

Cancao Carioca Program Notes

Introduction

Welcome to a celebration of Heitor Villa-Lobos' birthday. He would be 113 years old on March 5. Tonight's concert is a homage to Villa-Lobos' home of Rio de Janeiro and its place in musical history. In the first half of tonight's program we will journey from the roots of Rio's urban dance music of a century ago as heard in tangos by Ernesto Nazareth to the flowering of Brazil's concert music at the pen of Heitor Villa-Lobos. The second half of the concert begins with the cool urban pop of Antonio Carlos Jobim's bossa nova. Each of the composers on tonight's program shared the love of their home through words, melodies, rhythms, and harmonies. Along the way tonight we will also hear from composers who, while not natives of Rio, were so moved by the city's sounds and feelings that they let Rio speak through their work.

Carioca

We begin with Carioca by Ernesto Nazareth. Born in Rio in 1863, Ernesto published his first song when he was 14, a polka called "Voce Bem Sabe". He went on to write more than 200 songs during his life, 88 of which were tangos. This tango, Carioca, was written in 1913. Carioca is the name of a river that flows through the city of Rio de Janeiro and is the label for people and culture from Rio de Janeiro. This begins our journey through the music inspired by the cidade maravilhosa or "marvelous city".

Tango is typically associated with a dance popular in Argentina. But in the late 1800's, Eastern European dances were absorbed by South American countries. The polka and shottish blended with African, Portuguese, and Spanish musical traditions to create new dance forms unique to particular regions. As for the composer of this piece, Villa-Lobos described Nazareth as the "true incarnation of the Brazilian musical soul." Nazareth himself emphasized that his music should be played slower, more clearly and more singingly. He felt that performers often ruined his music by playing it too fast. The beginning of this piece will be played in an authentic manner with guitar and percussion. As the piece unfolds, I have updated the harmony and orchestrated it for this ensemble.

Odeon

Nazareth was not only a talented composer, he was a skilled improviser and sight reader. In the 1920's he was hired to play sheet music in a music shop so that customers could preview their purchases. Nazareth's own music was part of the store's inventory. When people "tried" his songs, he frequently told the possible buyer to interrupt his performance.

Nazareth was hired to play at the Odeon movie theater. Heitor Villa-Lobos joined him on many evenings. During silent movies they would provide a soundtrack and between showings, performed original music in the lobby where musicians came from far and wide to listen. Our next piece is Nazareth's tango written in the name of the movie theater.

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One admirer attributes the beauty of this piece to the perfect balance of “saudade” (nostalgic feeling) with upbeat rhythms, a long and expansive left hand melody in the refrain, “jazzy” harmonies in the right hand, and a slight touch of “Tico Tico” and Carmen Miranda in the last episode. In this piece you can hear similarities to American ragtime through the blend of European gentility with a kind of street-wise fun. This song has a feeling of hipness, or the scene, or the “it” club, where musicians play for other musicians. I like the melody of this song and modified the harmony with a chromatic bass line.

Corcovado

One musician to visit the Odeon was French composer Darius Milhaud. He lived in Rio for two years beginning in February of 1917 as the secretary of the French minister. In his autobiography, Milhaud wrote, “I would also sometimes go to Copacabana beach, facing the Atlantic. In the evenings I often walked around the Tijuca. I loved to see the panorama of Rio gradually spread out before me, with the bay clearly outlined in glittering lights; or else I would take a boat to the other side of the bay, near Niteroy, and lie on the lonely beach for a whole part of the night with the moonlight so bright that I could read easily.”

Three years later, the memories of Rio still haunted Milhaud. In 1920, during a visit to Copenhagen, Milhaud began writing *Saudades do Brazil* (Recollections of Brazil) a suite of 12 dances named after 12 of Rio’s districts. The music does not contain any actual Brazilian folk tunes but evokes moods and atmospheres felt throughout the city. Milhaud said in an interview that he “desired that these compositions be regarded not as reproductions of actual dances, but as music suggested by the dance rhythms of Brazil – in the main by tango rhythms... to some extent idealized.”

We will play the seventh dance called Corcovado. Corcovado means “hunchback” in Portuguese and is the name of the granite peak that towers over Rio from the Tijuca forest. As early as the 1890s a train carried people to the peak. The year that this piece was written, a proposal to erect a statue of Christ atop the peak was attracting donations. Construction took nine years and was completed in 1931.

Originally written for piano, the score is not altered except to orchestrate it for these instruments. We will play it on the slow side to let the polytonal harmony hang in the air.

Idilio na Rede

During his two years in Brazil, Milhaud became friends with Heitor Villa-Lobos. Milhaud wrote in the first issue of the French *La Revue Musicale* that Villa-Lobos was “a youth of robust temperament, filled with boldness.” Milhaud introduced Villa-Lobos to pianist Arthur Rubenstein at the Odeon theater. Rubenstein began to include Villa-Lobos’ music in his concert programs and helped seek patrons for the composer. In Rubenstein’s memoirs, he recounts telling one potential patron, “right here in Brazil lives

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an authentic genius, in my opinion the only one on the whole American continent. His country does not understand his music yet, but future generations will be proud of him.”

The next piece we will hear comes from Villa-Lobos, written at the time that Milhaud was living in Rio. Villa-Lobos wrote a collection of songs under the name of Suite Floral. The title is French and the musical vocabulary is influenced by the impressionism of Debussy. These songs contain pentatonic motifs. Pentatonic, or five note scales accommodate ambiguous and shifting harmony very well. Jazz musicians like John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter use this melodic and harmonic vocabulary in their works.

The first song from Suite Floral is Idilio na Rede or Daydreaming in a Hammock, a favorite pastime of Brazilians. Originally for piano, I altered the meter and stretched out the composition.

Uma Camponesa Cantadeira

The second piece we will play tonight from Suite Floral is Uma Camponesa Cantadeira or the Singing Country Girl. This song was performed during the Week of Modern Art in 1922 in Sao Paulo. The melody is made of five note scales and the rhythmic ostinato evokes a country girl dancing full of uncertainty and wonder. I particularly like the harmonic palette Villa-Lobos used in this piece, including the haunting chords played at the end. The shifting harmony reminds me of modal jazz pioneered by Miles Davis and Bill Evans on the recording Kind of Blue 37 years later.

Plantio do Caboclo

During the 1930's Villa-Lobos was working for the national government on music education. Villa-Lobos said, “Patriotism in music, and capitalizing upon it, is very dangerous. You will have propaganda instead. But nationalism – the power of the earth, the geographic and ethnographic influences that a composer cannot escape, the musical idioms and sentiment of people and environment – these origins, in my opinion, are indispensable to a vital and genuine art.”

As Villa-Lobos worked in government, he drifted away from his marriage. Although he had been married to pianist Lucilla for many years and dedicated most of his piano music to her, he separated from her through letters written while he traveled to Paris. One of the few piano works he wrote during this period was the Ciclo Brasileiro or Brazilian Cycle. Each song represents a different musical face of Brazil. Tonight we will play the first two songs beginning with Plantio do Caboclo, the planting of the Indians. I like the polyrhythm formed by the triplet guitar part against the duple meter hymn played by the vibraphone. This piece sets up a very stable and hypnotic tonality, morphs into a chromatic and dissonant section that is challenging to the ear, then returns to restate the calm opening theme. I have simplified the part played by the guitar. Tom Varner will improvise over the calm sections of this piece.

Impressoes Serestas

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The second song from Ciclo Brasileiro is Impressoes Seresteiras or Impressions of Serenaders. This harks back to the concert last November where most of the music honored the tradition of Brazilian street troubadours. Singers strolled under a window strummed a guitar and declared their emotions for their lover's ear as well as those nearby. This is one of the longest and most thematically developed pieces on tonight's program. I shifted the meter between 4 and 3 and opened up this piece with some guitar cadenzas to more directly point to the tradition of serenading by guitar. Around the same time that Villa-Lobos wrote this work, he also wrote the Bachianas Brasileiras #4 that closes our concert tonight.

Tira O Seu Pezinho

Besides musical portraits of Brazil, Villa-Lobos also wrote music inspired by and for children's games. Villa-Lobos collected and arranged many children's songs for "practice guides." Lucilla would often sing these melodies for Villa-Lobos to transcribe. His first work of children's melodies was Brinquedo de Roda or Children's Round Games or Toy Wheel written in 1912. I found Villa-Lobos' musical introductions and contrasting material much more interesting than the traditional melodies embedded in the song. We will play Tira O Seu Pezinho or Put Your Little Foot Right Out. I omitted the traditional children's melody and orchestrated the original part of the piano score with a reharmonization of the final melodic statement. Susan Pascal will improvise over the harmony that underpins the melodic material.

Intermission

Imagina

We begin the second half of our concert with music from Antonio Carlos Jobim. At the age of 18, Jobim wrote this untitled song that later was named Imagina with lyrics by Chico Buarque. Like Villa-Lobos before him, Jobim was influenced by Chopin and Liszt. When Jobim played this song for his piano teacher, she encouraged him to pursue composition because his hands were so small that they could not span an octave on the keyboard. The piano score for this work comes from the definitive collection of Jobim's music that was compiled with the help of his son, Paulo Jobim.

Corcovado

Next we turn to Jobim's most recorded song besides Garota de Ipanema (Girl from Ipanema) and Samba de uma Nota Sol (One Note Samba). Like Milhaud's piece from the first half of tonight's program, this has English lyrics under the title "Quiet Nights". Jobim learned English to translate his lyrics after being frustrated with American versions. Of Bossa Nova Jobim said, "It's Brazilian, and it's deeply influenced by Villa-Lobos." The term Bossa Nova can be translated as "new flair" – music that is fresh and has a contemporary style.

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Song for My Father

One American musical visitor to Rio was jazz pianist Horace Silver. He was invited to visit and take in Carnaval by Brazilian pianist Sergio Mendez. Trumpeter Kenny Dorham introduced Horace to Sergio while Sergio was on a State Department tour in New York. Kenny recognized in Sergio an approach to playing and composing similar to Horace. So in 1964, Horace stayed with Sergio in Niteroi and hung out in Rio at the club where Sergio was playing. At a club next door, drummer Dom Um Romao was playing and Horace was invited to sit in. The second week in Rio, Horace stayed with Dom Um Romao and his girlfriend, singer Flora Purim. American jazz musicians will recognize Dom Um Romao from his Bossa Nova recording with Cannonball Adderley and Flora Purim from her work with Chick Corea on *Light as a Feather*.

After returning to New York, Horace was haunted by the Bossa Nova he heard and wrote a song based on his reflection. He also incorporated the melodic concept from his father's ancestry. Horace's father, John Tavares Silva, was born on one of the Portuguese speaking Cape Verde Islands and frequently hosted musical jams in the house where Horace grew up. Because Horace's father frequently suggested that Horace include Cape Verdean music like morna and coladeira in his jazz, Horace named the work *Cantiga Para Meu Pai* (Song for My Father) and featured a picture of his father on the cover of the record. This became Horace's most famous song. The bass line was used later by Steely Dan on "Rikki Don't Lose That Number" and Stevie Wonder on "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing."

I played this song frequently on a juke box when I was in college. The tenor saxophone solo by Joe Henderson is so classic that I included it in this arrangement. I also added a coda with improvisation that I heard on a video of Horace's band playing in Umbria, Italy. I stretched the A sections of the song to have a few more spicy chord changes and slowed the tempo to bask in the groove.

Doringo

Like Horace Silver, I was also moved by the sights and sounds from Rio. I, however, was moved by the sights and sounds of a particular Carioca – the woman who was to become my wife. Soon after meeting Doris, I wrote this song for her. My poor understanding of Portuguese resulted in a clumsy title "Doringo" which rhymes Gringo, the slang for a white Northerner like me. I included this song on my first recording session 27 years ago and am happy to see that it still contains some magic. The chord progression begins with the same bass note movement as a song I was studying at the time, John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*.

Chromatic Carioca

When Doris and I were about to have our son Ruben, I got the crazy idea of making a recording with the person I consider the world's greatest drummer, Elvin Jones. As I prepared the repertoire, I wanted to include some Brazilian influenced music. There is a

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groove with a strong accent on the 4th beat that Elvin played on his feature “Doll of the Bride” and I also imagined a samba band that has a “roll call” to signal a new more intense rhythm. During this roll call, I had the bass and woodwinds playing opposing chromatic melodies. Therefore, I named this Chromatic Carioca. Soloists on this piece will be Tom Varner on French horn and Susan Pascal on marimba.

Old Wave

In 2001, Earshot Jazz invited me to play on their Voice and Vision series at the Seattle Asian Art Museum. I meditated in the sculpture court there and imagined the statues from Indian temples coming to life. This became the organizing theme for the concert – trance and dancing sculptures. I played recorded nature sounds under music for saxophone, French horn, vibraphone, bass, and drums while a dancer moved slowly between poses. The concert was held two days after 9/11 and everyone was feeling disoriented. I found that the reflection and calm of this music was helpful to heal the impact of the terrorist attack.

As a side note, I am planning a memorial concert on 9/11/2011 at the prototype building for the World Trade Center. The architect of the twin towers, Minoru Yamasaki, built a concrete version of the World Trade Center towers in Seattle at 5th and University, the IBM building.

On the Voice and Vision concert from 2001 I wrote a piece inspired by my memories of the beach in Rio’s Leblon neighborhood where my son and I played in the waves. The sound of waves can be very hypnotizing and soothing, a dance moving back and forth, toward the sea and away. Soloists on this piece will include Phil Sparks on bass, Susan Pascal on vibraphone.

Bachianas Brasileiras # 4 Preludio

Villa-Lobos wrote several collections of music that he titled “Bachianas Brasileiras” in homage to Johann Sebastian Bach. The 4th collection was written for piano. The first movement quotes Bach’s Musical Offering or “Royal Theme”. The story behind this theme goes something like this. When Bach was visiting Berlin, Frederick the Great summoned Bach to his palace in nearby Potsdam. The king was a flautist and performed on concerts every evening. When Bach arrived, the king invited the composer to try out his various pianos. Bach requested that the king provide a subject for an improvised fugue. Bach’s improvisation on this “royal theme” impressed the court. The king also asked Bach to improvise a six-part fugue on the theme. One writer suggested that this was akin to playing sixty simultaneous blindfold games of chess, and winning them all. Bach declined the challenge but did perform a six-part fugue on his own theme. A Berlin newspaper reported that Bach found the royal theme “so exceedingly beautiful that he intends to set it down on paper as a regular fugue and have it engraved on copper.” Two months later the Musical Offering was ready for the printer. Two hundred copies were printed at Bach’s own expense, including one special presentation copy that was sent to the king.

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Bachianas Brasileiras # 4 Canto do Sertao

The second movement of the Bachianas Brasileiras # 4 is titled Canto do Sertao or Song of the Jungle. In this piece there is a repeated B flat on off beats representing the araponga, a bird of the Brazilian jungle. Villa-Lobos wrote this description, "A slow song of religious characters... in the open air of tropical down in Northeastern Brazil, where one hears in the distance the sad and monotonous sound of the araponga, the blacksmith bird of the Brazilian forest." This piece demonstrates Villa-Lobos' use of four note chords that include the major 7th, a dissonant sound for the period. Improvised solos will be added by me on saxophone and Tom Varner on French horn.

Bye, Bye, Brazil

Before we finish, I want you to know that the next concert of this group will be November 20 here at the Good Shepherd Chapel. I plan to focus on Villa-Lobos' choros and Jobim's bossa nova. I hope to include English Horn and harp in the ensemble. I would also like to have a commercial recording of this group available for sale in time for the fall concert. These concerts are labor intensive projects and ticket sales do not cover the costs involved. I am seeking grants but if you would like to get involved in sponsoring the creative and musical aspects of November's concert or recording, please get in touch with me. I will be blogging about the creative process on my web site so you can see how the project develops over the months ahead.

We close this evening's performance with a theme from the 1979 movie "Bye, Bye, Brazil" written by Chico Buarque and Roberto Menescal. The film depicts the demise of live entertainment as television sweeps the rural landscape of Brazil. On behalf of the musicians, I thank you for choosing live music over television tonight.