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Brazilian Piano Through The Ages:

A Look at the Development in Style Through the Context of Social Issues and Historical Influences

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Visual and Performing Arts
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Music

by Rebecca Lin Chen

May 2012

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Music, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Music.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my parents, Dr. and Mrs. Tony and Cheryl Chen. Their love and encouragement in studying piano and pursuing college has been the greatest gift I could receive.

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Abstract

This project seeks to explore the development of piano music in Brazil, through the historical and social context of five different composers: Chiquinha Gonzaga, Ernesto Nazareth, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Francisco Mignone, and Edmundo Villani-Côrtes. By studying representative pieces of these composers, main influences are revealed, such as avoidance of or defying social stigmas, the impact of choro music, the influence of folklore and folk tunes, and the European and Romantic piano tradition. Furthermore, through the work of a composer still living today, we can trace these historical aspects into the modern day.

Foreword

Imagine the world with only one type of music. Pick any kind, classical, jazz, rock and roll, opera, or for argument's sake, bluegrass for solo banjo. You hear it on the radio, watch it on TV, and go to nightclubs that play it. But one day, you wake up and hear something completely new and fresh. It is a shadowy figure, far away outside your window, playing taps on a silver bugle. You have never heard anything so serene or somber. You've never seen an instrument that you blow air into for it to produce sound. And as you slowly rub your eyes and take it all in, a marching band staggers in behind the trumpeter. Within a minute, the band begins to play the Stars and Stripes Forever. There are tons of wind instruments and enormous drums that you have never seen before. This music is so energetic and joyous, even infectious! The world as you knew it is turning upside down.

This is an extreme hypothetical situation, but it's similar to how I felt about discovering Brazilian music. As a young pianist, Bach and Beethoven had served me well, but being assigned Brazilian music was a new experience, filling me with wonder and elation. The cheerful melodies and rhythmic background of my new piece, Ernesto Nazareth's *Brejeiro*, filled my practice room and I was in love.

It is for this love of Brazilian music that I decided to do an Honors project lecture recital investigating the traceable influences that give the music a unique character, whether joyous or mournful. By studying the history, social influences, and race issues of Brazilian composers, we can learn about the tumultuous times that shaped the music, giving it a sound that distinctly represented all that the country held within its borders. I will be looking in detail at the biographies of composers Chiquinha Gonzaga, Ernesto Nazareth, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Francisco Mignone, and

Edmundo Villani-Côrtes. I will discuss important influences upon their compositional style, and show brief musical analyses of each piece.

¹ This honors project was originally presented as a lecture recital was given on November 12th, 2011, in Anthony-Seeger Auditorium.

Brief History of the Development of Choro and Other Musical Forms

The innumerable dances of Brazil's native Indian population and African slaves have highly impacted the development of a national style of music. The concept of call-and-response in music, folk tunes, and most importantly, the rhythmic aspects of the music originally comes from these cultures. Though it cannot all be discussed in depth, some highlights are included here.

The maxixe was a hybrid dance of European and African influences. Appearing around 1870 in Rio de Janeiro, the dance was characterized by dancers dragging their feet and the incorporation of certain hip movements.² It is derived from the *lundu*, one of the first modern Afro-Brazilian dances.³ This particular dance brought African music into Brazil's towns and cities, contributing heavily to the formation of the Brazilian musical tradition.⁴ The *lundu*, and also consequently the maxixe, is considered to be a predecessor to the samba.⁵

Choro is a form of instrumental music, typically written for a small ensemble, including (but not limited to) flutes, guitars, and cavaquinhos. The influence of choro is so strong that Severino Dias de Oliveira asserts that, "for any and all Brazilian instrumental music, if it is really Brazilian in origin, we must consider choro as its basis."⁶

The first choro musicians were usually amateurs. The music is characterized by its "extreme melodic leaps, unexpected modulations, and occasional breakneck tempos."⁷ These amateurs generally came from the middle class since it was necessary to have at least a small amount of expendable income in order to purchase the string or wind instruments typically used. Another

² *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Maxixe" (accessed October 5, 2011).

³ Darien J. Davis, *White Face, Black Mask: Africaneity and the Early Social History of Popular Music in Brazil* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009), 236.

⁴ Peter Fryer, *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil*. (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 154.

⁵ Bryan McCann, *Hello, hello Brazil : popular music in the making of modern Brazil* (Durham [N.C.] ; London : Duke University Press, 2004), 46.

⁶ Tamara Elena Livingston-Isenhour and Thomas George Caracas Garcia, *Choro: A Social History of a Brazilian Popular Music* (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 2005), 177.

⁷ Chris McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha, *The Brazilian Sound : Samba, Bossa Nova, and the Popular Music of Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 159.

indication of status is that the musicians would gather in what would be considered middle-class venues to create choro music.⁸

The word “choro” comes from the Portuguese “chorar” which means “to weep, cry, or sob” or possibly from “chormeiro,” referring to a particular wind instrument, although it would later indicate members of an instrumental ensemble that included the aforementioned instrument.^{9,10}

Chormeiro literally means “sweet music,” from the same root as the word “chorus.”

Essentially, all of the pieces that will be discussed over the course of this project are directly impacted by the roots of dance in other cultures, assimilated and forged into a new uniquely Brazilian style.

⁸ Livingston-Isenhour, 65.

⁹ McCann, 163.

¹⁰ Livingston-Isenhour, 60.

Chiquinha Gonzaga



Figure 1 – Gonzaga, age 47

Francisca Edwiges Neves Gonzaga (1847-1935), better known as “Chiquinha,” was a prominent Brazilian female composer of the late 19th and early 20th century who wrote many dances, songs, and carnival marches.¹¹ Gonzaga is often characterized as a strong-willed and independent woman who disregarded convention, marrying and divorcing twice, which was practically unheard of at that time.¹² She was active in fighting social prejudices against women and blacks, evidenced by her involvement with the Brazilian abolition movement of the late 1800s.^{13,14}

Chiquinha Gonzaga was the daughter of Marshall Jose Basileu Neves Gonzaga, a white military officer in the Brazilian army. Her mother, Dona Rosa Maria de Lima Gonzaga, was also a dynamic figure in high-class, imperial society, and held a certain social status because of that fact.¹⁵ Chiquinha received a thorough classical music education from private teachers. Her parents tried to guide her toward elegant, genteel music, but she preferred the fiery drama of Italian opera.¹⁶ Gonzaga chose to pursue her musical dreams, disavowed the respectable, high-class life she was handed, and immersed herself in the popular social culture of Brazil.

¹¹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Chiquinha Gonzaga" (accessed September 20, 2011).

¹² Chris McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha, *The Brazilian sound : samba, bossa nova, and the popular music of Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 160.

¹³ Davis, 9.

¹⁴ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Chiquinha Gonzaga" (accessed September 20, 2011).

¹⁵ David P. Appleby, *The Music of Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 73.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 76.

Gonzaga was involved in many controversial and groundbreaking movements. In 1885, Gonzaga became the first woman to conduct an orchestra in Brazil. On the musicians' rights front, she helped form Sociedade Brasileira de Autores Teatrais (SBAT) to protect composers' rights.¹⁷ She is also well known for writing one of the most famous Brazilian carnival tunes—the marcha-rancho “Ô Abre Alas,” composed in 1899, which is known by many Brazilians to this day.¹⁸ Proving that she was a character of enduring intrigue, a 1999 TV miniseries details her life's story.

Gaúcho, written in 1895, was another piece that gained popularity. The title refers to a South American cattle herder, which invoked homely and pastoral feelings of the Brazilian countryside, specifically the cattle zone of Rio Grande do Sul.¹⁹ Gonzaga's composition actually has two titles: *Gaúcho*, and in parenthesis, *Corta-jaca*. In addition, it was termed a “tango Brasileiro,” to avoid the negative connotations associated with the label “maxixe.” The categorization of the composition is also ambiguous because of the fluid definitions of dances at the time.

Why would Gonzaga choose to label her piece a “tango Brasileiro” rather than a more specific or accurate label of “maxixe”? One consideration, as mentioned before, was that she was reportedly a strong-willed and independent woman, unfazed by a profession dominated by men, and a “woman who made it a lifelong practice to challenge social conventions in the society in which she lived.”²⁰ That late-nineteenth century society regarded women as only filling the role of mother or wife, and sometimes merely as a domestic servant.²¹ When women appeared in the music scene, it was typically as a singer or dancer, rarely as a composer, thus Gonzaga's hard-earned position is remarkable.

¹⁷ Daniella Thompson, “The *Boeuf* chronicles, Pt. 8 The lewd dance that shocked a venerable senator,” *Musica Brasiliensis*, http://daniellathompson.com/Texts/Le_Boeuf/boeuf.pt.8.htm (accessed September 20, 2011).

¹⁸ McGowan, 37.

¹⁹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Brazil” (accessed September 20, 2011).

²⁰ Appleby, *The Music of Brazil*, 73.

²¹ Rafael José de Menezes Bastos. “Chiquinha Gonzaga or the Epics of Female Musician in Brazil,” *Music on show: issues in performance*, 1998, 206.

Despite her daring attitude, Gonzaga was not the first to shy away from the term maxixe because of its negative connotation. Many composers, including Ernesto Nazareth, who popularized the term “Tango Brasileiro,” and wrote hundreds of these pieces, wanted to avoid the stigma of calling their work a maxixe due to its association with the lower class and its possibility of inciting vulgarity of movement.²² In fact, these tango Brasileiros had nothing to do with the more famous Argentine version of the tango.²³

In their book, *Choro: A Social History of a Brazilian Popular Music*, Tamara Livingston-Isenhour and Thomas Garcia discuss the so-called vulgarity of the maxixe. Because it contained “overt African rhythmic influences,” racial prejudice factored into the genre’s ill reputation. The issue of race was a highly contested item, considering that slavery was not abolished until 1888 in Brazil. Though the country would eventually come to embrace its diverse racial population and appreciate its multitude of cultural influences, the late 1800s were filled with ideas that fairer skinned people were somehow better than those of darker hues.²⁴ The maxixe was seen as inappropriately sensuous, and furthermore, respectable society was outraged by the way the male partner would hold the female partner, often with his hand on her buttocks.²⁵

The piece was originally composed for inclusion in the 1895 play *Zizinha maxixe*. A scandal arose surrounding this particular piece when it was performed in the presence of Senator Ruy Barbosa. Raunchy lyrics were written to accompany the piece, but Abel Cardoso Junior comments that, “Even when it was merely played on the guitar at the Palácio do Catete (residence of the

²² McCann, 44.

²³ Ibid, 45.

²⁴ Thomas Skidmore, *The Idea of Race in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 9.

²⁵ Livingston-Isenhour, 33.

president of the republic) in 1914, “Corta-Jaca” provoked the indignation of senator Ruy Barbosa.”²⁶
A song that seems so cheerful and harmless to us today caused an uproar during Gonzaga’s day.

On analysis of the piano score, arranged in 1897, the composition seems relatively straightforward. It starts off with a section marked *Batuque*, which is a traditional dance originating from Cape Verde off the Western coast of Africa. The batuque is characterized by call-and-response and the participation of listeners clapping the rhythm.²⁷ A *Canto*, or “song,” section comes in with the main melody. These two sections alternate until the second theme comes in, called *Côro e dança* (chorus and dance), which is lighter, more cheerful, and written in F major. The piece’s ABA form is rounded off by one more repetition of the alternating batuque/canto first part. Although the A section is written in D minor and a minor mode might indicate a sad or reflective mood, the entire piece retains a jovial quality.

I found a recording of *Gaiúcho* from 1912 played on flute, guitar, and *cavaquinho* (a small four-stringed guitar).²⁸ This recording is invaluable for discerning authentic, historically accurate performance practice, considering how relatively close to the piece’s initial debut it was made. It is very obvious where the piano tries to imitate the guitars’ rhythms with its left hand accompaniment pattern. The flute plays the melody throughout, and is fairly, but not militantly, strict about rhythm, which would have been useful for the people dancing to it. The beauty of this recording’s interpretation is that it is straightforward and unassuming, lacking dramatic pauses or even much dynamic contrast. This recording conjures up images of informal, yet intimate performances on the streets of Rio de Janeiro.

Chiquinha Gonzaga undoubtedly made a mark on popular Brazilian music of the early 20th century. Her combination of influences, ranging from European ballroom dances, to traditional

²⁶ Daniella Thompson, “The *Boeuf* chronicles, Pt. 8 The lewd dance that shocked a venerable senator.,” *Musica Brasiliensis*, http://daniellathompson.com/Texts/Le_Boeuf/boeuf.pt.8.htm (accessed September 20, 2011).

²⁷ McCann, 46.

²⁸ Recording located at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Corta_jaca_1912.ogg

African drum-based music, lent a unique flair to her compositions. Whether she was expressing defiance against her society or conforming to it, whether her piece is called “Tango Brasileiro” or *maxixe*, I believe it is clear that her music served and portrayed the people of Brazil.

Ernesto Nazareth

Ernesto Nazareth is considered to be one of the most influential figures of the first generation of Brazilian nationalist composers. Living from 1863 to 1934, Nazareth wrote only for his primary instrument, the piano, but his pieces have been adapted for anything from the solo guitar to a small group of flute, guitar, and *cavaquinho*.

Nazareth was first trained in classical music by his mother who passed away when he was only ten. He went on to study with Eduardo Madeira and French pianist Lucien Lambert, and this early training led him to be interested in both improvisation and the great works of Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin.²⁹

In order to support his family, Nazareth started performing sheet music in Brazil in 1919. This was a crucial marketing device because radio and records were rare and only beginning to become popular. The music publishing business was also fortunate to have him because he drew large crowds who wanted to hear him play.³⁰ He played a variety of music, including popular music and his own compositions.³¹

Nazareth may be best known for his job as pianist in the famous Odeon cinema from 1920-1924, playing music for silent films. This is the same theater orchestra for which Heitor Villa-Lobos played cello, and Nazareth's influence can be seen in much of his work.³²

Nazareth's music created a great legacy and reached more than just Brazilian nationalist composers. French composer Darius Milhaud remarked three decades after hearing Nazareth play

²⁹ David P. Appleby. *The Music of Brazil*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 78.

³⁰ Marilyn Mair, "Ernesto Nazareth (1863-1934) – Choro Pioneer," *Mandolin Quarterly*, 2003, Vol. 8, Nr. 3, 4.

³¹ Simone Machado, "An Examination of Selected Piano Works by Francisco Mignone, Lorenzo Fernandez and Marlos Nobre Using the Corresponding Brazilian Dances as a Guide to Their Performance" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2006), 31.

³² *Ibid.*

the piano that, “His way of playing—fluent, indefinable, and sad—helped me to better understand the Brazilian soul.”³³

Simone Machado wrote that Nazareth “combined the spontaneity of popular music... with the harmonic and melodic complexity of erudite chamber music, creating compositions that demanded technically skilled interpreters but were intended primarily for a popular audience.”³⁴

Nazareth had a strong influence on the development of choro. Inspired by the polkas he heard as a youth in Rio de Janeiro,³⁵ Nazareth was able to write music that appealed to the masses, yet also had sophistication and which inspired many Brazilian composers who followed him.

Nazareth did not actually want his works danced to, but nevertheless, they have a strong feel of choro, and an inescapable and “inherent choreographic essence.”^{36,37} In the case of “Brejeiro,” this refers to the undeniable rhythmic drive, as well as the lighthearted and joyful mood of the piece. Choro developed around the same time as American ragtime, and they are related in that both musical genres evolved from European dances, appealed to the masses, and have heavy use of syncopation.³⁸ Thus, the two styles of music sound similar at times.

Written in 1893, Nazareth dedicated this piece to his nephew, Gilberto Nazareth. The title means “mischievous” or “flirtatious.” It is easily identified as having an overall A-A'-B-A-A' structure (where A' indicates a variation on the A theme), and a four-bar intro which sets up the groove, including a swaying bass line and jaunty, syncopated right hand chords.

³³ Appleby, *The Music of Brazil*, 83.

³⁴ Machado, 33.

³⁵ Appleby, *The Music of Brazil*, 78.

³⁶ Ary Vasconcelos, *Panorama da Música Popular Brasileira* (São Paulo: Livraria Martins Editôra, 1964), quoted in Simone Machado, “An Examination of Selected Piano Works by Francisco Mignone, Lorenzo Fernandez and Marlos Nobre Using the Corresponding Brazilian Dances as a Guide to Their Performance” (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2006), 33.

³⁷ Machado, 33.

³⁸ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Ragtime” (accessed October 19, 2011).

Example 1: *Brejeiro*, mm. 1-4



The 4-bar melody of the A section comes in at bar 5, played first at mezzo-forte, followed by a softer echo which concludes in measure 12. A short sequence allows for some harmonic interest (iii-vi-V/V-V or c#7-f#-B7-E7) and leads into a measure of inversions of A major (the key of the piece), which transition gently and delicately (*com delicadeza*) into the A' section.

In the A' section, Nazareth varies the musical texture by having the left hand adopt a stride piano feel while the right hand melody remains unchanged. Stride piano is a left-hand accompaniment style in which a bass note is in the low register and the rest of the chord is in the middle register, which at a fast tempo causes rapid leaps and stride's characteristic sound. The B section begins with a large, startling B major chord pickup, which is the dominant chord leading the key change into E major. The B section is characterized by groups of a common syncopated choro rhythm (see figure 2), the right hand playing in octaves, and a stride-like left hand accompaniment. Finally, the A and A' sections are repeated exactly, except for an ending A major chord, which is the tonic.

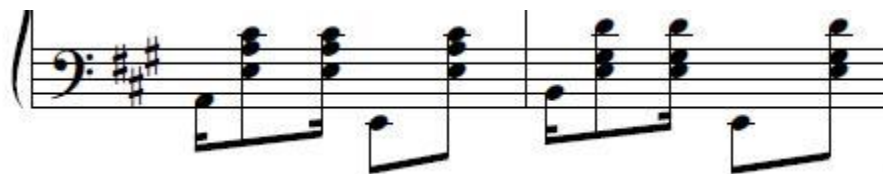


Figure 2 – Common choro rhythm

Ernesto Nazareth is widely regarded as a pioneer of choro music. Through “Brejeiro,” along with his other hundreds of compositions, Nazareth was able to help define stylistic characteristics upon which choro and other popular styles of music would thrive.

Heitor Villa-Lobos

“I am folklore. The melodies I compose are as truly folklore as the ones I collect.” This well-known quote of Heitor Villa-Lobos, which David P. Appleby discusses in his biography of the composer, is a great example of Villa-Lobos’s conceit, bravado, and purposeful obfuscation of his own inspirational sources. A frequent teller of tall tales, Villa-Lobos would reply to those who asked if he used indigenous Brazilian melodies, that he used melodies of “such great antiquity that the present generation had no knowledge of them.”³⁹ Upon being questioned as to how he himself acquired the melodies, he claimed in utmost “seriousness” that he received them from the parrots in the jungle.⁴⁰

Inevitably, a project written on Brazilian music starting from the 20th-century must mention the most well-known musical innovator, Heitor Villa-Lobos. Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1887, this composer, cellist, and educator is one of the most well known Latin American composers. In addition to his formal musical education, Villa-Lobos was trained as a cellist by his father, but at age 18, he traveled throughout Brazil for seven years seeking new ideas and absorbing folk music.

Simples Coletânea (Simple Collection) is a set written for solo piano between the years of 1917 and 1919. It has three pieces: *Valsa Mística* (“Mystic Waltz”), *Num Berço Encantado* (“In An Enchanted Cradle”), and *Rodante* (“Rolling”). In order to thoroughly analyze and appreciate *Valsa Mística*, the first piece in the set *Simples Coletânea*, we must consider that the bulk of Villa-Lobos’s piano music came from his earliest period, and therefore it is worthwhile studying the folk connections and inspirations Villa-Lobos drew on for his music.⁴¹

Though the composer would often divert questions that sought concrete solutions to his inspiration, headway has been made in finding the folkloric sources that Villa-Lobos used in his

³⁹ Appleby, *Heitor Villa-Lobos: A Life*, 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Stewart Gordon, *A History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and its Forerunners*. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 415.

compositions. He admitted that the indigenous melodies he used in his collection *Canções Típicas Brasileiras* (Typical Brazilian Songs), written in 1919, were originally recorded by E. Roquette Pinto, a member of the government sponsored Rondon expedition of 1913-14. The goal of the expedition was to mark off the northern boundary of Brazil. Villa-Lobos then transcribed the melodies from Pinto's recordings.⁴²

Not much has been written about Villa-Lobos' *Simples Coletânea*, since scholars tend to focus on larger, more eccentric, unique pieces from the composer's large output. Some even claim that his compositions are of "very uneven quality... [works] at times banal, as well as music which has the stamp of genius."⁴³ However, although the exact dates are disputed, the symphonic poems *Amazonas* and *Uirapurú* were written around 1917, approximately the same as the *Simples Coletânea*. These pieces are based on folk legends. *Amazonas* is a story about young virgins who live in the Amazon Forest and the wrath of the gods visited upon one girl who ends up being chased by a frenzied monster. *Uirapurú* tells the tale of Indian maidens in the jungle who search for a beautiful Indian brave in the form of an enchanted bird, who is eventually killed by a jealous ugly brave.⁴⁴

It is possible to conclude that the Brazilian imagery Villa-Lobos invoked could also be present in the *Simples Coletânea*. For instance, the opening, atmospheric sections of both symphonic works have similar surreal, mysterious moods and dissonant, polyphonic textures, which the composer uses to set up the jungle atmosphere. The *Simples Coletânea* exhibits a similar feel on a much smaller scale.

Valsa Mística, the first of the three pieces in the *Simples Coletânea*, evokes a sense of mystery and intrigue upon first listening. The lack of defined tonality, in conjunction with the constant 8th-

⁴² Appleby, *Heitor Villa-Lobos: A Life*, 24-25.

⁴³ Lisa M. Peppercorn. *Villa-Lobos The Music*. (White Plains [N.Y.]; Pro/Am Music Resources Inc., 1991), 106.

⁴⁴ Appleby, *Heitor Villa-Lobos: A Life*, 42-44.

note motion in the right hand, creates an ambiguous, nebulous atmosphere throughout the majority of the piece.

Example 2: *Simples coletânea*, “Valsa mística,” mm. 1-4



Villa-Lobos begins by writing the first four measures as the same six-note pattern, starting at pianissimo and increasing the volume steadily throughout. By measure 5, the left hand downbeat is written as a dotted half note, indicating that it should be held by the pedal to sustain the pitch throughout the measure, as the melodic line continues, thus creating the traditional feeling of waltz. The disjunct quality of the melody is a great exhibition of Villa-Lobos’s style, which includes “improvisatory freedom... highly complex...sonorities, creating bold splashes of exotic, often dissonant sound.”⁴⁵ One particular tension-creating device that Villa-Lobos includes is the use of the descending fourth for the first two notes of a measure. This is found in measures 9, 13, 19, 20, 21, 22, etc. I consider measure 22 to be the goal of the A section, and looking at the use of the descending fourth leading up to the climax, which increases greatly three measures beforehand, shows the drama-building and attention to phrasing that Villa-Lobos envisioned.

The B section, marked *Andante espressivo*, is more gentle and melodic than the previous section, having a quasi-chorale feel to it. One unusual characteristic is that Villa-Lobos marks accents in the alto line to emphasize it as the most important voice in the harmony, whereas

⁴⁵ Gordon, 415.

convention tends to favor soprano or perhaps bass. The most prominent note found in the first four bars of the piece, G, is highlighted once more in this section because it is the bass pedal point.

Example 3: *Simples coletânea*, “Valsa mística,” mm. 37-40



The relatively short B section (m. 37-52) transitions back into the A section via triplets in the right hand which outline the D minor 7 chord. The A section is then repeated exactly until measure 83, where the left hand harmony deviates. Measure 85 marks the beginning of “*animato poco a poco*” which leads into a *Prestissimo* finale, three measures of octave displaced E to F trills, and concluding with an A minor 7 chord followed by a triumphant C major chord.

Villa-Lobos’s 1913 marriage to pianist Lucília Guimarães greatly influenced and clarified his writing for piano, therefore the *Valsa Mística* is reasonably pianistic.⁴⁶ This could be partly due to its overall simplicity, if dissonance and lack of predictable tonality are not considered. In the coming years, Villa-Lobos would meet and begin a friendship with the famous virtuoso pianist, Arthur Rubinstein. Starting in 1921 and continuing through 1926, Villa-Lobos would produce *Rudepoema*, his longest ever solo piano piece, about twenty minutes in length, which was dedicated to Rubinstein and said to be a portrait of him. *Rudepoema* is notorious for being technically challenging, as it

⁴⁶ Eduardo Antonio Conde Garcia, Jr. “The importance of Afro-Brazilian music in Heitor Villa-Lobos' quest for a unique musical style.” (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2002.), 24.

includes many different moods and textures, long passages of rhythmic ostinatos, and at times four staves are needed to indicate all the voices and different lines.⁴⁷

Villa-Lobos's *Valsa Mística* demonstrates the impact of folk influences in his compositional style when one considers its “jungle legend” atmospheric nature, which follows along the same lines as *Amazonas* and *Uirapurú*. Through the composer's own purposeful smokescreen regarding musical inspiration and outside sources, we find that it is difficult to pinpoint the origins of the folk-inspired melodies. Perhaps he got them from the parrots?

⁴⁷ Appleby, *The Music of Brazil*, 123.

Francisco Mignone

Francisco Mignone was a composer, teacher, and conductor who lived from 1897 to 1986. Composer Mario Tavares declared Mignone “the greatest creator and teacher after Villa-Lobos” and praised his innovative spirit. “He was always on the vanguard of what was happening... And he was principally concerned with the question of Brazilian music.”⁴⁸ Mignone’s classical training and Italian upbringing allowed him to create a hybrid style of national Brazilian sound using European compositional techniques, which can be seen in his composition *Valsa de Esquina No. 1*.

Mignone was well versed in flute and piano, having been taught by his father, an Italian immigrant. Born and raised in São Paulo, Francisco Mignone was an active performer even as a youth. He was immersed in Italian music but also exposed to the popular Brazilian music trends.⁴⁹ He graduated from São Paulo Conservatory in 1917 and went on to study at the Milan Conservatory. Mignone wrote for all kinds of instrumentation, ranging from solo piano, to opera, to tone poems.

Mignone is thought to have had three periods of distinct compositional style. The first period is marked by a distinct Italian influence and Romantic flair. Starting around 1929 upon his return to Brazil, the second period was characterized heavily by the influence of Brazilian folk and popular traditions, spurred by Mário de Andrade, one of the founders of Brazilian modernism. Andrade detailed in his essay *Ensaio sobre música brasileira* his beliefs that music should serve a social function: to represent the country through elements of the folk and popular music of Brazil, thus creating “nationalist” music.⁵⁰ Concerning the fervor for which he adapted this cause, his stylistic transition has been described as being almost “religious conversion”-like in nature.⁵¹ His last

⁴⁸ Livingston-Isenhour, 198.

⁴⁹ Esdras Rodrigues Silva. “Francisco Mignone: Experimentation in the three sonatas for violin and piano.” (PhD diss., Boston University, 1999), 8.

⁵⁰ Albert T. Luper. “The Musical Thought of Mario de Andrade (1893-1945),” *Anuario*, 1965, Vol. 1, 45.

⁵¹ Silva, 12.

compositional period, which started in the late 1950s, took a more serialist, atonal approach to writing music, following the example of Arnold Schoenberg and others in the Second Viennese School.⁵²

Because Mignone lived to be 89 years old, he was able to produce over one thousand works, and participate in or witness nearly every important moment of Brazil's musical history during the 20th century.⁵³ His longevity contributed to his vastly differing style periods.

The *Valsas de Esquina* were a set of twelve pieces written between 1938 and 1943, during Mignone's middle period. Simone Machado hails the set as the "most significant contribution by Mignone to the Brazilian piano repertoire."⁵⁴ They are said to be an "attempt to re-create the style of the improvised waltzes of early 20th-century strolling serenaders, of the popular piano pieces of such composers as Nazareth, and, in their melody, of the popular *modinhas*."⁵⁵ Translating literally to "Corner Waltzes" or "Street Corner Waltzes," these pieces were "inspired by the bohemian wanderings of his youth."⁵⁶ However, the most striking association I make to the Valsa de Esquina No. 1 in C minor is its stylistic similarity to Chopin, and its Romantic, European sentiment.

Frédéric Chopin's music is a stronghold in today's piano repertoire and has been since the beginning of the 20th century. It was so important in Brazil, where social conventions of the day encouraged young ladies and gentlemen of the upper and middle classes to play piano, that most Brazilian states sponsored Chopin piano competitions.⁵⁷

Along with the class status earned by amateur musicianship, European music was traditionally considered to be more sophisticated than popular Brazilian music with African origins.

⁵² *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Francisco Mignone" (accessed October 20, 2011).

⁵³ Silva, 4-5.

⁵⁴ Machado, 69.

⁵⁵ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Francisco Mignone" (accessed October 20, 2011).

⁵⁶ Machado, 69.

⁵⁷ Livingston-Isenhour, 214.

Machado writes:

“Many dances, especially the ones with a strong African flavor, were considered immoral and were officially banned from being performed in theaters or on the street. In contrast, dances with European origins, such as the polka, waltz, fandango and mazurka, had a credibility based on centuries of intellectualized knowledge, civilization, power, tradition and culture. These dances were seen as genteel and civilized.”⁵⁸

Although the stigma had certainly lessened in Mignone’s time, these prejudices carried through generations into preference for European music and distaste for anything seen as lower class, thus paving the way for Mignone’s *Valsa*.

Marked *Soturno e seresteiro*, or “Grim serenade,” the 1st Valsa de Esquina is written in C minor and begins with a lurking bass melody reminiscent guitar music idioms. The right hand accompanies with light chords, which ground the roving melody. An A’ theme comes in at measure 17, because it is the same until measure 29, where a transition of the left hand descending pattern leads into the B section.

The B section is of utmost interest in discussing European influences and the impact of Chopin on Mignone’s writing. The piece takes on much the character of a nocturne, with its slower tempo and wistful sentiment. A nocturne is a “night piece,” a genre first popularized by composer John Field, but elevated by Chopin into a more substantial type of work. The general idea is that it must be a “slow-moving, decorated melodic line... spun out over an accompaniment, creating generally a mood of calm reverie.”⁵⁹ Although Mignone’s nocturne knockoff lasts only 8 measures, it incorporates Chopin trademarks such as an opera-inspired singing melody line, implication of rubato, ornaments, and long phrases that descend with an odd rhythmic grouping (the group of 11, measure 3 of the example).

⁵⁸ Machado, 23.

⁵⁹ Gordon, 295.

Example 4: Mignone, *Valsa de Esquina No. 1*, mm. 50-56

The image displays a musical score for Mignone's *Valsa de Esquina No. 1*, measures 50-56. The score is in 3/4 time and C minor. It features a piano introduction with a low bass note and a tenor chord. A detailed inset shows the first two measures with fingering: 1 5-3 for the first measure and 2 1 for the second. The main score shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with a fermata over the first measure of the main score.

For even further comparison, take for instance Chopin's "Nocturne in C minor," Op. 48, No. 1. Written in the same key, the opening few bars have a similar character to Mignone's work. Notice the low-register bass note, followed by a more accompaniment-like chord in the tenor register. The second measure of each example has the same basic shape, although Chopin's work prolongs the calmness a bit longer and waits until later in the piece to launch his full-scale drama.

Example 5: Chopin *Nocturne in C minor*, Op. 48, No. 1, mm. 1-4



Other Chopin-like features in Mignone's piece are found on page 3, where he writes passages in thirds for the right hand, invoking Chopin's ("Thirds") Etude, Op. 25 No. 6, G# minor, although Mignone's passage is not nearly as long or difficult.

Another feature that is reminiscent of Chopin is the use of sextuplets, or other unusual groupings of notes that are to be played over a single beat. The three measures marked Calmo contain sextuplets in both hands, the first measure being a tritone apart, outlining an F-sharp diminished seventh chord. In the second measure, the sextuplet pattern is a fourth apart outlining a G dominant seventh chord.

In the final measure, the right hand arpeggiates the C minor chord while the left hand plays a group of four, a group of five, and then a group of seven, outlining an A major 7 chord. The coordination challenge in these few measures is among the most technically difficult in the piece, and a great deal of finesse is necessary in order to be truly calm while executing the passages.

The A section comes back again after that, although it changes at the measure 16 of the A section into a slightly different texture, one which retains the left-hand melody and subdued right hand accompaniment. The last section of the piece seems to be an echo of the original A theme; a way of prolonging the end of the piece.

The Romantic, European, and Chopin influences exhibited in Francisco Mignone's "Valsa de Esquina No. 1" point to the broader trend of the composer and other composers of his day to

follow the conventions set by composers in Europe. Some modernist activists, such as Mario de Andrade would criticize this, regarding it as a step back from the progress which began with the Semana de Arte Moderna, which desired increased use of original Brazilian folk influences and also included efforts to avoid European influences. However, I believe that Mignone's choice to use European compositional techniques to portray his native "Brazilian soul" was intentional, beautiful, and an aesthetically pleasing cooperation of two spheres of thought.

Edmundo Villani-Côrtes

What is the current state of affairs of Brazilian piano music in 2011? One possible direction is seen in the compositions of Edmundo Villani-Côrtes. Born in 1930, this living composer reflects the history of Brazilian music making, as well as his personal experiences and identity as a Brazilian citizen.

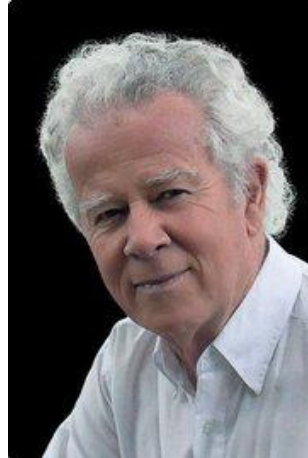


Figure 3 – Edmundo Villani-Côrtes

Villani-Côrtes is a composer, pianist, guitarist, and teacher. The famous composer M. Camargo Guarnieri was one of his teachers. Villani-Côrtes currently teaches at the State University of Sao Paulo, one of the largest universities in that city, and has been teaching there since 1988.

Villani-Côrtes learned to play the cavaquinho by ear at age 10, learning stylistic traits from listening to the radio. From there he learned guitar, and at age 17, he started taking piano lessons.

Villani-Côrtes's composer role models are the ones he heard on the radio growing up, which he described as an "eclectic" collection. This includes famous groundbreakers such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Chopin, but also popular music by Brazilian, American, and European composers. Further inspirations include his father who played the flute, as well as the relationships that he developed with various instrumentalists.

The cultural and social aspects of his life have lead Villani-Côrtes to write music inspired by the circumstances of his life. He said, “I have written about three hundred works and I can affirm that each one has a story/background and a special reason linked to my life and to what led me to write it.” Concerning nationalism, a complex state of identity when one considers composer’s intent, as well as what listeners perceive or attribute to the music. For Villani-Côrtes, it is very simple: “I was born in Brazil. I never studied or lived in any other country and never studied folklore. The music I write has to do with my life and with the environment in which I have lived.” Nationalism flows through him as a natural course. In this way, he is almost saying, “how could I be anything besides Brazilian?”

In 1999, Villani-Côrtes wrote the set of five *Interlúdios*, the pieces discussed in this project, because they were commissioned for a recital which programmed only modinhas, a type of lyrical, sentimental song.⁶⁰ The recital involved a pianist, tenor, and a soprano, and showcased modinhas from all throughout different times in the history of Brazil. The *Interlúdios* were composed to be used as costume change music while the singers changed into period costumes, and they too are reflective of different styles of Brazilian music throughout history.

Villani-Côrtes prefaces each of the *Interlúdios* with a brief explanation of the time period it represents and his philosophy behind it. For the third Interlúdio, he wrote about the mixing of European concert hall music and the rhythmic-melodic elements of popular music, forming a new, peculiar flavor, which is distinctly our [Brazil’s] own. This particular piece is written in a choro style in C major. It takes the popular choro arrangement of ABA form with a short coda. The common choro rhythm found in Nazareth and Gonzaga’s pieces, which I discussed earlier, is found here as well, frequently in the left hand accompaniment. Many traits that McGowan and Pessanha

⁶⁰ Livingston-Isenhour

established earlier in their definition or description of choro, (“extreme melodic leaps, unexpected modulations, and occasional breakneck tempos”) are found within the first few measures.⁶¹

Example 6: Interlúdio III, mm. 1-4



Notice the right hand melody’s large leaps. While no tempo is specifically marked, one could expect to take a tempo similar to a Nazareth “Brazilian tango” because of expected performance practice, as well as context clues contained in the 2/4 meter and melody in 16th notes.

However, the unexpected modulations McGowan and Pessanha refer to are not present, because the harmonies in this piece are fairly simple and straightforward. It starts in C major, transitions to F major for the B section, and then back to C major. The most complex chord progression might be presented right at the beginning, looking at the above example. Starting in measure 2, the harmonies change every beat: C-major, C-sharp diminished-seventh, D-minor, C-diminished, D minor-seventh, and resolving on the fourth 16th note of measure four, G-dominant-seventh. These are all chromatically close harmonies and not very uncommon.

What else makes a choro a choro? Tamara Livingston-Isenhour and Thomas Garcia mention a few other attributes of choro: melody played by a single wind instrument, presence of a ‘center’ instrument, such cavaquinho that plays in a middle range, and a bass instrument which reinforces the harmonic motion.⁶² These different voices of the typical choro group are found in

⁶¹ Chris McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha, *The Brazilian sound : samba, bossa nova, and the popular music of Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 159.

⁶² Livingston-Isenhour, 6.

Villani-Côrtes's composition. Present in both the previous example and the one shown below, the piano imitates the archetypal choro voices.

Example 7: Interlúdio III, mm. 21-24



This piece does not necessarily represent a modern take on choro; instead, Villani-Côrtes is using the typical traits of the established choro style. However, as I mentioned before, this is the music that flows out of him, and represents his Brazilian heritage.

Similarly, the *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, were written in 1978 as pedagogical pieces to showcase specific Brazilian styles. As Villani-Côrtes puts it, “I wrote the Miniatures for recorder and piano with the purpose of composing a simple, pedagogical, concise work, with easy rhythms and melodic and harmonic resources present in Brazilian Music, that were absorbed by me as a musician.” The word “absorb” conveys once more how intrinsic the music of Brazil is for him.

Most of the five miniatures is given a dance title. The first movement, “Prelúdio,” is a moderate tempo opener, with the piano playing an eighth-note ostinato and striking a pedal bass note. The flute melody is gentle and beautiful, with little rhythmic complexity. The B section has the flute and piano trade off playing the melody, and then the A section returns with a short coda.

Example 8: *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, “Prelúdio,” mm. 19-22



The second piece in the set, “Toada,” is based upon a traditional Brazilian folksong that was typically short and had a romantic or comedic theme.⁶³ There is a definite joviality in Villani-Côrtes’s rendition which comes from his use of syncopation between the flute and piano.

Example 9: *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, “Toada,” mm. 1-5

The juxtaposition between the flute’s straight rhythm and the left hand syncopation in the piano part is the main driving factor in this piece. The presence of a B section is quite a feat in any of these pieces, because each is only about a minute in length (with the exception of the Prelúdio, which is longer). The flute part’s rhythmic activity increases and the piano syncopation continues. Then, the piece transitions back into the A section.

⁶³ Davis, 237.

Choro is the third piece of the set. An interesting aspect of this version is the entrances of the various melodic or accompanying lines.

Example 10: *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, “Choro,” mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Choro" from "Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras". The score is written for flute and piano. The tempo is marked "Vivo, saltitante" and the dynamics are marked "f". The music is in 2/4 time. The flute part begins with a grace note in the first measure, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The piano's right hand enters in the second measure with a similar rhythmic pattern, and the left hand enters in the third measure with a bass line. The three parts converge in the fourth measure.

The flute comes in slightly before the piano's left hand, and the right hand comes in with a middle voice shortly after that, creating a canonic, quasi-fugal feel. The three distinct voices have different entrances, but all end together in measure 9.

The B section contains clear examples of the choro hierarchy: the flute's melody line, the right hand's cavaquinho center, and the left hand's bass. As expected, the A theme is repeated once more.

Example 11: *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, “Choro,” mm. 10-13

The fourth piece of the set, “Cantiga de Ninar,” translates to “Song of Lullaby” or simply “Lullaby.” Its peaceful nature is seen in the simple flute melody, which could easily be sung, and the tranquil piano accompaniment. The piece’s overall texture is much like the first four bars of the example, but Villani-Côrtes takes great care to continue the forward motion by including moving lines, such as the bass in measure 10 which leads into the upward run.

Example 12: *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, “Cantiga de Ninar,” mm. 6-11

Lastly, the fifth piece, “Baião,” is based upon a dance form originating in the northeastern part of Brazil. Peter Fryer describes the baião as “[involving] very rapid ‘gymnastic’ movements of

legs and feet” and being similar to the African-American Charleston.⁶⁴ In its contemporary urban form, it is often played with accordion.⁶⁵

Example 13: *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, “Baião,” mm. 1-9



Marked “Decidedly” or “Determined,” this piece imitates its namesake rapid, vigorous dance. The piano part helps to build the energy with a rhythmic accompaniment in measures 5 and 6, and plays in harmony with the flute in measures 8 and 9.

Example 14: *Cinco Miniaturas Brasileiras*, “Baião,” mm. 5-9



This piece is in ABA form, but the A section is prolonged and marked “Affretando até o Final,” [hastening to the end] and thus, performers are encouraged to go faster and grow louder all the way through to the finish.

In these two musical works, Villani-Côrtés brings his personal musical training and absorbed Brazilian influences into his compositions. As a lover of Brazilian music, it is encouraging to know

⁶⁴ Fryer, 125.

⁶⁵ Davis, 235.

that composers still enjoy writing these traditional types of music. That is why people are still writing it and listening to it. Edmundo Villani-Côrtes describes his music as Brazilian in character, but furthermore, his compositions are also reflective of himself as an individual. He writes, “Each one of us has something very special and unexplainable that defines the character of everything and it is called SOUL.”

Conclusion

Within the course of this project, I have looked at the historical and social issues in Brazil and their effect upon the music of Chiquinha Gonzaga, the influence of Ernesto Nazareth's compositions on the world of choro, and the folklore element in Heitor Villa-Lobos's musical style. I described how Francisco Mignone created a musical hybrid of European and Brazilian influences to create his pieces, and Edmundo Villani-Côrtes took the music he grew up with and made it into his own.

As a pianist, I have found great meaning in learning some of their pieces and portraying them with accuracy to the composer's intentions. However, music is ultimately a personal, rather than collective experience, whether one is the composer, the performer, or the listener. Music is the communication of human emotion and a reflection of that individual's soul.

Glossary

Baião - A musical form based on European ballroom dance which further developed in the Northeastern part of Brazil.

Batuque – A traditional African dance, characterized by call-and-response and the participation of listeners clapping the dance's rhythm.

Cavaquinho – A small four-stringed guitar, often used in choro groups.

Choro – A form of Brazilian instrumental music, typically written for a small amateur ensemble, including (but not limited to) flutes, guitars, or cavaquinhos.

Gaúcho - A South American cattle herder.

Lundu – A dance which brought African music into Brazil's towns and cities, contributing heavily to the formation of the Brazilian musical tradition. A predecessor to the samba.

Maxixe - A hybrid dance of European and African influences, characterized by dancers dragging their feet and the incorporation of certain hip and foot movements.

Modinha – A traditional type of lyrical, sentimental song.

Stride piano – A piano style in which a left-hand accompaniment style in which a bass note is in the low register and the rest of the chord is in the middle register, which at a fast tempo causes rapid leaps. Often associated with ragtime and early jazz.

Tango Brasileiro – A term used to refer to a piece influenced by the maxixe, but which wanted to avoid the negative connotation that came with the maxixe.

Toada – A traditional Brazilian folksong that was typically short and had a romantic or comedic theme.

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