

NOTES FOR A HISTORY OF PORTUGUESE PIANO MUSIC

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Abstract: *In the last years, I have deeply studied the Portuguese piano music, the subject chosen for my doctorate thesis which I defended at the National University of Music of Bucharest in March 2006. In the last twenty years I have spent in Portugal, due to my work as pianist and pedagogue, I have discovered step by step a fascinating universe, and my wish was to share it with the Romanian musicians, hoping to facilitate the spreading of the Portuguese piano literature and to draw them closer to the Portuguese musical world.*

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This paper is about piano music, but I have to write a little about what happened before this instrument entered into the Portuguese musical life. Besides the general reasons, which I will not discuss here, there are some specific Portuguese ones: the golden era of the Portuguese music happened in the 16th, 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries; the Iberian organ school has an important place in the history of this instrument; equally, we cannot omit Carlos Seixas, the most outstanding Portuguese baroque composer and one of the most important (if not the most important one) of the Portuguese music history. Even though he composed for harpsichord, clavichord and organ, his music adapts easily to the piano, which is a very important fact for a present time pianist, being his place in the Portuguese piano music the same as Scarlatti's in the Italian one.

Portugal is one of the most ancient European states, founded in 1143 and having kept more or less the same borders for more than 800 years. Culturally

speaking, the most important king of the first dynasty was D. Diniz (he reined between 1279 and 1325). He was the most famous Portuguese troubadour; he founded the Portuguese University in Lisbon in 1290 and transferred it to Coimbra in 1307, one of the most ancient European universities, which started a music cathedra in 1309; also during his reign, in 1299, the Royal Chapel has been created.

The first mention of a keyboard instrument in Portugal dates from 1428, when the princess Leonor of Aragon married prince D. Duarte, son of the first king of the second dynasty, D. João I (1385-1433). At the wedding, the bride sang and accompanied herself at the clavichord [4].

Also from historical documents, we know that at the end of the 15th century, there were three keyboard instruments at the Lisbon Court: a clavichord, a virginal and a "craviorgão", instrument which combined the principles of the organ and the harpsichord.

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The 16th and 17th centuries represent the most glorious period of the Portuguese kingdom, due to the worldwide maritime discoveries. The culture and the arts profited from the flourishing economic development. The Portuguese vocal polyphony of this period is one of the most valuable in Europe. Court life was filled with music, the vocal and the harpsichord one being the most preferred. At the beginning of the 16th century, there were 20 keyboard players and several keyboard instruments constructors in Lisbon.

During the geographical discoveries, music and the instruments played a very important role. The missionaries, the ambassadors and the merchants offered the sovereigns organs and harpsichords which made a big impression with their sounds, decoration and complex mechanic; often, these gifts included players as well. The Portuguese missionaries taught the European music and instrumental playing everywhere – Brazil, Africa, Persia, China and Japan. Famous was the musical embassy of the four Japanese princes, who learned the European music with Portuguese Jesuits and then they visited Portugal and Rome, playing organ and harpsichord. That's why we can consider that the Portuguese have some responsibility in the oriental musical invasion of the last decades.

Between 1580 and 1640, Portugal lost its independence and the Spanish kings, who were related to the royal Portuguese family, ruled the country. However, musically speaking, it was a remarkable period. The sacred polyphony was at its height; also, the St. Cecily society, which supervised the musical activity and protected the rights of the musicians, was born in 1603.

In the meantime, the cultural importance of the Vila Viçosa palace, residence of the Dukes of Bragança family, increased a lot. Duke Teodosio II provided an exquisite

education to his son, the future king D. João IV (1640-1656), who became not only a deep connoisseur and music lover, but also a composer and a musical theory specialist. He created a vast music library, if not the biggest, one of the biggest in Europe, as some music histories have considered it. Unfortunately, the earthquake of 1755 destroyed the royal library. We have only the first part of the catalogue, which mentions about two thousand printed scores and four thousand manuscripts.

Besides the court, music was taught and made in monasteries and churches, real cultural centers. The most important ones were in Évora, Coimbra, Braga, Viseu, Porto and Lisbon. The archives of Évora and Coimbra monasteries have been investigated in the last years and the results were spectacular. Concerning the keyboard music, there were very organized and rigorous teaching systems. All the young students learned elementary organ and the most gifted continued a specialized training of organ, harpsichord and clavichord playing. The change of monastery by a student was conditioned by the existence of an available teacher for him in the new place. Also, they were obliged to serve God for life, but some of them deserted, temporarily or forever. These monasteries had factories in which organs, harpsichords and clavichords were constructed; the clavichord was the most cherished in Iberia and also preferred for teaching, because it was capable of producing sounds in forte and piano, thus helping the player getting accustomed to create expressivity. The Iberian organ has some particularities – it has no pedals, but the keyboard can be divided in two halves, in which it is possible to action different registers.

In the 16th century, the most important composers known were António Carreira and Don Heliodoro de Paiva, and in the

17th century Pedro de Araujo and Pe. Manuel Rodrigues Coelho, who printed in Lisbon in 1620, *Flores de Música para o Instrumento de Tecla e Harpa (Musical flowers for keyboard and harp)*, the first Portuguese keyboard printed score known.

The first half of the 18th century was the splendorous era of king D. João V (1706-1750). He created the Music Seminar in 1713 and other choral schools. The royal family loved and practiced music, that's why the king employed Domenico Scarlatti as Kapellmeister and music teacher, especially of D. Maria Bárbara, king's daughter, and D. António, king's brother.

In the same period, **Carlos Seixas** (1704-1742), the most important baroque Portuguese composer, lived in Lisbon. Scarlatti's influence is clear, but it seems that also Scarlatti was influenced by his Portuguese colleague, as Macário Santiago Kastner affirmed, based on the analysis of the Italian composer's creation [5]. For those who don't know, Kastner was an English musician (born in 1908) who lived in Portugal since 1934, after studying in Germany and Holland. He investigated the Iberian ancient music and keyboard instruments, discovering and publishing musical works. He could be considered as the father of the Portuguese modern musicology. His affirmation is based on the fact that the great Scarlatti's Sonatas were written after the death of Seixas. *Bibliotheca Lusitana*, an Encyclopedia of the 18th century, mentions 700 Seixas's Sonatas for keyboard. A great part was destroyed in the earthquake, at the present only about 135 are known. Furthermore, we have his harpsichord Concerto, one of the first of the genre in Europe. Unfortunately, Seixas died at 38. Even so, his music is originally and profoundly Portuguese, showing a great potential as a creator.

Contemporary with Seixas was Frei Jacinto de Sacramento (born in 1712), from whom three keyboard sonatas remained which show a remarkable technical development.

In the second half of the century, a lot of Portuguese musicians who had been in Italy to study, returned and made career, especially in opera music, the most appreciated genre in Portugal. At that time, the Royal Chapel was one of the biggest orchestras in Europe (51 instrument players in the 80s), and it had, according to the testimonies, a very high quality. The most important composer was **João de Sousa Carvalho** (1745-1799), named the "Portuguese Mozart", because of his beautiful music with roots in the Italian *belcanto*. He composed also for keyboard, and represented, with Francisco Xavier Baptista (died in 1797) the Portuguese transition from the harpsichord to the pianoforte. The other important composers created exclusively vocal music.

The pianoforte penetrated rapidly in Portugal. It is interesting that the first pieces written specifically for the new instrument, *Sonate da Cimballo di piano e forte* by Lodovico Giustini da Pistoia, printed in 1732, were dedicated to the prince António de Bragança, king D. João V's brother. It means that at the time there was at least one instrument of the kind in the Portuguese court. In the middle of the century, the pianoforte was constructed in Lisbon, and several factories were known which started to built "clavicembalo a martelletti col piano e forte" (harpsichord with hammers with piano and forte). At present, five Portuguese pianofortes from that time still exist.

The political instability which happened in Portugal during a great part of the **19th century** determined the decline of music, which no longer kept pace with all the European development.

The Portuguese music continued to be dominated by the opera, so the symphonic and chamber genres have had a very slow development, due especially to some isolated personalities.

The most outstanding figure was **João Domingos Bomtempo** (1775-1842), pianist and composer who can be included in the classical style. Contrary to the Portuguese habit of studying in Italy, he chose to go to Paris, where he built up a pianist, composer and teacher career. His music recalls young Beethoven, fact that we can explain by the influence of Clementi over both musicians. In 1810, he continued his career in London, with the same success. Returned to Lisbon in 1820, he created the Philharmonic Society in 1822, the first Portuguese concert association, which had a relevant action in the cultural life, by introducing the music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven and trying this way to modify the musical taste of the public. Besides, he was the first director of the National Conservatory from Lisbon, founded in 1835, in the place of the former Seminary. His piano works – Sonatas, Fantasies, Variations, Concertos - were published in Paris (Leduc, Pleyel) and London (Clementi). He also composed Symphonies and chamber music, not being attracted by the opera at all. Bomtempo is very important for the Portuguese music history: he was the first pianist who made an international career; he is the first Portuguese symphonist based on the principles of the Viennese classicism; he is the greatest Portuguese classical composer, announcing romanticism at the same time.

Unfortunately, the effort of Bomtempo had no continuity. In the second half of the century, the most important pianist was Arthur Napoleão (1843-1925), who made a big career all over Europe and both Americas. But his compositions, even more than 90 of them published in Paris, have not big value, being Fantasies on

Opera themes, Suites of nice and brilliant pieces and so on.

It was just close to the end of the century that a group of musicians of real value, who accomplished a consistent and professional musical creation, appeared and who imposed themselves as a real romantic tardy generation. The most outstanding were Vianna da Motta (1868-1948, student of Liszt and Bulow), Francisco Lacerda (1869-1934, who studied with Vincent d'Indy) and Óscar da Silva (1870-1958, pupil of Ruthardt, Reinecke and Clara Schumann).

Vianna da Motta (1868-1948) is one of the most important names of Portuguese music. He was a very complex individuality: pianist, teacher, composer, conductor, critic and writer. He studied in Lisbon Conservatory and afterwards in Germany, first at the Scharwenka Conservatory in Berlin, than with Karl Schaffer, Franz Liszt (in Weimar, 1885) and Hans von Bülow (in Frankfurt am Main, 1887)[6].

His debut with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1883 represented the beginning of a brilliant career developed in Europe and both Americas, which includes more than 1600 concerts. He was with no doubt one of the most valuable pianists of his time. His fabulous memory allowed him to have about 400 pieces in his repertory. And if you can cast doubt on this number, his 1907 tour in Argentina reveals through the programs that, during 24 days he played 112 different pieces, among which we can enumerate the Sonatas op. 57, 101, 109 and 110 by Beethoven, Sonatas by Chopin and Liszt as well as several Cycles by Schumann. He was a cerebral pianist who placed himself at the service of the composer, but always through the modern interpretative conceptions. He considered the balance between the form and the content essential, and the importance he gave to the proportions resulted into an

architectonical interpretative conception. He was an objective pianist, trying to unveil to the listener the art piece as an object, not himself as a subject.

As a pedagogue, he taught at Geneva Conservatory between 1915 and 1917 and from 1919 at Lisbon Conservatory, where was also director. There, he accomplished an important reform of the teaching system with the purpose of modernizing it and placing it up to the European standard.

In 1913, Breitkopf and Hartel publisher asked Busoni and Motta to revise the complete edition of Liszt's piano works. Busoni took care of the first three volumes, Motta of the other seven.

As a composer, he was part of the late German romantic style, being a clamorous fan of Liszt's and Wagner's ideas. So, his early compositions are beautiful pieces in the romantic style, without any language audacity, but well constructed and showing an excellent composition technique. Among these, we can name Barcarole, Fantasiestuck and the d minor Sonata, which are seducing with their pianistic art opulence and their beauty.

Later on, he introduced popular music in his works, trying to create a Portuguese national style. He considered the popular song as a support, through a phase of transition, to reach the essence of the national spirit, which must be expressed into the music. He composed Portuguese Rhapsodies, Portuguese Scenes and his masterpiece, the Ballad op 16, which accomplished his purpose: a synthesis between the national spirit and the erudite expression form.

Vianna da Motta is also very important for the Portuguese symphonic music. After the Bomtempo's Symphonies, written in the first two decades of the century, there was a great silence in the Portuguese music. The Symphony "The Homeland" by Motta, composed in 1894 was the first expression of the Portuguese romantic

symphonic conception and opened the way to the 20th century Symphony in Portugal.

Observing the chronology of Vianna da Motta's compositions, it is obvious that the majority of his works were written in the 19th century. After his 35 years of age, he reduced his activity as a composer substantially. This fact makes me think that the profound musician was aware of his creative inspiration limits; so, after the youth euphoria had passed, he wrote with the precise purpose of contributing to the creation of a national musical style and, with the passing of the time, composing became a sporadic activity. This purpose was totally achieved by his pupil, Fernando Lopes Graça.

Francisco de Lacerda (1869-1934) studied at Paris Conservatory with Widor and at *Schola Cantorum* with Vincent d'Indy. The latter prized the young Portuguese musician a lot, considering him as having been born to be a conductor. He studied conducting with Nikish and Hans Richter and made a big career as a conductor, especially in France and Switzerland. He was a teacher of Ernest Ansermet, who classified Lacerda as "*mon maître et mon modèle*". Not many people know that Strawinsky asked Lacerda in the first place to join him in the American tour of the Russian Ballet; however, the Portuguese refused for health reasons and recommended Ansermet to conduct.

His piano music was almost unknown for a long time, even in Portugal, and only in the last decades of the 20th century his pieces were published. There is a very interesting universe, which shows the deep mastery of the musician, who can be considered as a miniaturist, because few pieces exceed more than some pages. If his early works remind us of Schumann, Chopin or Liszt, his language developed into the impressionism. His master-piece is the cycle *Trente-six Histoires pour amuser les Enfants d'un Artiste*, short pictures

from the infantile universe, in the spirit of the musical symbolism of Debussy's *Children's Corner*.

Óscar da Silva (1870-1958) was one of the most fascinating personalities of the Portuguese piano universe, a real *Wanderer* attracted by the adventure and voyages, who found emotional and physical stability only for short periods and in different places of the world. Born in Porto, he studied piano in his birth city with Miguel Ângelo Pereira, a distinguished pianist, and then in Germany, with Richard Hofmann, Adolf Ruthardt, Karl Reineke and Clara Schumann [2]. During all his life, he performed all around the world, and many of his tours were made without previous organization. He often changed his residence and even now there are some unknown periods of his life. The state of composer combined with the one of pianist in the romantic spirit and tradition, his concerts always combined his own works with master-pieces from the universal literature, Chopin and Schumann being the privileged.

Óscar da Silva composed some symphonic music, an Opera, chamber music and, of course, more than 200 pieces for piano, organized in cycles, many times evoking states of the soul – Nostalgias, Pains, Cries; also, the romantic genres are well represented – Waltzes Mazurkas, Nocturnes, Scherzo, Preludes. This entire universe has an unequal quality, which can be explained by his agitated life and lack of time to polish many of his works. Even so, his talent is evident, as well as his musical imagination and, specially, a splendid piano writing which demonstrates his huge technique possibilities. His music was essentially romantic, sometimes involving some French spirit. In his maturity, he tried to modernize his language, expressed by constant modulation, chromatic intensity and tonal instability.

Looking at his creation, we are some disappointed by the discrepancy between his possibilities and the effective accomplishment, which could often be more consistent. Perhaps this inconstancy is part of his romantic personality. I will finish this chapter citing Alfred Cortot, who wrote to Óscar da Silva: “*I have read every page with great interest and renewed artistic pleasure (...). I congratulate you with all my heart for the sensitive and imaginative quality of your art, also for the ingenious piano translation.*” The truth is that this piano translation is one of the most fascinating aspects of Óscar da Silva's creation.

Other important composers of this generation were:

Hernani Torres (1881-1939), student of Teichmuller; he was teacher at Leipzig Conservatory and had an important concert activity in Germany; he was important for his pedagogic activity developed in Porto.

Tomás de Lima (1887-1960) composed for the piano, but he really preferred the violin, making career in Portugal and Brazil.

Luís Costa (1879-1960), born in northern Portugal, was a pupil of Vianna da Motta, Bernhard Stavenhagen, Conrad Ansoerge and Ferruccio Busoni. He was one of the most distinguished Portuguese pianists, playing solo concerts or chamber music with great artists of the time, like, Pablo Casals, Guilhermina Suggia, Alfred Cortot and George Enescu. He was a piano teacher and director of the Porto Conservatory and really created a piano school, due to the great number of pianists formed. He was also very important for the music life in Porto, being president of the most important music society in his city – *Orpheon Portuense*.

He composed for voice, chamber music and for piano, most cycles having a profound Portuguese thematic, which constituted a very good repertoire for the teaching process.

He was married to the daughter of the important violinist, conductor and teacher Bernardo Moreira de Sá, Leonilda, who was also a pianist, student of Vianna da Motta. One of their children was the distinguished dame of the Portuguese piano, Helena Sá e Costa (1913-2006).

All this generation culminated with **Luiz de Freitas Branco** (1890-1955), perhaps the most important Portuguese composer of all times. His musical education was a combination of the German school (he studied in Berlin with Humperdink and Desiré Paque) and the French impressionist esthetics, which captivated the composer[3]. By introducing the modernism and creating a real symphonic tradition, his work represents a landmark of the Portuguese music.

His musical language is impregnated with the impressionist style and evolved to polytonality and atonality, having a neoclassical vector as a counterbalance, based on his structural thinking, with roots in the German classicism and romanticism.

He composed a lot for piano, his masterpiece being the cycle of 10 Preludes dedicated to Vianna da Motta, which represents the pinnacle of Portuguese piano impressionism.

The way opened by Freitas Branco was followed by many contemporary colleagues or of the next generations. All of them tried to compose in the spirit of their period and have been influenced by the great European composers of the first half of the 20th century; furthermore, one of the most important fundamentals of their creation was the musical nationalism, in different ways, of course. Among them, the most significant are:

Cláudio Carneiro (1895-1963) has one of the most important Portuguese piano creations in the 20th century. Despite his modern language and his introverted and cerebral personality, his music is communicating directly with the listeners, which are accepting it with enthusiasm.

António Fragoso (1897-1918) imposed his talent early, but unfortunately he died at 21; his piano works (about 30 short ones) show the elegance of the piano writing and the intimate character of his harmonic relations.

Ivo Cruz (1901-1985) investigated and promoted the Portuguese music, animating the Lisbon musical life. He composed two Concertos named “*Portuguese*” and several other pieces.

Frederico de Freitas (1902-1983), more known as a conductor, wrote several piano pieces, “*The book of Maria Frederica*” being important as teaching material in the spirit of Schumann’s *Album fur die Jugend*.

Fernando Lopes-Graça (1906-1994) was one of the most interesting and complex personalities of the 20th century Portuguese music: composer, pianist, conductor, musicologist and folklorist. His huge piano work (more than 150 pieces) includes two *Concertos* and a *Fantasy* for piano and orchestra, 6 *Sonatas*, 24 *Preludes* and several cycles for piano solo. His fundamental importance resides in the fact that he reached a profound synthesis between the erudite and the popular music, being his work impregnated with an authentic national character. To achieve this, he studied the Portuguese folklore and also the linguistic and prosodic particularities of the Portuguese language. His music is genuine and has a very personal character, due to his deliberated compromise with the Portuguese spirituality.

Armando José Fernandes (1906-1983), studies in Paris with Cortot, Boulanger, Ducasse, Dukas and Stravinsky, dominates the composition technique deeply, using preferentially the counterpoint, reminding us of Hindemith.

Jorge Croner de Vasconcelos (1910-1974) enjoyed the same teachers in Paris and proved a solid mastery and an elegant writing in his reduced work.

Joly Braga Santos (1924-1988) was an important symphonic composer, student and heir of Freitas Branco, but he wrote for piano only some small children pieces and a Concerto.

In the second half of the century, the Portuguese composers have continued to practice various esthetics and the tendency of modernizing the musical language, under the influence of the new post-war currents is noteworthy. The journeys of many musicians to Darmstadt had resulted in 1959-1960 in the appearance of the first Portuguese pieces written in the spirit and with the composition techniques of that vanguard school. Among them, I can mention Fernando Corrêa de Oliveira (1921-2004), Maria de Lurdes Martins (1926), Filipe de Sousa (1927-2006), Clotilde Rosa (1930), Filipe Pires (1934), Cândido Lima (1939), António Victorino de Almeida (1940).

This evolution to what is new in the universal music had a climax with three personalities:

Constança Capdeville (1937-1992), adherent of the interaction between music, dance and theater, utilized the piano only in chamber groups.

Jorge Peixinho (1940-1995) composed a lot for piano, the aleatoric dimension and the improvisation being fundamental elements [1].

Emmanuel Nunes (1941), perhaps the most notorious Portuguese composer at the moment, composition professor at the *Conservatoire National de Musique de Paris*, created only two works for piano – *Litanies du feu et de la mer I* and *II*.

These masters have spread their conceptions to many disciples, a lot of the young composers from the present having them as esthetic references. The time does not allow me to present them, because there are so many who have composed really very good music for piano.

I can conclude affirming that in the 20th century, the Portuguese music recovered from the delay that happened before; this long process started at the time of Vianna da Motta and continued in the next generations. The present situates the Portuguese musical creation and activity in a normal and natural position in the European context.

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