o nosso caso ainda."

⁸⁶ Marlos Nobre, "Depoimentos de Compositores e Musicólogos sobre Mário de Andrade," in *Três Musicólogos Brasileiros*, ed. Vasco Mariz (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1983), 82.

that caused me anguish. . . . Shortly after reading Mário de Andrade, I composed works using the folklore of Pernambuco. To those who did not like them, I would proudly show them the book of my new ‘guru.’⁸⁷

It was through Andrade that Nobre became acquainted with one of the most evident influences of his early years:

Then came Ernesto Nazareth, also by influence of Mário de Andrade. Thus, I ordered from Rio [de Janeiro] all the tangos by Nazareth, and my compositions displayed in the beginning this double or triple face: the Northeast, Nazareth and traditional education.⁸⁸

If after his first contact with Andrade Nobre was able to solve the aesthetic dilemma of using or not using folklore as a source of musical ideas, by the time he studied with Camargo Guarnieri Nobre would not agree with an aesthetic attitude directed toward creating music that must necessarily sound nationalistic. To Nobre, such an approach represents a primitive level of nationalism rather than the unconscious level of Andrade’s nationalism. The distinct aesthetic alternatives to which Nobre was exposed at the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires

⁸⁷ Ibid., 82-83. “Foi quando me caiu às mãos, pelos caminhos da Providência, o *Ensaio sobre a Música Brasileira*, de Mário de Andrade. . . . Lendo Mário de Andrade, eu me dei conta, deslumbrado, da existência da ‘música brasileira’, isto é, de que não havia em princípio a separação da música popular e da clássica ou tradicional, mas sim, cabia aos compositores amalgamá-las em um todo resultante. Quer dizer, para mim era a solução de um problema que me angustiava. . . . Mas logo depois de ler Mário de Andrade, apareceram as peças usando o folclore de Pernambuco. A quem não gostava, eu mostrava orgulhoso o livro do meu novo ‘guru.’”

⁸⁸ Ibid. “Depois veio Ernesto Nazareth, também por influência de Mário de Andrade. Assim, mandei buscar no Rio todos os tangos de Nazareth, e minhas primeiras obras mostravam no início, esta dupla ou tríplice face: o Nordeste, Nazareth e a formação tradicional.”

contributed greatly to the consolidation of the artistic attitude he absorbed from

Andrade's words:

In 1963, when I was in Buenos Aires and after writing many works, I realized that Brazilian music could not be indefinitely created after the conscious motivation of being "national". Besides, I noticed, ever more anguished, that the Brazilian music created by national composers was moving in circles, repeating, in a certain way, some formulas that were accepted and established as being "Brazilian." Because of such repetition, some rhythmic clichés had become ineffective and anti-creative.⁸⁹

Nobre perceived that it is natural for a composer to utilize music of his country, since it is an integral part of his musical formation. However, such a use of national sources does not necessarily imply a nationalistic result:

I felt I could create music freely, without attempting to be "Brazilian," without having to use themes or reference to themes, or to use melodic, rhythmic or harmonic twirls, without having to title the composition with "Brazilian" names. I felt, therefore, that I could enter, without hesitation, in the stage that Mário de Andrade himself referred in his book as "national unconsciousness." That is, the composer was able to assimilate the Brazilian matter in his subconscious in such a way that he could create his own music and that had to be necessarily a music that is ours, Brazilian, without having to rely on any Nationalist clichés. That is the most important lesson, in my opinion, from Mário de Andrade's book, a profound intuition of the inner desire of any

⁸⁹ Ibid. ". . . mas seria depois, em 1963, quando estava em Buenos Aires e depois de ter escrito muitas obras, que me dei conta de que a música brasileira não poderia ser indefinidamente criada em base à busca consciente de ser "nacional". Além disso, eu notava, cada vez mais angustiado, que a música brasileira criada pelos compositores nacionais girava em torno de si mesmo, repetindo de certa forma, algumas fórmulas aceitas e consagradas como 'brasileiras.' Certos tiques e clichês rítmicos, devido à repetição, se tinham tornado ineficazes e anti-criativos."

composer: I am a Brazilian composer who creates music, and not a composer who makes “Brazilian music.”⁹⁰

It is possible, therefore, to understand why Nobre considers *Variações Rítmicas op. 15* as an important mark in his output, pointing to the beginning of a new compositional style. With opus 15, Nobre achieved a synthesis of the avant-garde and nationalism that was distant, at the same time, from both Koellreutter’s and Guarnieri’s approaches. This new level of artistic maturity allowed him to use serial techniques as a practical tool rather than an end in itself. In addition, Brazilian elements were no longer obvious flags raised on the surface of the music, but sources of musical material that could be consciously manipulated through modern techniques.

Brazilian Rhythm

Among all the elements of music, rhythm may very well be the most distinguishable aspect of Latin American music in general and Brazilian music in particular. In order to appreciate the regional identity of the rhythm patterns utilized by Nobre in *Variantes e Toccata op. 15a*, it is necessary to review the defining characteristics of typical Brazilian rhythms.

⁹⁰ Ibid. “Sentia que eu podia criar música, livremente, sem tentar ser ‘brasileiro,’ sem usar temas ou lembranças de temas, ou giros melódicos, rítmicos, harmônicos, sem intitular a peça com nomes “brasileiros”. Senti enfim que eu podia ingressar, sem titubear, na fase que o próprio Mário de Andrade chamará em seu livro de “inconsciência nacional”. Isto é, o compositor assimilaria de tal maneira em seu subconsciente a matéria brasileira, que criaria sua própria música e esta tinha de ser necessariamente uma música nossa, brasileira sem usar qualquer chavão nacionalista. Esta a maior, a grande lição, a meu ver do livro de Mário de Andrade, uma intuição profunda do íntimo desejo de qualquer compositor: sou um brasileiro que faz música e não um compositor que faz ‘música brasileira.’”

Mário de Andrade was one of the first musicologists who identified a rhythmic device common to Brazilian music in general, stating that the “syncopation . . . on the first beat of the 2/4 measure . . . [is] the most positive characteristic of the Brazilian rhythm.”⁹¹ This syncopated rhythm is not only a characteristic of Brazilian music, but it is also present in the music of other Latin American countries.

The origin of such a syncopated rhythm in Latin American music has been identified both in the African influences of colonial times and as a manipulation of European rhythmic patterns.⁹² Scholars have observed the common practice of mixing binary and ternary rhythmic groups in African music, with, for example, the patterns 3+3+2 (that is, two dotted quarter notes plus one quarter note), or 3+2+3+2+2. Such formations, despite containing an even number of pulse unities, cannot be divided into two parts of equal length.⁹³ Since traditional Western music lacks such an alternation of binary and ternary groups, the influence from such a mixture ended up being assimilated into conventional notation as syncopations.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Mário de Andrade, *Música, doce Música* (São Paulo: Martins, 1976), 382; quoted in Carlos Sandroni, *Feitiço Decente: Transformações do samba no Rio de Janeiro (1917-1933)* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2001), 19-20. “sincopa . . . no primeiro tempo do dois por quatro é a característica mais positiva da rítmica brasileira.”

⁹² For a more thorough discussion of the African influences on Latin American rhythm patterns, see Peter Manuel, “The Anticipated Bass in Cuban Popular Music,” *Latin American Music Review* 6, no. 2 (Autumn-Winter 1985); 249-261, and Samuel A. Floyd Jr., “Black Music in the Circum-Caribbean,” *American Music* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1999); 1-38.

⁹³ Simha Arom, “Structuration du temps dans les musiques d’Afrique centrale: périodicité, metre, rythmique et polyrythmie,” *Revue de Musicologie* 70, no. 1 (1984); 25.

⁹⁴ Sandroni, 26-27.

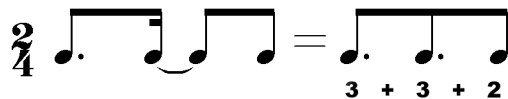
It is possible to observe how the performance practice of certain European- and African-derived genres led to rhythmic accents that do not conform to the metric pulse. One example can be found in the *habanera*, which was “the first influential Cuban genre of European derivation.”⁹⁵ The rhythmic ostinato of the *habanera* can be represented as shown in Example 4.1:

Example 4.1: Rhythmic ostinato of the *Habanera*.



The practice of accenting the sixteenth note or eliding it with the next eighth note results in a syncopated pattern that is characteristic of African-derived rhythms, and commonly referred to as the *tresillo*.⁹⁶ Example 4.2 shows the *tresillo* represented in two distinct ways:

Example 4.2: *Tresillo*.



⁹⁵ Manuel, 250.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

The *habanera* is only one of the possible variations of the *tresillo*; in Brazil, it was also known as the “tango” rhythm.⁹⁷ The many variations of the *tresillo* rhythm share the common characteristic of being strongly articulated on the fourth pulse rather than the fifth, resulting in a pattern that can only be divided into two unequal halves (3+5).⁹⁸ It is important to observe that the *tresillo* pattern was so common in Brazilian music that it was not a defining characteristic of a specific genre; rather, it could be found in compositions under many different names, for example, in the *lundu*, *polca-lundu*, *cateretê*, *fado*, *chula*, *tango*, *habanera*, *maxixe*, etc.⁹⁹ The specific rhythmic pattern of each instance could vary, but it always maintained the articulation that defines the *tresillo*:

[The variants of the *tresillo* pattern] are accepted as interchangeable by composers, editors, and audience alike. Its reversibility is manifested in several ways: either one or another variant would appear as the basis for the accompaniment of different works of the same genre, in different parts of the same work, and even in different sections of the same part of the same work. . . . What makes this relative indifference from the perspective of musical content possible is the syntactic mark on the fourth sixteenth note in a cycle of eight.¹⁰⁰

The following examples illustrate the use of the *tresillo* pattern in the accompaniment of early Brazilian polkas. All examples were composed during the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁷ Sandroni, 30.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Example 4.3: Nineteenth-century Brazilian polkas.

a. Virgínio Leite: *Vesgo não namora*, mm. 1-4.¹⁰¹

Musical score for 'Vesgo não namora' by Virgínio Leite, measures 1-4. The score is in 2/4 time, key of B-flat major, and marked *f*. The melody is in the right hand, featuring eighth-note patterns and slurs. The bass line consists of chords and rests.

b. Antonio Rocha: *O que é da tranca?* mm. 1-5.¹⁰²

Musical score for 'O que é da tranca?' by Antonio Rocha, measures 1-5. The score is in 2/4 time, key of B-flat major, and marked *f*. The melody is in the right hand, featuring eighth-note patterns and slurs. The bass line consists of chords and rests.

c. Porfírio Pinto: *Socega, nhonhô*, mm. 1-3.¹⁰³

Musical score for 'Socega, nhonhô' by Porfírio Pinto, measures 1-3. The score is in 2/4 time, key of D major, and marked *f*. The melody is in the right hand, featuring eighth-note patterns and slurs. The bass line consists of chords and rests.

¹⁰¹ Available online at the website of the Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, <http://catalogos.bn.br/DIMAS/Partituras/mas577717.djvu> (accessed 31 January 2009).

¹⁰² Ibid., <http://catalogos.bn.br/DIMAS/Partituras/mas232587.djvu>

¹⁰³ Ibid., <http://catalogos.bn.br/DIMAS/Partituras/mas198335.djvu>

d. Calixto da Cruz: *Polka de estilo brasileiro*, mm. 43-46.¹⁰⁴



As the example above illustrates, the articulation of the *tresillo* pattern can be achieved by different notations. The use of dotted eighth-note, eighth note followed by a sixteenth-note rest, or sixteenth note followed by an eighth-note rest is equally common:

One of the most characteristic elements in the rhythmic formations of Brazilian urban popular music is the organization of eighth-note patterns within duple meter into variations of three-plus-three-plus-two-units. . . The syncopation is given its characteristic quality and sensuality by two factors: the tension between the basic duple meter and the disturbance of the pulse occasioned by the three-plus-three-plus-two organization; and the careful control of the length of pauses, which produces a highly sensuous quality.¹⁰⁵

The *tresillo* is defined by the melodic contour, accentuation and use of rests in many of Ernesto Nazareth's compositions (Example 4.4):

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., <http://catalogos.bn.br/DIMAS/Partituras/mas196324.djvu>

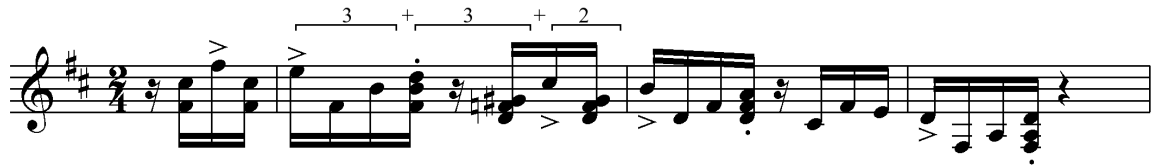
¹⁰⁵ David P. Appleby, *The Music of Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas, 1989), 80.

Example 4.4: The *tresillo* in Ernesto Nazareth's tangos.

a) *Nêne*, mm. 1-4, melody.



b) *Remando*, mm. 61-63, right hand.



Performance practice of such repertory must take into consideration the characteristic syncopation. The *tresillo* and related syncopation patterns are such important defining features of the Brazilian style that performers would emphasize them in their performance. The French composer Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) related his impressions:

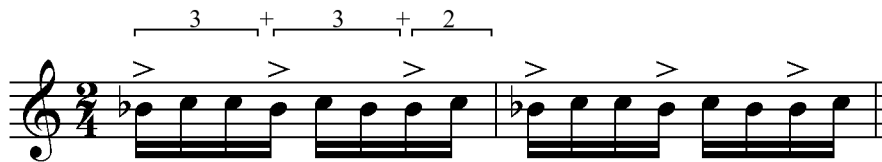
The rhythms of this popular music intrigued and fascinated me. There was in the syncopation an imperceptible suspension, a languorous breath, a subtle pause, which seemed to me very difficult to capture. I then purchased a large quantity of *maxixes* and tangos: and tried to play them with the syncopations which alternated from one hand to the other. My efforts were rewarded and I was finally able to express and analyze this “little nothing” so typically Brazilian. One of the best composers of music of this kind, Nazareth, played the piano in the lobby of a movie theater on Avenida Rio Branco. His way of playing – fluent, indefinable and sad – helped me to better understand the Brazilian soul.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Appleby., 83.

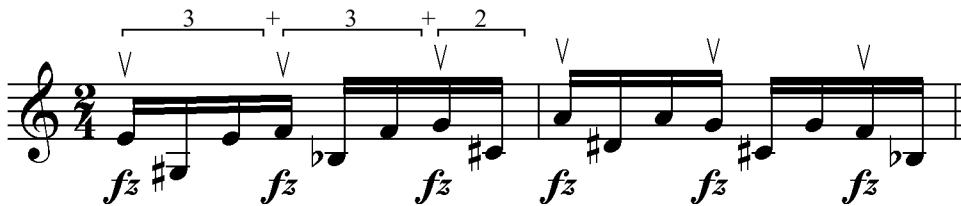
The association between the *tresillo* pattern and Brazilian identity was naturally absorbed into concert music and Villa-Lobos, though he was not the first to use it, explored it through compositions in many different genres. Example 4.5 illustrates such an association with two short piano pieces:

Example 4.5: *Tresillo* in piano music by Heitor Villa-Lobos.

a) *Caboclinha* from *Prole do Bebê* no. 1, mm. 1-2, right hand.



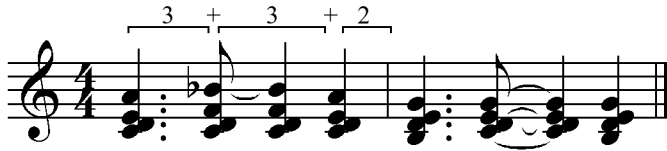
b) *A Baratinha do Papel* from *Prole do Bebê* no. 2, mm. 1-2, right hand.



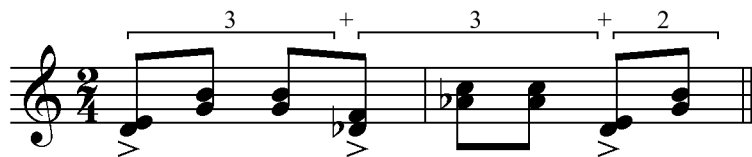
The following generations of nationalist composers kept the association of the *tresillo* rhythm with Brazilian identity, as can be seen in the accompaniment patterns of many of Camargo Guarnieri's *Ponteios* for pianos solo (Example 4.5):

Example 4.5: *Tresillo* pattern in Guarnieri's piano music.

a) *Ponteio* no. 7, mm. 1-2, left hand.



b) *Ponteio* no. 12, mm. 1-2, left hand.



Marlos Nobre had experienced Brazilian rhythms directly since his childhood, when he was exposed to the popular manifestations of street music in his hometown: “The subconscious formation of my unconscious was highly influenced by the Afro-Brazilian rhythms of Recife, my home town where rhythms such as the Maracatu, the Frevo, the Caboclinhos, the Candomblé and the Cirandas still exist.”¹⁰⁷ In addition to his personal contact with native rhythms, Nobre was exposed to and interested in all the sources discussed above. Regarding his studies with Guarnieri, Nobre explains that “it was a productive

¹⁰⁷ Nobre, “My Musical Beliefs” (2005), http://marlosnobre.sites.uol.com.br/index1_i.html (accessed 31 January 2009).

period where, through the hand of the master, I tidied up the compositional technique and Brazilian music.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Flávio Silva, ed., *Camargo Guarnieri: o tempo e a música* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 2001), 67. “As aulas de Camargo Guarnieri, na rua Pamplona, e sua exigente vigilância confirmaram tudo o que me anunciava sua carta. Foi um período fecundo onde, pela mão do mestre, eu passei a limpo a técnica da composição e a música brasileira.”

CHAPTER V

VARIANTES E TOCCATA, OPUS 15a: ANALYSIS

Pitch Organization

As mentioned previously, Marlos Nobre's musical language was manifested in a myriad of distinct idioms throughout his career. During his first style period alone, for example, he observed that his music progressed from tonality to modal music, to polytonality and finally to atonality. He explains:

As my musical knowledge grew – aesthetically and technically – through the assimilation of new elements, those became submersed in my subconscious, and there they stay, expanding, moving toward new ideas, a general confusion, popping up here and there into works, depending on the circumstances.¹⁰⁹

Despite the general trends of each compositional period, Nobre never completely abandoned any of his musical vocabulary. Elements of all previous styles would come back every now and then, portraying the many facets of Nobre's language. In the beginning of his second style, in 1963, Nobre was focusing his attention on the atonal idiom and avoiding references to modal or

¹⁰⁹ Grebe, "Nueve Preguntas," 41. "A medida que mi campo de información musical – estética y técnicamente – se fue ampliando, mediante la incorporación de nuevos elementos, éstos fueron sumergiéndose em mi subconsciente, y allí permanecieron expandiéndose, moviéndose hasta tomar cuerpo em nuevas ideas, una confusión general, estallando aqui y allá em obras, según las circunstancias."

tonal music. Therefore, it is natural that the composer would choose to avoid intervals that are closely related to tonal music – the 3rd and 6th – and build his music on the intervals that are more dissonant in a tonal context, such as the minor second (and its inversion, the major seventh) or the tritone. Thus, interval classes 1 and 6 are, not surprisingly, the most abundant in opus 15a.

The set class [016] is the simplest set that contains the aforementioned intervals, which can be observed through its interval class vector $\langle 100011 \rangle$.¹¹⁰ The trichord [012] is also relevant for its chromatic quality (two consecutive interval classes 1). The set class [015] is very closely related to [016] in voice-leading space.¹¹¹

Nobre has frequently used these sets as building material for his compositions. The first movement of his *Toccatina, Ponteio e Final op. 12*, for example, contains an ostinato figuration in the left hand throughout most of the piece. The set classes [016] and [012] provide the pitch classes that form the ostinato pattern, as can be seen in Example 5.1:

Example 5.1: Trichords in Nobre's *Toccatina*.



¹¹⁰ The numbers in the interval class vector stand for the amount of times that each interval class is represented in a given set. In the case of the sc [016], the IC vector $\langle 100011 \rangle$ demonstrates that there is one instance of the interval class 1, one instance of interval class 5 and one instance of interval class 6.

¹¹¹ Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 3d ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 111.

The rows of Nobre's serial compositions also tend to be organized in a way that consecutive notes form the aforementioned set classes. In the row of *Ukrinmakrinkrin op. 17*, shown in Example 5.2, only three out of the ten trichords formed by consecutive notes are not [012], [015] or [016]:

Example 5.2: Trichords in the row of *Ukrinmakrinkrin, op. 17*.

The musical notation shows a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. Brackets above the staff group the following trichords: [016] (G4, A4, B4), [012] (A4, B4, C5), [016] (B4, C5, B4), [015] (A4, B4, C5), [016] (B4, A4, G4), and [012] (G4, F4, E4).

Interval classes 1 and 6 are also present in Nobre's later works. His *Sonâncias III op. 49* from 1980 also uses a row (Example 5.3) where every trichord except for one is one of the three trichords already mentioned:

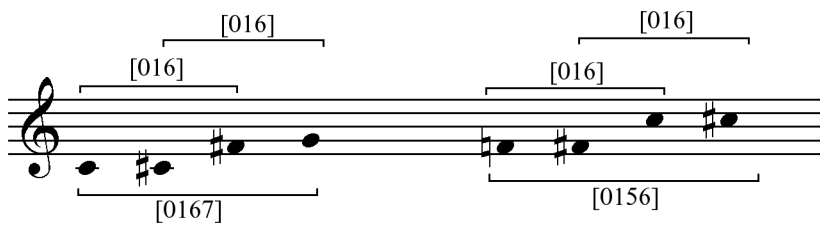
Example 5.3: Trichords in the row of *Sonâncias III op. 49*.

The musical notation shows a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. Brackets above the staff group the following trichords: [016] (G4, A4, B4), [015] (A4, B4, C5), [016] (B4, C5, B4), [016] (A4, B4, C5), [016] (B4, A4, G4), [012] (G4, F4, E4), [016] (F4, E4, D4), [012] (E4, D4, C5), and [016] (D4, C5, B4).

The referential sonority created by the combination of these trichords can naturally be expanded to larger objects such as tetrachords. Tetrachords that result from the union of the trichords [012], [015] and [016] tend to retain the intervallic properties of

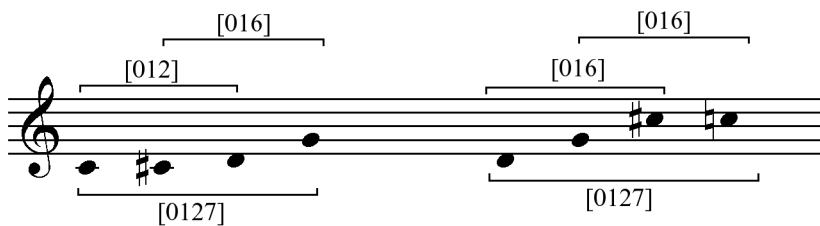
the trichords, particularly when the elements of one trichord are mapped onto the elements of the other. Example 5.4 shows how two sets of [016] can be combined to generate tetrachords [0167] and [0156]:

Example 5.4: Tetrachords [0167] and [0156].



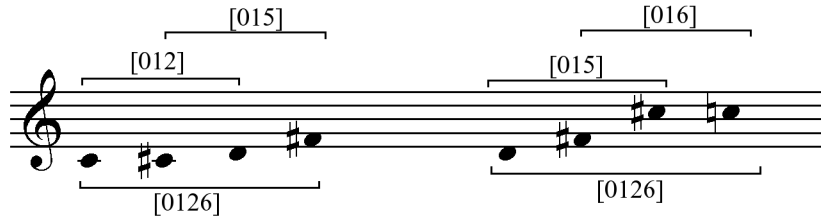
The tetrachord [0156] can also be generated by combining [015] with [015] or [015] with [016]. The tetrachord [0127] can be formed by two instances of [016] or by the union of [016] and [012] (Example 5.5):

Example 5.5: Tetrachord [0127].



Likewise, the tetrachord [0126] can result from the combination of [012] with [016] or [012] with [015] (Example 5.6):

Example 5.6: Tetrachord [0126].



The tetrachords discussed above are the most abundant sets found in opus 15a. Among these, [0167] has special importance – while the IC vector of [016] is $\langle 100011 \rangle$, the IC vector of [0167] is $\langle 200022 \rangle$. In fact, any combination of three elements of [0167] will always result in [016]. This emphasis on the tritone and minor second represents well the attempt to avoid tonal references. The Uruguayan composer Hector Tosar (1923-2002) wrote in his set theory essay *Los Grupos de Sonidos* [The Groups of Sounds] (1992) that, in the 1950s, set class [0167] became a favorite among the avant-garde composers and that “some of them used this sonority in their works in a recurrent and even obstinate way.”¹¹² To exemplify the importance of set class [0167] in the musical language of the twentieth century, Tosar mentions the example of Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück IX*, which repeats a chord derived from the set [0167] 142 times.¹¹³

¹¹² Sílvia Hasselaar, “Sonatina No. 2 de Hector Tosar: Uma Visão Histórica e Analítica” (DMA diss., Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2006), 56. “Alguns deles faziam uso desta sonoridade em suas obras de forma recorrente e até mesmo obstinada.”

¹¹³ Ibid.

Regarding the *Variações Rítmicas op. 15*, Nobre considers the interval classes 1 and 6 as “privileged intervals . . . from which the work is built.”¹¹⁴ The melody represented by the upper voice in the first measure of the theme consists of the pitch-classes 6 0 5, which form the set class [016] (Example 5.7).

Example 5.7: Opus 15a, mm. 1-2, upper voice.

The silence in measure 5, followed by the transposed version of the initial motive in the next measure, delimits the first phrase, and it is meaningful to observe that all verticalities so far presented in the right hand consist of [015] and [016] (Example 5.8).

¹¹⁴ Nobre, e-mail to the author, 17 January 2009. “O tema inicial das *Variações Rítmicas* incorpora como intervalos privilegiados o trítono, as 2as menores e 7as e a partir deste conceito a obra é construída.”

Example 5.8: Set classes in opus 15a, mm. 1-5.

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The theme of opus 15a defines the referential sonority that underlies the whole composition. The set classes discussed above are the basic building materials for the rest of the variations and variety is achieved by the distinct treatments that Nobre applies to them. Nobre builds a twelve-tone row in a way that the elements form trichords and tetrachords that contain the referential sonority (Example 5.9):

Example 5.9: Main tone row and set classes.

Variation I exposes the row for the first time in a traditional serial treatment, presenting retrograde and transposed versions of it (Example 5.10). It is possible to see that the statements of the row are not strict. For example, the second statement of P10 in m. 20 includes only the first eight elements and the third pitch of P5, starting on m. 21, is dislocated to the next measure. This exemplifies Nobre's use of serialism, in that in his opinion the ear overrules the system regarding the choice of pitches.

Example 5.10: Variation I (mm. 17-22): Exposition of the tone row.

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I. a VAR.
L'istesso Tempo
a tempo

8 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

P10 R10 P5

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the third tone of the row, displaced to form a verticality with the eighth and ninth pitches of P5 in m. 22, also results in a [016] set. Nobre segments the row in the beginning of Variation I in a way that emphasizes the set classes under discussion. It is particularly interesting to observe how the composer

musically connects the last two notes of the row with the first two notes of its next statement, forming the set class [0167] (Example 5.11):

Example 5.11: Segmentation of the row in Variation I, mm. 19-20.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, bass and treble clef. The tempo is marked 'a tempo'. The score includes several measures with musical notation. Key features include:

- Measure 19: Bass staff has a dynamic marking 'mp' and a set class label [012]. Treble staff has a set class label [0167].
- Measure 20: Treble staff has a set class label [0167] and an articulation marking 'acc'.
- Measure 21: Bass staff has a set class label [015].

 The score is numbered '20' at the top, indicating the start of the second measure shown.

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For Nobre, the twelve-tone technique serves more as a general guideline, a tool that allows the composer to avoid tonal centers: “the most interesting idea about serialism is, for me, the concept of non-hierarchic organization of the notes” – without the functions of tonic and dominant, the result is the democratization of the sound, where “there is only the ‘pure’ note that one chooses according to the ‘rational’ need of its utilization, it is the independence of the sounds!”¹¹⁵ This idea can be illustrated by the way Nobre uses the row in Variation II: the order of the elements is manipulated for personal reasons, but still keeps the idea of presenting all twelve tones. Example 5.12 shows four instances of the row where the order is always slightly different:

¹¹⁵ Denis, 33-34. “L’idée la plus intéressante du sérialisme est, d’après moi, la notion de non-hiérarchisation des notes. . . . C’est une sorte de démocratisation des sons, il n’y a pas de tonique, il n’y a pas de dominante, il y a la note “pure” que l’on choisit selon son besoin “mental” de l’utiliser, c’est l’indépendance des sons!”

Example 5.12: Instances of the row in Variation II.

a) Measures 46-50, upper staff.

Musical notation for measures 46-50, upper staff. The notation is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. A bracket labeled 'P10' spans measures 46 through 50. Measure numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are indicated below the staff. The music features a sequence of notes with various articulations, including slurs and triplets.

b) Measures 53-56, upper staff.

Musical notation for measures 53-56, upper staff. The notation is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. A bracket labeled 'P10' spans measures 53 through 56. Measure numbers 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 are indicated below the staff. The music includes slurs, triplets, and a dynamic marking of *sva* (sforzando) in measure 56.

c) Measure 55, lower staff.

Musical notation for measure 55, lower staff. The notation is in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. A bracket labeled '[R10]' spans the entire measure. Measure numbers 1, 2, 10, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 3, 11, and 12 are indicated below the staff. The music features a sequence of notes with slurs and triplets.

d) Measures 57-59, upper staff.

Musical notation for measures 57-59, upper staff. The notation is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. A bracket labeled 'P10' spans measures 57 through 59. Measure numbers 3, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 are indicated below the staff. The music includes slurs, a triplet in measure 58, and a dynamic marking of *sva* in measure 59.

The referential sonority that results from the basic sets is manifested both in its vertical and horizontal aspect throughout the composition. Variation II and IV emphasize the melodic potential of the set, while Variation III utilizes both the vertical and horizontal possibilities, as can be seen in Example 5.13:

Example 5.13: Sets in Variation III, mm. 77-79, upper staff.

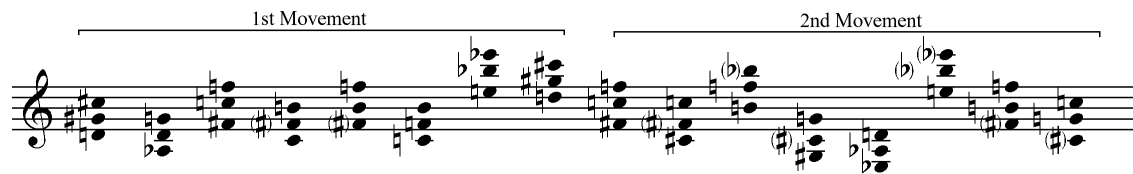
The texture of Variation V places special emphasis on the vertical organization of the pitches (most of the right-hand chords are [016] sets). However, the dyads played by the left hand are combined, in several cases, to form [0167] tetrachords, unfolding the referential sonority along the horizontal axis (Example 5.14).

Example 5.14: Trichords and tetrachords in Variation V, mm. 102-105.

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When the set [016] is rendered as a chord, Nobre usually chooses to place the pitches so that the intervals starting from the lowest note are a major seventh and either a perfect fourth or a tritone. It is not a coincidence that such writing resembles a work for piano solo composed in 1936: Anton Webern's *Variations op. 27*. Every three-note chord in the first two movements of Webern's *Variations* belongs to the set class [016] and the pitches are arranged in the manner described above. Example 5.15 shows all the chords found in the first two movements of Webern's op. 27:

Example 5.15: Chords in the 1st and 2nd movement of Webern's op. 27.



Despite Nobre's statements against Webern's approach to serialism, he was very influenced by the Viennese composer when he composed opus 15: ". . . by that time I was truly fascinated by Anton von Weber [sic], which is possible to identify in some of the variations that have an evident pointillist character. I did not try to avoid such reference to Webern, on the contrary, I wanted to emphasize it and it is very clear."¹¹⁶

The "pointillist character" refers to the texture of Variation VI, which shows remarkable similarity to the extreme leaps in register in the 2nd movement of Webern's

¹¹⁶ Nobre, e-mail to the author, 17 January 2009. "Quero também ressaltar que nesta época eu vinha de uma verdadeira adoração de Anton von Webern e isso é possível identificar em algumas variações que têm um caráter meio pontilístico evidente. Esta lembrança do Webern eu não quis evitar, ao contrário eu quis enfatizar e é muito clara."

opus 27. To emphasize his homage to Webern, Nobre brings back a clear statement of the tone row in Variation VI (Example 5.16):

Example 5.16: Tone row in Variation VI, mm. 127-130.

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Previous variations demonstrated how Nobre used the tone row to form chordal and melodic textures. Variation VII illustrates how Nobre utilizes the tone row in a polyphonic texture. The section shown in Example 5.17 contains three distinct layers: the lowest part (lower staff, stems point downward) spells the first five tones of I10, the middle part (lower staff, stems point upward) presents the next five tones of I10, and the upper part (cross staff) contains six ordered elements of P5.

Example 5.17: Polyphonic texture and the tone row, Variation VII, mm. 149-150.

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The Toccata introduces another tone row, which is completely derived from the trichord [016] (Example 5.18):

Example 5.18: Second tone row and set classes.

The first four pitches of the tone row (which belongs to the set class [0156]) form a motive that Nobre repeats twice before presenting the row in its entirety (Example 5.19):

Example 5.19: Second tone row, Toccata, upper staff, mm. 163-166.

The retrograde and inverted forms of this row are presented next (Example 5.20):

Example 5.20: Second tone row, Toccata, mm. 166-172.

The second tone row is only used briefly and it is the most straightforward application of serialism in the work. The order of elements is kept as in the original statement. R1 is slightly manipulated, though, for its first four notes do not form the set class [0156], which is associated with the four-note motive preceding each statement of the tone row. Thus, Nobre uses the first four notes of P1 before R1 (mm. 166-167) and the last four notes (the same as the first notes of P1) are absent in the statement of R1.

This illustrates how important the intervallic content is for Nobre, for even in the most straightforward instance of the use of tone rows, he makes sure that the sonority is kept associated with the motive. The pitch language of opus 15a is unified by the consistent use of set classes that prioritize interval classes 1 and 6. As is usually the case in Nobre's compositions, the first musical idea exposed in the first measure contains all the elements that are used to build the musical material for the rest of the work. The composition is clearly placed in the context of progressive twentieth-century music, where the composer employs advanced compositional techniques to manipulate musical material, without ever losing sight of his personal language.

Rhythmic and Motivic Manipulation

Just as the first idea presented in opus 15a establishes the elements of the pitch language that are explored during the rest of the work, the first measures of the composition also present the basic motivic and rhythmic patterns that are developed in the variations.

The long chord in the first measure functions as a punctuation mark that delimits a group of three eighth notes. This musical idea is restated in measure 3, but the repetition of the punctuating chord creates a 3+2 grouping (Example 5.21):

Example 5.21: Exposition of metric groups, Theme, mm. 1-5.

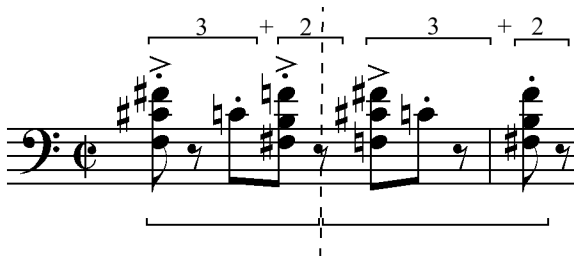
The musical score for Example 5.21 consists of five measures. The right hand (treble clef) features a complex rhythmic pattern with dynamic markings of *ff* and *sf*. The left hand (bass clef) provides a steady accompaniment. The right hand's rhythm is segmented into groups of 3, 3+2, and 3+3. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

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In effect, this initial phrase contains all the elements in which the *tresillo* pattern can be segmented: 3+3+2 can generate the patterns (3), (3+3) or (3+2) by derivation. Among these, 3+2 is the most typical of the *tresillo* pattern, since it represents the asymmetry as well as the alternation between groups of three and two, which is a major feature of African-Latin rhythms.

Nobre states the main motive twice in measure 12, creating a non-retrogradable rhythm (Example 5.22), a compositional device that is very characteristic of Messiaen's music. Messiaen labeled as "non-retrogradable rhythm" the rhythmic formulas that are the same whether read forwards or backwards (a rhythmic palindrome, in other words). While the rhythm content is palindromic and therefore symmetric, the texture and accents reinforce the 3+2 pattern.

Example 5.22: Non-retrogradable rhythm, Theme, mm. 12, upper staff.



This motive becomes associated with the 3+2 rhythmic pattern and is developed through different processes of variation throughout the work (Examples 5.23a-k). Melodically, the original statement of the idea presents the cseg $\langle 2\ 0\ 1 \rangle$ ¹¹⁷. In Variation I, the motive has its contour extended to a cseg $\langle 3\ 2\ 0\ 1 \rangle$, while the rhythmic grouping 3+2 is maintained. This contour is the most consistent version of the motive throughout the rest of the work. The same cseg $\langle 3\ 2\ 0\ 1 \rangle$ can be found in Variations II, III, IV, V, VII, and in the Toccata. The contour is manipulated in Variation VI by keeping the initial csubseg $\langle 2\ 1\ 0 \rangle$ and altering the last c-pitch. In addition to the cseg $\langle 3\ 2\ 0\ 1 \rangle$, the Toccata presents its inversion, cseg $\langle 0\ 1\ 3\ 2 \rangle$, and the original form $\langle 2\ 0\ 1 \rangle$, which works as a brief recapitulation by creating a reference to the theme.

¹¹⁷ The concept and notation of contour segments are explained in Elizabeth West Marvin and Paul A. Laprade, "Extensions of a Theory for Contour," *Journal of Music Theory* 31, no. 2 (Autumn 1987): 225-267. A contour segment (cseg) can be defined as an ordered set of contour pitches in contour space. Contour pitches are elements in contour space, numbered in order from low to high, beginning with 0 up to (n-1), where n stands for the number of elements of the set. Contour space is a musical space that consists of elements arranged from low to high disregarding the exact interval between elements.

Example 5.23: Motivic development and melodic contour.



a) Theme, mm. 12-13
< 2 0 1 >



b) Variation I, mm 36-37
< 3 2 0 1 >



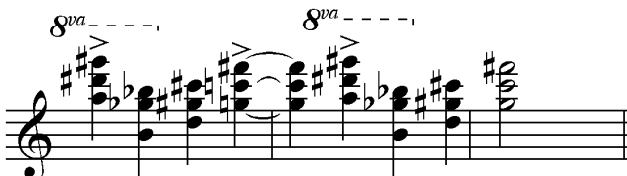
c) Variation II, m. 61
< 3 2 0 1 >



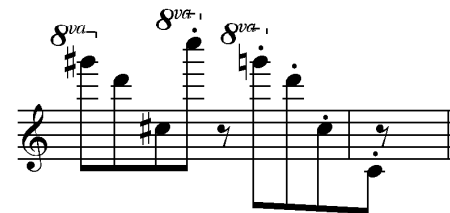
d) Variation III, 74-75
< 3 2 0 1 >



e) Variation IV, mm. 88-89
< 3 2 0 1 >



f) Variation V, mm. 102-104
< 3 2 0 1 >



g) Variation VI, mm. 135-136
< 2 1 0 3 > / < 3 2 1 0 >



h) Variation VII, m. 151
< 3 2 0 1 >



i) Toccata, mm. 163-164
< 3 2 0 1 >



j) Toccata, mm. 169-170
< 0 1 3 2 >



k) Toccata, mm. 181-182
< 2 0 1 >

Besides introducing the extended form of the motive, Variation I also displays the *tresillo* pattern in a retrograded version (2+3+3) in measure 25, immediately preceding a statement of the main motive (Example 5.23):

Example 5.23: Retrograde version of the *tresillo*, Variation I, mm. 24-27.

The image shows a musical score for measures 24-27. The top staff is a vocal line with a treble clef, and the bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with a bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part begins with a *cresc.* marking. The vocal line has dynamics *mf*, *mp*, and *f sub.* Above the vocal line, a bracket groups three eighth notes with the numbers 2, 3, and 3 above them, indicating a retrograde tresillo pattern. The piano part has a dotted quarter note in measure 25, which is the eighth-note rest mentioned in the text.

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The *tresillo* pattern is also shown in its regular form in Variation I; however, its appearance is somewhat disguised: at the end of the group, Nobre adds an eighth-note rest which obscures the length of the group. The group can ambiguously be perceived as 3+3+2 or 3+3+3 (Example 5.24). In the second instance (mm. 37-38), the *tresillo* pattern is displaced in relation to the written meter.

Example 5.24: *Tresillo* pattern, Variation I, mm. 28-31 and mm. 36-39.

mm. 28-31

mm. 36-39

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Metric displacements as shown above are very common in Nobre’s music. In his *Musical Beliefs*, the composer states that, “as for rhythm, regular pulse and metrical points of reference, associated with the greatest possible rhythmical freedom, seem to me to be the basic elements of composition.”¹¹⁸ As can be observed throughout the composition, there are many moments when the accentuation and grouping are offset both in relation to each other and to the written measure. However, a sense of “metrical points of reference” is never lost; on the contrary, the important arrival points and climaxes always coincide with the strong beat of the measure. Example 5.25 illustrates an example of this

¹¹⁸ Nobre, “My Musical Beliefs” (2005), http://marlosnobre.sites.uol.com.br/index1_i.html. (accessed 29 January 2009).

procedure in Variation II, where every musical aspect contributes to the climactic chord in measure 64: the rhythmic density increases due to a progressively larger amount of notes per beat; the pulse rate increases according to the *accel.* indication; the dynamic level is brought from *mp* to *ff sonoro*; the register of the section encompasses an extended range of the piano, with the highest note coinciding with the climactic chord; the chord belongs to the set class [016] and its highest note provides the aggregate completion (B natural was the only pitch missing in the previous measure); and finally, the point of culmination marks the only appearance of the *tresillo* pattern in Variation II.

Exmaple 5.25: Climax and metrical point of reference, Variation II, mm. 63-64.

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Another technique that Nobre employed in order to manipulate the 3+2 pattern derived from the *tresillo* consists of adding a basic unit rest (eighth note) to each part of the pattern. The resulting 4+3 pattern, which can be conceived of as a stretched version of 3+2, is found in Variation III (Example 5.26):

Example 5.26: Stretched version of 3+2, Variation III, mm. 80-83.

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The *tresillo* pattern can be found at the very end of the variation in the upper part, closely imitated by the lower part (Example 5.27):

Example 5.27: *Tresillo* pattern in Variation III, mm. 84-87.

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As the variations progress, the *tresillo* pattern becomes more prominent. The first three variations would present one instance of the pattern at a time, sometimes followed by a rest (which obscures the length of the last group), or immersed in a dense polyrhythmic texture. Variation IV is the first moment when

two instances of the *tresillo* are presented consecutively, which is one step closer to the natural context of the pattern as an ostinato accompaniment (Example 5.28):

Example 5.28: Consecutive instances of *tresillo* , Variation IV, mm. 92-94.

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The reiteration of the *tresillo* is obscured by the lower voice, which creates a metric pattern of four unities that diverge from the upper voice. As the examples above illustrate, metric displacements do not take place in only one voice: the independence of parts resulting from the polyphonic quality of Nobre's writing is expressed by the constant non-simultaneous accentuation of groups, sometimes making use of imitative texture. Polyrhythmic structures are a defining characteristic of Nobre's language and for this reason, their absence can be perceived as a contrasting, special moment, as is the case with Variation V.

In Variation V, every quarter note is articulated, but both register and dynamics contribute to shape the motives, phrases and structure. The *tresillo* pattern is more marked in this variation than in any of the preceding ones, since the absence of polyrhythmic structures lends clarity to the rhythmic grouping.

Example 5.29 shows three instances of the *tresillo*. The first and third instances are marked by the left hand dyads, while the second instance is marked by the accents in the right hand. It is important to observe again the association of the patterns with the dynamic levels.

Example 5.29: *Tresillo* patterns in Variation V, mm. 112-121.

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Variation VI also avoids polyrhythmic texture, since it consists of one part only. This Webern-like variation maintains a uniform sound quality by indicating *sempre pp e staccato*, except for a few slurred notes at the end of the variation. The shaping of ideas, therefore, results from the interaction between register and rests in the flow of eighth notes. The *tresillo* pattern, for instance, is quite hidden in the first measure of the variation, but it is delineated by the register of the

pitches. The pitches B-flat, C-sharp and G-natural are carefully placed in a higher register than the neighbor tones (Example 5.30):

Example 5.30: *Tresillo* pattern in Variation VI, mm. 127-130.



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The *tresillo* pattern achieves its most complete rendition in the *Più Mosso* section of the Toccata, where it finally becomes an ostinato rhythm and thus a perceptible reference to the typical Brazilian rhythm (Example 5.31).

Example 5.31: *Tresillo* ostinato, Toccata, mm. 189-192.



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Nobre avoids a simple repetitive accompaniment by inserting occasional extended patterns. For example, after five instances of 3+3+2, measures 194-195

present the grouping 3+3+3+3+4, followed by seven instances of the *tresillo*. Groupings of three notes running against the written measure become more frequent toward the end of the piece, particularly during the crescendo of the last nine measures, from *pp* to *ffff*. The metric frame of the last instance of the *tresillo* in opus 15a can be interpreted in two ways. While the hand distribution in measures 230-231 indicates a *tresillo* that coincides with the measure, the dynamic accents point to a metrically shifted version of the pattern. Rhythmic complexity emerges from the conflict between the confirmation of the written meter and the displaced pattern. The dense texture of the left-hand chords confirms the natural placement of the pattern, but by displacing the *tresillo* pattern one eighth note to the right by means of accentuation, Nobre causes the last note of the pattern to coincide with the downbeat of the last measure. This way, the second note of the binary group at the end of the 3+3+2 pattern gains a new meaning: instead of an upbeat quality that points to the next beat, the cluster on the first beat of measure 231 serves as an explosive ending point (Example 5.32):

Example 5.32: *Fortissimo* ending, Toccata, mm. 230-231.

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Nobre was never afraid of the bombastic effect of *fortissimo* finales:

Usually, the composer has two clear options to end a piece, either fortissimo or pianissimo . . . One thing that irritated me and still does deeply irritate me in contemporary music festivals . . . [is that] the great majority of contemporary composers always end their works in PIANISSIMO! . . . After hearing thousands of concerts like this . . . I REBELLED, I TRANSGRESSED the avant-garde cliché, and I finish my piece however I want. I was never afraid of the opinions of my colleagues, critics, or pseudo-critics (that are numerous). . . I remember well, and that always gave me pleasure, the disgusted faces, the rejection, the pseudo-intellectualism of so many people, after the final explosions of my pieces. Had I chosen to end them in pianissimo, everyone would approve. So what?¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Nobre, quoted in Scarambone, 30. “Em geral o compositor tem duas opções muito claras para ‘terminar’ uma obra, ou o faz em fortíssimo ou em pianíssimo . . . E outra coisa que me irritava e ainda me irrita profundamente nos festivais de música contemporânea, ou concertos de músicas do nosso tempo: a grande maioria dos compositores contemporâneos terminam suas obras sempre EM PIANÍSSIMO! . . . Ora, depois de ouvir milhares de concertos assim . . . eu me REBELI, eu TRANSGREDI o clichê vanguardista, e termino minha obra como me dá na gana. Nunca tive receio das opiniões de meus colegas, ou críticos ou pseudo-críticos (que são mais numerosos), das escolinhas ou das turminhas de vanguarda. Lembro perfeitamente, e isso sempre me divertiu muito, ver a cara de nojo, de repúdio, de pseudo-intellectualismo de tantos e tantos, após estas explosões finais de minhas obras. Tivesse eu simplesmente optado por terminar em ‘pianíssimo’ e a aprovação seria geral! E daí?”

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Nobre's period of study in Buenos Aires was essential for the maturation of his relationship with twelve-tone technique and serialism. Rather than conceiving the system as a set of strict rules, Nobre would use it as a tool to create a "democracy of sounds." Marco says that "in his first avant-garde works, Nobre's harmony may be closer to the language of serialism, yet he does not practice it as much as he seeks the neutralization of intervals to avoid polarizations. . ."¹²⁰

However, the democracy of sound must refer to pitches rather than intervals. Nobre freely alters the order of tones in a tone row, but his concern with the exposition of the aggregate is evident: "There is no tonic, there is no dominant, only the pure note chosen by one's rational needs – it is the independence of sounds!"¹²¹ Nobre avoids polarization, thus neutralizing the traditional musical function of chords, which is not to say that intervals are neutralized the same way. The trichords [012], [015] and [016] – and the tetrachords derived from them –

¹²⁰ Marco, 135. "En sus primeras obras de vanguardia, la armonía de Nobre puede estar más cercana de los lenguajes seriales, aunque no los practica y más atenta a una neutralización de intervalos para no privilegiar polarizaciones . . ."

¹²¹ Denis, 33-34. "C'est une sorte de democratization des sons, il n'y a pas de tonique, il n'y a pas de dominante, il y a la note 'pure' que l'on choisit selon son besoin 'mental' de l'utiliser, c'est l'indépendance des sons!"

were carefully chosen and carry substantial musical meaning in the proper context: choosing interval classes 1 and 6 as musical building blocks reinforces the distance from traditional functions where the tritone is an unstable entity that must be resolved. In opus 15a, such interval classes are the most consistent elements throughout the composition, the utilization of which results in a referential sonority that not only brings unity and consistency to the work but also inserts it into the broad historical movement shared by Bartók, Stockhausen, Webern, and many other twentieth-century composers.

Nobre successfully incorporates Brazilian elements into opus 15 through the manipulation of the *tresillo* pattern. This rhythmic pattern, which is so pervasive in Latin-American music in general, was metamorphosed into many Brazilian popular genres and found its way into the *maxixes*, *polkas* and *tangos* in the nineteenth century. After the popular piano music of Ernesto Nazareth – which influenced Nobre’s language more than any other composer in his first compositions – the pattern migrated naturally to the realm of concert music and was employed by many generations of composers with the desire of representing a national identity in their music. Villa-Lobos’ and Guarnieri’s music is rich in instances of the *tresillo*, sometimes providing an ostinato accompaniment and sometimes shaping the melodic contours.

Nobre breaks down the *tresillo* into its smallest components and meticulously manipulates them through the process of variation throughout the whole composition. This represents an important step for the composer, when he

became able, through the teachings of Messiaen, to coordinate the manifestation of Brazilian rhythms both on unconscious and conscious levels. The motivic fabric that holds the composition together consists of Brazilian elements being treated with modern compositional techniques.

The artistic cohesion of opus 15 was kept intact when the work was arranged for the solo piano medium, which makes Nobre's opus 15a an important addition to the pianistic repertoire. The work represents the historical moment of Nobre's development of a personal language – a language that transcended scholastic perspectives and synthesized, rather than repudiated, the incorporation of advanced compositional techniques with Brazilian rhythmic patterns.

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APPENDIX

LETTER OF PERMISSION
FOR THE CITATION OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

March, 21st 2009

Dear Marlos Nobre:

I am completing a doctoral dissertation at University of North Carolina at Greensboro entitled "A Synthesis of Modern and Brazilian Elements: An Investigation of *Variantes e Toccata Opus 15a* by Marlos Nobre." I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:

Variantes e Toccata, Opus 15a para piano solo.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of my dissertation by UMI. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Pablo Gusmão

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE
USE REQUESTED ABOVE:



Marlos Nobre

Date:

March 29, 2009

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil