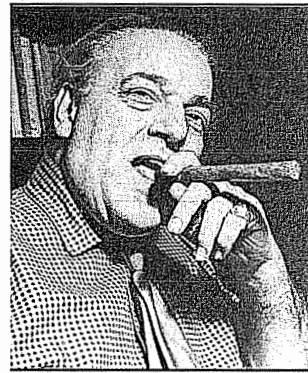


Twentieth-Century Brazilian Choral Music

by Vladimir Silva



Heitor Villa-Lobos

WESTERN music during the last century was marked by a large variety of compositional tendencies. Choral music received a new treatment, and many composers exploited different aspects of the human voice, such as the production of noises and sounds using spoken and sung text. Brazilian choral music has a diversity of works that capture the most important conceptions of twentieth-century music. The purpose of this article is to describe the evolution of twentieth-century Brazilian choral music, focusing on compositional and stylistic aspects, and on composers and their works.

Brazilian music during the transition to the twentieth century was characterized by musical nationalism. Although the composers of this period continued to be essentially academic and their ideals were geared to European Romantic and Post-Romantic music, including the universal Wagnerian influences,¹ they were engaged in creating a national musical idiom. Their works were based on popular tunes and utilized some patterns that came from urban and rural music. During this time, compositions for choir were not produced as frequently as opera and instrumental music, which dominate the musical landscape. However, composers wrote some secular and sacred choral works such as *Uyaras* (1896) for soprano, female voices, and orchestra, and *O salutaris hostias* (1911) for mixed choir

and organ, written by Alberto Nepomuceno.

By the 1920s, debates about national art, literature, and music increased rapidly. On the 13th, 15th, and 17th of February, 1922, during the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, at the Teatro Municipal de São Paulo, a group of scholars, artists, musicians, and poets symbolically inaugurated modernism in Brazilian culture and established the basis for a modern nationalist music. Modernism in Brazilian music extended from 1922 until 1945, even though there is no consensus about these dates. Some scholars agree that modernism had two different moments. However, the first phase was characterized by resistance to the past, especially musical romanticism, sentimentalism and the subordination of music to descriptive intentions; the second phase addresses the Brazilian reality, essentially cultural and aesthetic fundamentals toward a modernist nationalism.²

Heitor Villa-Lobos took part in the *Semana de Arte Moderna*. His works, however, neither broke with the tradition nor were heard as a direct manifestation of *avant-garde*.³ In fact, he had already tried to write music in a personal way before that remarkable occurrence.

After 1922, he introduced new musical devices in his works. A good illustration is a group of twelve pieces titled *Chôros*. This word means "a street band of players of popular songs," but Villa-Lobos extends the name to mean any composition "in which the various aspects of Brazilian music, Indian, and popular, achieve their synthesis."⁴

Villa-Lobos wrote these pieces using and experimenting with distinct frameworks, manifested by the use of some themes based on native melodies, by references to urban music, and by the arrangement of different vocal and instrumental ensembles. Two of his *Chôros* include choral parts. Although *Chôros no. 3*,

Vladimir Silva is a conductor and professor at Universidade Federal do Piauí (UFPI), and researcher of the Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento Tecnológico (CNPq). He is pursuing his DMA in choral conducting at Louisiana State University. <vladimirsilva@hotmail.com>

Figure 1. Villa-Lobos, *Choros No. 10*, mm. 216-219 (chorus) - Landmark of Brazilian modernism.

written in 1925, has an interesting vocal effect produced by the male choir, which repeats syllables extracted from *pica-pau* and *pau-brasil* using a type of obstinate rhythm, *Chôros no. 10* includes a mixed choir that chants a popular melody, *Rasga o Coração* (Figure 1). His program notes for this piece suggest that:

This work represents the reaction of a civilized man to stark nature; his contemplation of the valleys of the Amazon, and the land of Mato Grosso and Pará. . . . Their music is full of nostalgia and of love; their dances are full of rhythm. The Brazilian song *Rasga o Coração* is heard, and the Brazilian heart beats in unison with the Brazilian earth.⁵

Villa-Lobos started the process of emancipation of Brazilian music, synthesizing and unifying, at the same time, national and universal elements through the recurrence of technical devices of twentieth-century music. Moreover, one of his most important contributions to Brazilian music was in the educational field. In 1932, he directed the Superin-

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tendence of Musical and Artistic Education, the Brazil's official center that coordinated musical and educational activities. He developed a complex musical curriculum accompanied by an extensive method of music education based almost exclusively on choral music. Villa-Lobos composed a large repertoire using folklore, civic melodies, sacred tunes, and also promoted big choral spectacles that frequently occurred in public places, during civic exhortations or national festivities. Béhague says that,

Villa-Lobos's programme included not only initial music instruction in primary and technical schools but also education on a mass popular scale through choral, or 'Orpheonic' (originally a cappella) singing, of Brazilian music in particular. Such 'civic exhortations' involved on one occasion in 1935 some 30,000 voices and 1000 band musicians, and in 1940, and again in 1943, nearer 40,000 singers. The regime's patriotism undoubtedly boosted Villa-Lobos' own, but whether he truly shared its far-right leanings has been a matter of considerable debate. That he was initially concerned more with his individual career is undisputed. But at the same time his music and education policy was intentionally taken up as instruments of ideology, and he himself saw the mass gatherings as a powerful tool for inculcating a nationalist fervour.⁶

There is no doubt that the relationship of Villa-Lobos with anti-democratic government during the 1930s has been a matter of considerable debate. Indeed, many authors have criticized him and have considered his choral and educational activities as symbols of a dictatorial state because of the principles of brotherhood, homogeneity, national pride, civic order, and authoritarianism that they reinforced and transmitted.⁷ Despite his personal and political convictions, Villa-Lobos produced a large corpus in which choral music occupies a considerable part. His most representative choral compositions include, among others, *Vidapura* (1919) for chorus and orchestra; *Missa São Sebastião*

Despite his personal and political convictions, Villa-Lobos produced a large corpus in which choral music occupies a considerable part.

(1937); *Invocação em Defesa da Pátria* (1943) for soloist, chorus and orchestra;

Chôros no. 10 (1926) for chorus and orchestra; *Bendita sábedoria* (1958) for mixed choir; *Magnificat-Alleluia* (1958) for soloist, chorus, and orchestra; *Guia prático* (1932) for children's voices and *Canto orfeônico* (1940, 1950) for equal and mixed voices.

During the 1950s, Brazilian composers learned of Arnold Schoenberg's method when they contacted H. J. Koellreuter, a German teacher-composer who lived in Brazil and "defended twelve-tone writing as a technique of composition, entirely suitable to the expression of national elements in music."⁸ Koellreuter gained some followers and by 1946, he, Claudio Santoro, César Guerra-Peixe, and Edino Krieger wrote a manifesto in which

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7 **Allegretto** ♩ = 108

f sem precipitar

S Cha - mao Sa - ci si si si si

f sem precipitar

A Cha - mao Sa - ci si si si si

mf *f*

T Os a - gua - pês dos a - gau - çais Nos i - ga - pês dos ja - pu - rás Bo - lem! Bo - lem! Bo - lem!

mf *f*

B Os a - gua - pês dos a - gau - çais Nos i - ga - pês dos ja - pu - rás Bo - lem! Bo - lem! Bo - lem!

9 *bem ritmado* *cresc. poco a poco*

si si si si si si si si

bem ritmado *cresc. poco a poco*

si si si si si si si si

f bem ritmado *cresc. poco a poco*

Ui - vaa Ia - ra a Ia - ra a Ia - ra Ui Ui Ui Ui Ui

f bem ritmado *cresc. poco a poco*

Ui - vaa Ia - ra a Ia - ra a Ia - ra Ui Ui Ui Ui Ui

11 *ff* *mf* *f*

Ui Ui Ui dos Ja - pu - rás e dos Pu - rus.

ff *mf cresc.* *f*

Ui Ui Ui Nos a - gua - çais dos i - gua - pês e dos Pu - rus.

ff *mf* *f*

Ui Ui Ui dos Ja - pu - rás e dos Pu - rus.

ff *mf cresc.* *f*

Ui Ui Ui Nos a - gua - çais dos i - gua - pês e dos Pu - rus.

Figure 2. Brandão, *Cussaruim em dois tempos*, mm. 7-13 - Based on Amazonian Legend.

they affirmed that “national sources should be studied and absorbed, not quoted.”⁹ This manifesto established the basis for the *Música Viva* movement. Nevertheless, many composers neither accepted nor adopted the fundamentals established by them, and between the 1950s and the 1960s choral music was composed in a diverse context in which romantic, impressionist, and neo-classical styles coexisted. Some composers such as

José Siqueira, Waldemar Henrique, and José Vieira Brandão adopted the style of modernist nationalism developed by Villa-Lobos (Figure 2). They used elements from Indigenous, African, and Portuguese culture, and from Brazilian urban and rural music in their compositions. Other composers such as those tied to the *Música Viva* movement were writing in a different way, emphasizing the scientific, technical, and experimental character in vogue

at the time.

Claudio Santoro had different phases in his career that demonstrate musical life at mid-century. He used dodecaphonic techniques between 1939 and 1947; then, from 1950 to 1960, his music was nationalistic; and after 1960 he returned to serialism.¹⁰ The *Cantata elegiaca* (1970), which has improvised choir and instrumental passages, is a good example of his last compositional style.

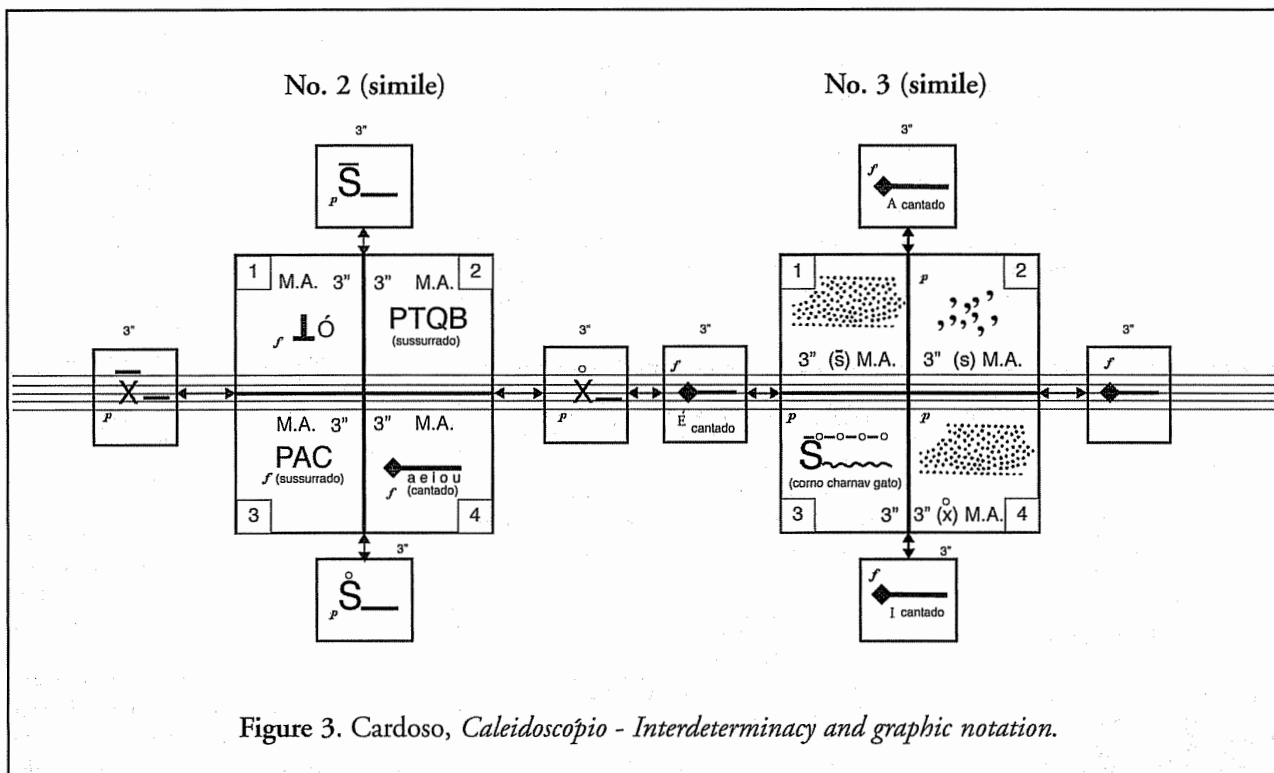


Figure 3. Cardoso, *Caleidoscópico* - Interdeterminacy and graphic notation.

After 1960, new changes occurred in Brazilian music. The earliest signs were manifested in 1962, when Gilberto Mendes, Damiano Cozzella, Willy Corrêa de Oliveira, and Rogério Duprat promoted the *Festival Música Nova* in Santos – São Paulo, the first of its kind in Latin America. Later, in 1963, composers published a manifesto called *Por uma música nova* in which they affirmed their compromise with the contemporary, refusing dogmatic and orthodox principles that had oriented compositional practices until that time. They were also aware that they were living in a new context, tuned with the modern world and oriented to the advances in science. Composers were encouraged, therefore, to revise and “recycle” the past, applying it in the contemporary context.¹¹

Gilberto Mendes, the most representative member of the *Música Viva* movement, composed *Motet em Ré Menor*, also called *Beba Coca-Cola*, in 1966 for mixed choir. This piece, a sort of anti-advertising, based on a concrete poem written by Decio Pignatari, is one of Mendes’ better-known works. It is an interesting composition in which “the performers use such means as sounds suggesting anger, while

carefully orchestrated repetition of syllables conveys to the listener either the sounds of Coca-Cola or a transposition of the sounds, such as *cloaca*, meaning ‘sewer’ in Portuguese.”¹²

In 1966, the *Grupo de Compositores da Bahia*, formed by Ernst Widmer, Jamary Oliveira, Lindembergue Cardoso, Fernando Cerqueira, Walter Smetak, Ilza Nogueira, and Milton Gomes also stated that it was indispensable to be in tune with the experimental in order to compose a true, new music. Essentially, they were committed to the contemporary artistic world and “under the leadership of Widmer, the Bahia group remained quite distinctive in the eclecticism of its members, who stressed individuality rather than fashionable trends.”¹³

Ernst Widmer refused to accept established patterns and was not included in any stylistic classification. Tendencies, therefore, and not principles, would define the intersection of stylistic conceptions that interacted in his work. Furthermore, he accepted being classified as a Northeastern composer and not as a composer included in the regionalist aesthetic movement, because his music was related to the musical traditions of the

Northeast.¹⁴

Ernst Widmer and Lindembergue Cardoso composed for accompanied and unaccompanied choir. Widmer’s most representative pieces include: *Ceremony after a Fire Raid* (1962–3) for chorus; *Wettinger Sternsingerspiel* (1968) for chorus and orchestra; *Rumos* (1971) for narrator, chorus, Smetak instruments, orchestra, tape, and audience; an oratorio *Lebendige Steine* (1973) for two choruses, organ, and percussion; *Vento no Canavial* (1979) for mixed choir; *Romanceiro da inconfidência* (1984) for unaccompanied chorus; and *Tropos: Sinfonia IV* (1986) for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra.

As for Lindembergue Cardoso, his most important works are: *Procissão das carpideiras* (1969) for female voices and orchestra; *Oratório cênico* (1972) for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra; *Requiem* (1974) for two mixed choruses and orchestra; *Missa João Paulo II na Bahia* (1980) for mixed chorus, percussion, organ, and optional orchestra; *Oniça orê* (1981) for female chorus and orchestra; *Missa Nordestina* (1966) for mixed chorus; *Caleidoscópico* (1975) for mixed choir (Figure 3); *Chromaphonetikos Opus 58* (1979) for mixed choir; and

Minimalisticamixolidicosaxvox (1988) for tenor sax and chorus.

In terms of choral performance, conductors, voice teachers, and singers reoriented their activities to attend to the demands of the time, because composers were exploiting different possibilities of the human voice, combining song and spoken voice, noises and sounds, as well as interacting with other artistic areas,

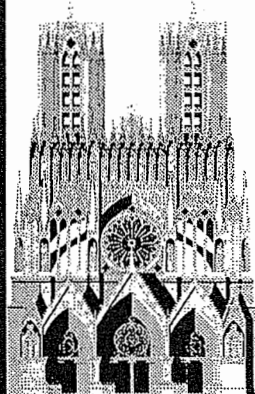
such as visual and corporal arts, and systematically recurring musical and non-musical resources. Another interesting aspect is that conductors also introduced arrangements of Brazilian folkloric and popular music in their repertoire, a fact that stimulated and allowed, by itself, a more adequate interpretative treatment, especially in the sonorous and gestural aspects. Neves, explaining the character-

istics of the period, says that,

"while the earlier nationalists tried to redeem and valorize elements from majority communities without contacting them, practicing a kind of applied archeology, modernist composers clearly manifested their engagement with the minority classes – intellectuals and urban, for instance – and promoted a creative and compatible research related to their cultural experiences without refusing suggestions from popular traditions that eventually could be evoked from their memories."¹⁵

By the 1970s, Brazilian music was extremely diverse. Although many composers were not directly involved in the movements that had occurred years before, their compositions revealed the acceptance of current aesthetic and stylistic ideals. Some composers such as Ricardo Tacuchian and Murillo Mendes in Rio de Janeiro; Bruno Kiefer in Rio Grande do Sul; Mário Ficarelli, and Almeida Prado in São Paulo worked in isolation.

Música Nova do Brasil Para Coro A Capela is an important choral collection published in Brazil at the beginning of the 1980s. It was published by Funarte and is formed by the following compositions: *A arca de Noé* by Ernst Mahle; *Aleluia* by Bruno Kiefer; *Ave Maria* by Claudio Santoro; *Belo Belo* by Brenno Blauth; *Belo Belo* by Ronaldo Miranda (Figure 4); *Canção de Barco* by Ricardo Tacuchian; *Canção da Primavera* by Murillo-Santos; *Cato/Giranda (AO)-Chão* by Aylton Escobar; *Chromaphoneticos op. 58* by Lindembergue Cardoso; *Com sem sem som* by Gilberto Mendes; *Cussaruim em dois tempos* by José V. Brandão; *Em tempo de terra e de boi* by Henrique Morozowicz; *Invocação Litúrgica* by Jaime C. Diniz; *Na rebancêra do má* by Sérgio Corrêa; *O morcego* by Nestor Cavalcanti; *Os sinos* by Carlos A. P. Fonseca; *O vento no canal* by Ernst Widmer; *Passos da Paixão Willy de O. Corrêa*; *Peça Coral no. 1-M.30* by Emílio Terraza; *Poema* by Mário Ficarelli; *Rezação* by Reginaldo Carvalho; *Rola Mundo* by Fernando Cerqueira; *Rosa Rosae* by Raul do Valle; *Segredo* by José Penalva; *Topologia do Medo* by Cirlei de Hollanda; and *Três cânticos de amor* by Almeida Prado.



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60

S

que - ro re - ver

Qué, que que - ro só que - ro ...ver

A

Qué, que que - ro só que - ro ...ver

T

Que - ro dar a vol - taao mun - do só num na - vi - o de ve - la que - ro re - ver Per - nam -

B

Que - ro dar a vol - taao mun - do só num na - vi - o de ve - la que - ro re - ver Per - nam -

65

que - ro ver Cus - co, Cus - co que - ro que -

que - ro ver Cus - co Bag - dá e Cus - co que - ro que -

bu - co que - ro ver Bag - dá e Cus - co

bu - co que - ro ver Bag - dá e Cus - co

Figure 4. Miranda, *Belo Belo*, mm. 60-69 - Simplicity without cliché.

These compositions represent the way in which composers have been working since the 1950s until now. They show that Brazilian choral music has been characterized by the use of the most important twentieth-century compositional techniques such as twelve-tone, integral serialism, and minimalism. In fact, according to Tacuchian, they reveal that post-modern composers surpassed the conflicts between national versus universal, expressed themselves using simplicity without populism and communicability without clichés, and as valorized and exploited texture, timbre, dynamic and spatial parameters, transforming twentieth-century compositional aesthetics in compositional techniques.¹⁶

NOTES

¹ Gérard Béhague, *The Beginnings of Musical Nationalism in Brazil* (Detroit: Informa-

tion Coordinators, 1971), 9.

² Elizabeth Travassos, *Modernismo e Música Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2000), 19–20.

³ José Miguel Wisnik, *O Coro dos Contrários: A Música em Torno da Semana de 22* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1983), 142.

⁴ Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music of Latin America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1945), 145.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁶ Gérard Béhague, "Heitor Villa-Lobos," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Database on-line [cited November 30 2001]. Available from <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

⁷ Irene Z. Tupinambá, "Dois Momentos, Dois Coros. Por Uma Análise da Evolução da Linguagem Coral no Rio de Janeiro do Século XX" (MA diss., Conservatório Brasileiro de Música, 1993), 75–6.

⁸ Appleby, 157.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁰ Gérard Béhague, "Claudio Santoro," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Database on-line [cited 30 November 2001]. Available from <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

¹¹ José M. Neves, *Música Contemporânea Brasileira* (São Paulo: Ricordi, 1981), 162–3.

¹² Appleby, 167.

¹³ Gérard Béhague, "Brazil," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Database on-line [cited 30 November 2001]. Available from <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

¹⁴ Ilza M. C. Nogueira, Ernst Widmer. *Perfil Estilístico* (Salvador: UFBA, 1997), 35.

¹⁵ Neves, 148.

¹⁶ Ricardo Tacuchian, "O Pós-Moderno e a Música" *Em Pauta* 4(1992):24–31.