

1. MIGNONE'S JOURNEY TOWARD NATIONALISM

Mignone Timeline

- 1897 Born in São Paulo, September 3
- 1917 Graduates from the São Paulo Conservatory (studying under Cantu)
- 1920-21 Studies at the Milan Conservatory under Ferroni
- 1920-29 Lives in Europe, traveling to Paris, Vienna, residing in Spain and Italy
- 1923 Richard Strauss premieres *Congada* (an orchestral piece from *O contratador de diamantes*), conducting the Vienna Philharmonic in Rio
- 1924 First complete performance of *O contratador de diamantes*, in Rio
- 1927-28 Travels through Spain
- 1928 First performance of his opera, *O Inocente*, in Rio
- 1929 Begins to teach harmony at the São Paulo Conservatory
- 1933 Appointed conductor and conducting teacher at the *Escola Nacional de Musica* in Rio, moves from São Paulo
- 1937-38 European conducting tour
- 1942 Visits United States and conducts his music (NBC and CBS orchestras)
- 1944 Toscanini conducts the NBC symphony playing *Festa das igrejas*, which gains international recognition
- 1945 Mário de Andrade dies
- 1961 First wife, Liddy Chiafirelli Mignone (1891-1961), lost in plane crash
- 1968 Named Brazilian Composer of the Year
- 1981 Marries Maria Josephina at the age of 83

Early Life

Throughout his lifetime Francisco Mignone (1897-1986) created and enjoyed music associated with all layers of Brazilian culture. From a young age he pleaded to participate in any music that he heard—from playing with *choro*¹ musicians in the streets to Italian opera orchestras in the most elegant theaters of São Paulo. He was hungry to learn everything he could about all types of music, regardless of its high or low cultural status. By the time he was ten years old he was composing and playing in *choro* circles in the several neighborhoods of São Paulo, including Brás, Bexiga, and Barra Funda.²

During opera season he also played second flute next to his father. By the time young Francisco had reached his thirteenth year, he led a band that played popular music.³ The precocious teenager again proved his potential at fifteen years of age, winning second place in a popular music competition with two of his compositions: *Manon* (a waltz) and *Não se impressione* (a tango).⁴ An avid flutist and pianist, Mignone declared (reflecting his strong love for urban popular music) “flute was my favorite instrument to play *choros* and nocturne serenades from old Pauliceia [a nickname for São

¹ *Choro* is a popular urban, improvisatory Brazilian musical genre originating in the late nineteenth century.

² Divisão de Música Biblioteca Nacional. (Accessed 11 November 2007), <<http://www.bn.br/fbn/musica/emigno1.htm>>

³ Verhaalen, Sister Marion, “The Solo Piano Music of Francisco Mignone and Camargo Guarnieri.” PhD diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1971: 21.

⁴ Kiefer, Bruno. *Francisco Mignone: Vida e Obra*. Porto Alegre: Editora Movimento, 1983: 12.

Paulo].”⁵ Despite his obvious love and respect for popular music, in his early days Mignone was not altogether comfortable publicizing his name alongside his compositions for popular ensembles.

Chico Bororó

Elitist, Euro-centric preferences in erudite artistic circles drove the young Mignone to carefully protect his outward appearance as a serious composer. Dabbling in “low culture” popular music could lead to professional suicide for a composer of this era. Consequently, all of Francisco Mignone’s early popular works (before he graduated from the São Paulo Conservatory in 1917) were under the pen name Chico Bororó.⁶ Under his assumed identity, Mignone wrote numerous pieces in the popular dance genres of the day, in particular the tango, waltz, and *maxixe* (an early twentieth century precursor to samba). The deft Mignone’s contact with popular performers and his job as a silent theater pianist endowed him with improvisational skills and personal command of his country’s unique musical genres and styles.

Upon graduating from the conservatory and making his debut as a “serious” composer, Mignone still occasionally employed his pen name when publishing works of a more popular persuasion. In 1929 he reverted back to his alias to publish a foxtrot, entitled “Miami.”⁷ When asked why he chose to compose under an assumed name,

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Bororó is a name of one of the native tribes of Brazil. It is interesting that Mignone chose a name so closely linked to Brazilian heritage—we might even view his name choice as one of the first harbingers of his nationalistic musical path.

⁷ Kiefer, Bruno. *Francisco Mignone: Vida e Obra*. Porto Alegre: Editora Movimento, 1983: 12.

Mignone replied, “It’s because in the beginning of the century, to write popular music was something disqualifying and vile.”⁸

Despite his early trepidations about writing accessible, non-academic music, Mignone soon attained a mindset that allowed him to marry his conservatory training with the music that he and his people so deeply understood and cherished. This transformation eventually led him to state: “Music comes from the people and should return to the people.”⁹

Absorbing the *choro* and samba music in the streets, the silent movie theaters, and Afro-Brazilian drum circles, Mignone soon championed popular and folk musics of every variety in his erudite compositions. Mignone must have been excited to be a part of the generation that would give Brazil’s folk and popular traditions a new voice in the world’s concert halls. He relished his role in helping to deliver Brazil from the suffocation of colonialism, calling on Brazilian art music to reflect the actual demographic of Brazil.

Turning Toward Nationalism

Composers from Francisco Mignone and Heitor Villa-Lobos’ (1887-1959) eras deserve popular recognition as Brazil’s first nationalist composers but they were definitely not the first composers to explore urban and folk themes. Their brand of nationalism was the first to consciously cast aside European pretension, and the most

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Divisão de Música Biblioteca Nacional. (Accessed 11 November 2007), <<http://www.bn.br/fbn/musica/emigno1.htm>>

dedicated artists from the nationalist camp cared not whether they gained acceptance outside of Brazil.

Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), Brazilian novelist, librettist, poet, and ethnomusicologist, spearheaded this movement with lifelong dedication. In addition to his outspoken reformist rhetoric, his high expectations of Brazil's composers to explore and absorb indigenous Brazilian themes gave more credibility to composers associated with his movements than those part-time Brazilian nationalists of preceding eras.

Not surprisingly, incorporating Brazilian elements meant different things to different generations. It is difficult to pinpoint the first nationalist composition in Brazilian art music. Indeed, ever since Brazil was colonized its inhabitants have struggled to define themselves and their music. Along with Oscar Lorenzo Fernández (1897-1948), Jaime Ovalle (1894-1955), and Walter Burle-Marx (1902-1990), Mariz categorizes Mignone among the "Second Nationalist Generation". He lists Villa-Lobos among the first generation even though he is only ten years older.¹⁰ It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that these composers were the first to explore Brazil's rich and varied cultural tapestry in their concert works.

In the following passage Gerard Béhague traces the origins of Brazil's musical conventions, codifying many of the disparate qualities that define Brazilian music:

. . . certain stylistic elements unify the various repertoires. Melodic organization tends to follow patterns associated with Europe, such as arched melodies, conjunct motion and melodic gravity. Antecedent and consequent symmetrical phrasing is also generally observed. Melodic tension created by intervallic leaps tends to occur at the beginning of a song, followed by a typically conjunct descending motion, or a static phrase made up of repeated notes. This markedly descending tendency has been attributed to western European and West African

¹⁰ Mariz, Vasco. *A Música Clássica Brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Andrea Jakobsson Estúdio, 2002: 162-163.

influences in Brazilian music. But a similar characteristic has been shown to exist also in the music of the Nambicuara Indians of Mato Grosso, among other Amerindian groups. Very frequently the descending motion follows an undulating design. Melodic sequence abounds. Songs more closely associated with Iberian folk traditions exhibit a predominantly triple metre (3/4) or compound metres (6/8, 9/8). Duple metre prevails in genres of a clearer Afro-Brazilian folk origin though quite often there is a duple-triple composite in actual performance, creating the hemiola rhythmic effect.¹¹

Vasco Mariz goes on to give more specific examples of how European music seeped into Brazilian culture:

The instruments came from Portugal, the musical literature from all over Europe. Spanish music has been influential through boleros, fandangos, seguidillas, habaneras, and zarzuelas. Spanish-American music has left traces too, first through the pericon and, more recently, through the tango. One notices a strong French influence in Brazilian children's songs, while Italian opera has made a deep imprint since it came into vogue in Brazil in the eighteenth century. Finally, the Austrian waltz has been widely played, and in the last twenty years American jazz has exerted a powerful influence, especially in the orchestration of Brazilian popular music.¹²

In the simplest terms, Brazilian music is a mixture of European and African styles, with traces of Amerindian influence. Since European music had dominated the landscape for over 200 years, the revolutionary or "nationalist" choice, was to incorporate the historically under-represented African or Amerindian musics in their erudite compositions. African music was most commonly incorporated.

Originally brought to the state of Bahia, Brazil, African music derived from Candomblé¹³ brought many unique characteristics to Brazilian compositions.

¹¹ Béhague, Gerard: 'Brazil, §I, 2: Art music: After independence', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 16 November 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

¹² Mariz, Vasco. *Heitor Villa-Lobos: Life and Work of the Brazilian Composer*. Washington, D.C.: University of Florida Press, 1963: ix.

Characteristics from this religious music eventually found their way into modern popular music. Typically, this African-based music has either 2/4 or 4/4 time signatures and features syncopated, binary rhythms. “The rhythmic practices most commonly associated with Afro-Brazilian folk music reveal a subtle duple-triple ambivalence . . .”¹⁴ African-influenced music will often have a compound duple rhythmic texture; a 2/4 measure will sound like a 6/8 measure due to the rhythmic accompaniment, consisting of triplets. Likewise, a 4/4 time signature may often sound like 12/8. Melodically, African music uses mostly hexatonic and pentatonic scales (these are scales made up of five and six notes, unlike our Western scales consisting of seven notes). African music uses call and response frequently; this describes when an instrument or voice states a melody or rhythm and it is echoed back by other voices or instruments. Perhaps most obviously, African music uses percussion instruments heavily, with percussion’s role often surpassing that of the other instruments.

Some of the earliest evidence of the blending of African with Portuguese classical music occurs as soon as the Seventeenth century in the colonial salons of Brazil’s upper classes. There is evidence of salon performances (singing) of the *lundu*, a fast-paced, African-influenced (often sexually suggestive) satirical song and dance type that originated in *batuque*¹⁵ circles.¹⁶ Some regard the first nationalist work to be *A Sertaneja*

¹³ Candomblé is mainly an Afro-Brazilian religion, brought by African slaves from countries such as Nigeria and Togo. Originating in Salvador, the capital city of Bahia, it features music and dance as a prominent part of worship.

¹⁴ Béhague, Gerard: ‘Brazil, §I, 2: Art music: After independence’, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 16 November 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

¹⁵ *Batuque* refers generically to an Afro-Brazilian solo or partner dance, generally surrounded by drummers, singers, and people clapping.

(The Country Woman), written for piano by composer and active slavery abolitionist Brasília Itiberê da Cunha (1846-1913) in 1869. This piece . . . “attempts to recreate in various ways the atmosphere of urban popular music, and quotes a characteristic popular tune.”¹⁷ Carlos Gomes, Brazil’s (some assert the Western Hemisphere’s) greatest nineteenth-century composer (most celebrated for his operas), also flirted with national themes. In *O Schiavo* (The Slave), Gomes attempted to explore Brazil’s dependence on a slave economy. Béhague recounts that before *O Schiavo*’s premiere, the librettist (Rodolfo Paravicini) made the decision to use Amerindians in a picturesque setting instead of depicting Afro-Brazilians in settings familiar to the audience, thereby rendering his work politically impotent and more palatable to Brazil’s late nineteenth-century upper classes. In addition, the setting was moved to the sixteenth century, instead of the eighteenth as the librettist had originally intended.¹⁸ Likewise, many Brazilian composers, then mainly dependent on the monarchy and aristocracy for patronage, were strongly limited in their compositional freedom. If their work threatened the status quo or sounded too tribal it was likely to offend those that provided their livelihoods. As a result, composers who lived before and immediately following the advent of abolition had a particularly difficult time incorporating African influences into their erudite compositions.

¹⁶ Olsen, Dale A. and Daniel E. Sheehy, Editors. *The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000: 254.

¹⁷ Béhague, Gerard: 'Brazil: Art Music: After independence', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 16 November 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

¹⁸ Béhague, Gerard. *Music in Latin America: An Introduction*. Inglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979: 114.

After slavery's abolition in 1888, composers quoted folk themes more freely and incorporated popular styles in their art music compositions. At the end of the nineteenth century, composers Joaquim Antonio da Silva Callado (1848-1880), Alexandre Levy (1864-1892), and Alberto Nepomuceno (1864-1920) were among those that led the pre-nationalist vanguard. This generation of composers drew on Rio's urban musical traditions for their inspiration, favoring the *lundu*, *choro*, and *modinha*.¹⁹ "The composer Alberto Nepomuceno played a primary role in the creation of genuine national music: many of his compositions present folk or popular material or simply draw directly on popular music."²⁰ Mariz explains that the forerunners of musical nationalism (among whom Mariz lists Alberto Nepomuceno, Alexander Levy, and Brasília Iteberé da Cunha) inserted "national flavor" into their music, creating an appealing exoticism.²¹ There is something inherently unsettling about a culture that makes a practice of exoticizing its own citizens' music; it implies a distance, or an incomplete understanding of one's own environment. Gerard Béhague notes that composers who used non-Western and popular themes in their compositions found themselves misunderstood in the mainstream world of classical composition, such that even "the best of Alberto Nepomuceno was not understood in his time. Musicians of outstanding talent were forced to disguise Brazilian national works under alien titles."²² Late Romantic Italian opera and Impressionism were

¹⁹ Olsen, Dale A. and Daniel E. Sheehy, Editors. *The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000: 256.

²⁰ Béhague, Gerard: 'Brazil: Art Music: After independence', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 16 November 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

²¹ Mariz, Vasco. *A Música Clássica Brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Andrea Jakobsson Estúdio, 2002: 161.

the officially sanctioned flavors of the day; compositions diverging from these styles were eyed with an air of condescension. As evidenced by Mignone's reluctance to reveal his real name on his popular compositions, this cultural intimidation extended well beyond the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

Pre-1920s Attitudes

Francisco Mignone, Heitor Villa-Lobos and their contemporaries lived in an age that was slowly embracing the fusing of European-style art music with themes and rhythms of previously marginalized South Americans and Afro-Brazilians. “[Brazilian Composers] turned to cult music and other Afro-Brazilian forms for melodic themes and rhythms.”²³ With ties to Portugal's royalty and memories of slavery fading, Brazilians searched for an artistic identity separate from their colonizers. They longed to include the popular rhythms and dances that many of them unofficially enjoyed when they were not trying to appear cultured or European. Absorbing African influences all around them, composers infused a certain corporeal decadence into their music. Although played by traditional classical instruments, this “classical” music made people want to dance. The flirtatious Brazilian *maxixe* and *lundu* dances were two of the first popular inspirations to Brazilian art music composers. Famous and well-respected composers in these genres produced a seismic disturbance that registered the bellwether change in Brazil's social climate.

²² Cited in Mariz, Vasco. *Heitor Villa-Lobos: Life and Work of the Brazilian Composer*. Washington, D.C.: University of Florida Press, 1963: xii.

²³ Vassberg, David E. “African Influences on the Music of Brazil.” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 13, no. 1 (Summer 1976): 47.

1920s and the Week of Modern Art

Perhaps the most significant springboard for advancing the nationalist movement in Brazil was the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Week of Modern Art). This took place in São Paulo from February 11-18 and brought together some of Brazil's greatest visual, literary, and musical artists for an exposition of their works at the Municipal Theater.²⁴ Mário de Andrade spearheaded the event. While promoting his upcoming book, "Hallucinated City," he mobilized other modernist Brazilian artists around the introduction of new ideas to the masses. The Week of Modern Art included concerts,

²⁴ Peppercorn, Lisa M. *The World of Villa-Lobos in Pictures and Documents*. Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1996: 79.