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**The Progression of Villa-Lobos Compositional Style from the *Suite Popular Brasileiro* to the *Doze Estudos***

“Its too dainty.”

“Dainty?”

“Yes, you’re pussyfooting it”

I had just played Villa-Lobos’ *Choro No. 1* for my uncle Claudio and he responded by telling me that I was making the piece too elegant. He took the guitar out of my hands and began to play the first few bars with fingers that struck the strings with a leaden thud.

“We’re not in a concert hall. We’re in my bar, so don’t play like you’re in the *Teatro Municipal*.”

I was aware of this much; the unctuous smoke coming from his patrons’ cigarettes were making my eyes water, and some of the drunker ones were beginning to offer their own advice on how to play the piece. My uncle wasn’t bothered by any of this. He continued on with the piece, stopping every few moments to impart more advice: “You have to give the bass notes much more weight...this isn’t Chopin; its Chorinho.”

The lesson I had with my uncle was well over four years ago, but it has stuck with me ever since. That small exchange between us was the first time I began to think about the predicament Villa-Lobos finds himself in. His work fits both within the tradition of western art music while maintaining strong ties with his Brazilian heritage. In his work one finds both the echoes of 19<sup>th</sup> century French art music and the folk traditions of Rio de Janeiro. Both are given equal weight and importance. It is because of the influence of

these two traditions, whose cultural distance is underscored by an equally great geographical distance, that the study of Villa-Lobos' music demands the musician to be informed of the cultural context in which Villa-Lobos composed. As Eero Tarasti writes, "Instead of evaluating the musical features of [Villa-Lobos] exclusively in the Western context, [he] must be examined also in Villa-Lobos' own universe, taking into account his Latin American background."<sup>1</sup>

What has been said about understanding Villa-Lobos within his own cultural context can be said of many composers of the last hundred years. Composers from Bartók to Rodrigo to Ginastera have fashioned musical material from folk tradition as well as the western canon. However, of the composers that have looked towards the folk for inspiration, Villa-Lobos is one of the few to write extensively for the guitar. It is his particular importance to the repertoire of this instrument that demands special interest from the music scholar. Like Villa-Lobos' music, the guitar traverses the space between folk music and art music. It has arguably become the most popular instrument in world, becoming incorporated in a vast array of musical traditions. As Victor Anand Coelho writes, "the guitar and its development comprise multiple histories, each characterized by distinct styles, playing techniques, repertoires, and socio-cultural roles."<sup>2</sup>

It is this unifying quality in both the oeuvre of Villa-Lobos and the instrument he is most often associated with that calls for special consideration. This essay will examine the two distinct musical influences present in his first two sets of works for guitar, the *Suite Popular Brasileiro* and the *Doze Estudos*. Aside from strict analysis, it will explore

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<sup>1</sup> Eero Tarasti "Heitor Villa-Lobos and the problem of national neoclassicism," *Atti del XIV Congresso della Societ'a internazionale di musicologia*, Vol 3 (1990) p. 390

<sup>2</sup> Victor Anand Coelho, *Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University press 2003), p. ii

his own writings, biography and cultural milieu to better inform the motivation behind his works.

### **Structure and Methodology**

The guitar works of Villa-Lobos were written during different compositional periods in the composer's life. His first works, the *Suite Popular Brasileira*, was written between 1908 and 1912. He then did not write another work for guitar for twelve years. When he returned to the instrument it was to pen the works that have become synonymous with his name: the twelve etudes for guitar. These were written between 1924 and 1929, however they were not published for another 25 years.

For the discussion of his larger social context, the works serve as a sort of stylistic snapshot. While the primary focus is on Villa-Lobos' contribution to the guitar repertoire, he did not develop these works in a vacuum. The musical material found in the guitar works also appears in his compositions for other instruments. As both come from the same fountainhead, the author will not hesitate to consult these sources when appropriate to further enrich the critique.

With regard to Villa-Lobos' own writings, the paper approaches the composer's words with caution and incredulity. It is widely known that he had a knack for romanticizing his own history. His account of his ethnomusicological adventure through Brazil is colorfully spotted with his own personal mythology, such as his epic testimony of playing a saxophone to soothe a man-eating jungle flower that had just devoured his friend.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the creative license he takes with his own history, other musicians with whom he was been acquainted often contradict his recollections.<sup>4</sup> For this reason

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph Gustafson, "Villa-Lobos and the Man-Eating Flower: A Memoir" *The Musical Quarterly*, 75 no. 1 (Spring, 1991) 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Dwayne Vincent Corbin, "The Three Wind/Choral works of Heitor Villa-Lobos:

the composer's own perspective will not be used when the factuality of a matter is concerned, but will only be used to underscore the contributions of his persona to his oeuvre.

Apart from the textual sources consulted in this paper, the essay also relies on my own personal history. As a classical guitarist I am extremely familiar with Villa-Lobos' guitar works. As guitarist Nicholas Alfred Ciraldo points out in his doctoral dissertation, a thorough analysis of Villa-Lobos guitar works require knowledge of the idiosyncratic nature of classical guitar technique.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, I not only draw from knowledge of the tactile exigencies of the works but also from knowledge accrued through years of attending master classes where these pieces have been performed.

My perspective on Brazil's cultural and musical milieu is also informed by my identity as a Brazilian-American. I am the fourth generation in a family of musicians, and have a particularly privileged position from which to approach Brazilian music and culture. This may seem like I am just boasting my own musical heritage, but ethnomusicologist Greg Downey takes such a position, arguing that any musical understanding is "refined by a cultural agent actively constituting... perception."<sup>6</sup> This position is further suggested by errors I have discovered in my research that point to the impediments of such a "cultural agent."<sup>7</sup> Having laid the conceptual base from which this

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Quatuor, Nonetto, and Choro no. 3" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, August 10, 2006)

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Alfred Ciraldo, "A Comparative Study of the Eshig Editions and the '1928 Manuscript' of Heitor Villa-Lobos' Twelve Etudes for Guitar" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, May 2006), Chapters one and two.

<sup>6</sup> Greg Downey, "Listening to Capoeira: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and the Materiality of Music" *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Autumn 2002) p. 490

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For example, in one dissertation the writer explores some of the peculiarities of Villa-Lobos percussion choices in the composition *Nonetto*. When scrutinizing an oddly notated extended technique "*sifflet*" (to whistle in French) over the timpani part the

paper expounds its position, the paper can now examine the specific periods of Villa-Lobos compositional output.

## **The Early Period: The *Suite Popular Brasileiro* (1908-1912)**

### **The Origins of an Artist**

The *Suite Popular Brasileiro* is definitely Villa-Lobos most musically conservative work, clinging closely to the tools with which he learned the craft of composition. The influence of the French salon music is present throughout the entire work, while the popular music of Rio de Janeiro appears only tangentially. However, these two compositional sources are intimately linked. The historical processes that brought about the importance of the French influence are directly responsible for the development of the indigenous urban music of Rio.

During the Napoleonic war the Portuguese court fled Lisbon and settled in Rio in 1808, and during this time the city effectively became the Portuguese capital. In an attempt to modernize the city to standards of European refinement, Emperor Dom Pedro

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author ponders over whether this corresponds either to Villa-Lobos' desire for the timpanist to "actually whistle a glissando," or perhaps that it is "simply a description of the sound characteristic that [Villa-Lobos] wants." The author assumes that the word *sifflet* corresponds to the verb, while it actually corresponds to the homonymic noun: what Villa-Lobos means is actually the instrument the whistle. This point is validated when one takes the Portuguese score into account, where the notation reads *assevio* (the noun) and not *asseviar* (the verb). The word itself is what linguists call "structurally ambiguous," and while the American writer perceived it to signify the act of whistling, Brazilians assume it to signify the instrument.

II aimed to enlighten Brazilians by enticing European elites to relocate in Rio. With the defeat of Napoleon in 1816 Dom Pedro II saw an opportunity to woo French artists and intellectuals into his capital city. He provided funding for a new School of Fine Arts, staffed by a faculty of French artists and architects. The founding of this school catalyzed a cultural flow that would soon turn Rio into a “tropical Paris.” As one author writes writes:

The ‘Frenchification’ of imperial Rio de Janeiro could be easily seen in the local neoclassical architecture, the dress and hair styles of elite women, the paintings of artists trained in French ateliers, and in the sanctioning of music and literary fashion streaming from Paris”<sup>8</sup>

During the same period, the middle class of Rio reaped the benefits of an economy energized by the efforts towards modernization. The development of Rio’s infrastructure created employment for countless cariocas (residents of Rio de Janeiro) as public servants, merchants and entrepreneurs. In 1850 the slave trade was abolished, and while slaves were not emancipated until 1888, many were able to work their way to freedom in the thriving urban economy. As Henrique Cazes notes, it was the combination of this new urban middleclass along with the incorporation of African culture in the socio-economic mix that created Brazil’s first indigenous urban music: the choro.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the average carioca has equal contact with French cultural imports as well as the homegrown culture of this new urban middleclass. In the words of professor and critic Pablo Capistrano, “On a Saturday night a carioca might attend a staging of *Carmen*, dressed in his finest clothes. However after the opera he would walk downtown, drinking cachaça [Brazilian rum] until four in the morning while

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<sup>8</sup> Cited in Corbin, “The Three Wind/Choral Works,” p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Enrique Cazes, *Choro: Do Quintonal ao Municipal*, (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998) p.

enjoying the improvisations of the *chorões* (choro ensembles).”<sup>10</sup> This was the cultural climate of fin de siècle Rio, and Heitor Villa-Lobos was inculcated in its musical practices quite literally from birth.

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1887 Raul and Noêmia Villa-Lobos brought their son into the world and the boy was immediately surrounded by music.<sup>11</sup> Raul Villa-Lobos was a librarian by trade, but he played the cello, clarinet, and piano and would often host chamber music salons in his home. At the age of six Heitor began learning cello from his father and was adept at the instrument. While the cello was always Villa-Lobos’ instrument of choice, he also learned to play the piano, guitar, and several wind instruments in his childhood. When Raul died in 1899, Heitor began to work as a musician in a local theater to pull in some extra income in order to support his family.

### **The Elements of Villa-Lobos Early Style**

In 1907 Villa-Lobos enrolled in the *Instituto Nacional de Musica* in Rio and began the study of harmony. The professor Francisco Braga was one of his early mentors, and it was Braga who first suggested to Villa-Lobos that he incorporate folk themes into his art music. While Villa-Lobos had good relations with Braga, he found many of the other professors to be overly pedantic. Meanwhile, his professors found him to be abrasive and pretentious. After spending but a year in the *Instituto Nacional* Villa-Lobos failed out because he neglected the advice of his professors. In Heitor’s opinion, the instruction his father gave him in performance, composition and literature was all he needed to write music.<sup>12</sup> Despite this claim and his renunciation of academia, he

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<sup>10</sup> Pablo Capistrano, Personal Interview conducted December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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<sup>12</sup> Corbin. “Three Choral/Wind Works,” p.12.

continued to study composition using manuals such as Vincent D'Indy's *Cours de Composition Musicale* and Berlioz' *Grand Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes*.<sup>13</sup>

Heitor also played guitar in popular choro ensembles on the streets of downtown Rio. This was an activity his mother detested, as she thought it endangered her plans for Heitor to become as a physician. This clash between mother and son reflects on the social status of choro during Villa-Lobos' childhood, an artform commonly regarded as unrefined. Nevertheless, it was a large part of Villa-Lobos' formative years. It is no coincidence is that Villa-Lobos' first composition, *Os Sedutores*, is for solo guitar and is written in the style of a choro. Nor is it a coincidence that it was written the same year he began playing with the *chorões*.<sup>14</sup> The dual influences of French art music and Brazilian street music acted as antagonistic forces on Villa-Lobos. There was a tension within the young composer to convey a sense of Brazilian life, and that seemed to be mutually exclusive with his desire to embrace the European style that was considered the only appropriate form of art music.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from this inherent tension between his two musical influences, the guitar itself presented Villa-Lobos with the same crisis. In an account of their first musical encounter, Villa-Lobos first wife Lucília Guimarães describes the composer's relationship with the guitar:

The evening of music went well, extremely pleasant, and for us the guitar in Villa-Lobos' hands was a success. When he finished his presentation, Villa-Lobos indicated his desire to hear the pianist, and I played a few pieces by Chopin, and it seemed to me that he was impressed by the technique and interpretation of the performance.

However, Villa-Lobos felt embarrassed, perhaps diminished even, because at that time the guitar was not a parlour instrument, for real music, but rather a vulgar instrument played by street musicians and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid 15

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 15

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 14



serenaders Suddenly, as though overcoming a depression, he declared that his real instrument was the cello, and he insisted that we arrange a meeting at our house to hear him play it.<sup>16</sup>

This anecdote illustrates Villa-Lobos' struggle not only with his musical instruments but also with the place of the guitar within the hierarchy of instruments' social status. During this period, it seems that for Villa-Lobos the guitar is stuck somewhere between the bar and the concert hall. The fact that Villa-Lobos had a rather mercurial approach to the guitar during this period helps to explain the ambiguity that exists in his first major work, the *Suite Popular Brasileiro*.

### **Suite Popular Brasileiro**

The suite consists of five separate movements, each of which is only tenuously connected to the others. Analyzing the macro level harmonic development through the entire suite –as one might do with a classical period symphony- proves useless, as the technical demands of the guitar necessitate keys which will best suite the natural notes of the instrument: E4, A4, D5, G5, B5, and E6. What all the movements except the final one do have in common are the titles Villa-Lobos gave them. Each title consist of two parts, the first being a European dance style –Mazurka, Schottish, Watzl, and Gavotte- and the second always being choro. As for the final movemet, it is entitled chorinho, the diminutive form of choro.

When one considers the musical content of the movements the titles become a bit puzzling. Each falls squarely within the conventions of the respective European dance styles. The harmonic style of the pieces is unquestionably tonal, using chromaticism to

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<sup>16</sup> Suzel Ana Reily et al, “Hybridity and Segregation in the Guitar Cultures of Brazil,” Andy Bennet and Kevin Dawe et al, *Guitar Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2001) p. 169

embellish harmonic tension, and thus falls squarely within 19<sup>th</sup> century European practice. As Wolff and Allesandrini write, “The *Suite Popuar Brasileira* is notated in a traditional fashion: the phrases are regular, the harmonic system is primordially tonal, and the melodic turns are typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is especially clear when contrasted with choro music of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>17</sup> With the exception of the fifth movement, these work’s musical materials give no evidence to the Latin American influence of their composer.

Only the last piece is distinctly Brazilian. The rhythms used are the characteristic eighth-sixteenth-eighth note pattern found in much of Brazil’s music.<sup>18</sup> However, this movement still contains puzzling aspects. For example, when the diminutive form of choro is used, it usually implies that the piece is played at an accelerated tempo.<sup>19</sup> In spite of this, the marking in Villa-Lobos’ fifth movement is *lent*. While definitively more Brazilian than the other pieces, this movement is still ambiguous in character.

Why is a suite that is mostly comprised of European material given the name *Suite Popular Brasileiro*? Where is the Brazilian material? Perhaps the answer lays not within the music itself but rather the instrument used to interpret it. The choce of the guitar as the instrument with which to express the suite is a distinctly Brazilian choice. By European convention, music of this style would most likely be performed on the piano, an instrument linked to a high social status. The use of the guitar is an instance of a low status instrument being used to interpret high status music. As professor Suzel Ana Reily suggests, “in Brazil...the guitar refused to be confined to the ‘common man’: it

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Wolf and Olinda Allesandrini, “Os Cinco Prelúdios para Violão de Heitor Villa-Lobos e a transcrição para piano de José Vieira Brandão” *Per Musi* no. 16 2007, p. 55

<sup>18</sup> Capistrano, 2009

<sup>19</sup> Miller, “The Guitar in Brazilian Choro,” chapter 1

could be found alongside drums amongst blacks and mulattos as well as in the drawing rooms of respectable households.”<sup>20</sup>

It is this reappropriation that is distinctly Brazilian. This occurs in a rudimentary and lopsided fashion in the *Suite Popular Brasileiro*; in this piece the distribution between the European and Brazilian influence is skewed. However, one must keep in mind that this is only the juvenile stage of Villa-Lobos’ style. As will be shown in *Os Doze Etudes*, the two sources of material are more evenly distributed and transcended by Villa-Lobos personality. Up until this point it has proven sufficient to speak of choro in general terms. This has been done for the sake of coherence and continuity. However, before embarking on a discussion of the *Doze Estudos*, the specific musical characteristics of choro must first be clarified.

### **The Choro: Brazil’s First Urban Music**

While the historical process that led to the formation of this style has been explained above, not much has yet been said as to what choro actually encompasses. The *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* describes it as “instrumental” music played by “strolling street musician-serenaders known as weepers (chorões)...performing dance music and...sentimental songs.”<sup>21</sup> In actuality this is a most definition, which corresponds more to the romanticized myth of choro rather than the actual musical practice. *Grove Music Online*’s definition encompasses a bit more of the style, acknowledging that it is “a term with various meanings...[that] generically denotes urban instrumental ensemble music.” And has been “closely connected with other popular dances of urban Brazil.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bennet and Dawe, “Guitar Cultures”, p. 157

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Both of these definitions are nebulous at best, and call attention to the lack of Anglophone scholarship on this style of music. However it is not within the scope of this paper to expound on the causes of this deficiency, nor is it the moment to give evidence to the music's merit as a subject of academic study.

The author who comes closest to providing a complete definition is the choro musician and historian Henrique Cazes. He posits that the choro has at its base European dance genres that were combined with a "mixture of local styles and accents...and African influence."<sup>23</sup> While this is the material of the music, the style also depends on a specific mode of phrasing, interpretation, and improvisation. The melody is played with extreme exuberance and sentimentality, so much so that in early recordings the instrument that carries the melody almost appears to be playing out of time.<sup>24</sup>

This specific style of interpretation is what gave the music its namesake. *Choro* in Portuguese means "to cry." However, when referring to music it connotes no sadness, but only extreme emotion. If one were to call an interpretation of a song "*bem chorado*" this would mean that it was vivacious and played with extreme emotion.<sup>25</sup> With regard to specific musical devices that signify that an interpretation is *bem chorado*, I present Cazes' adaptation of The Beatles song "Blackbird:"

1. Original Melody as played by The Beatles.

### **Example 1**

2. As played by Cazes

### **Example 2**

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<sup>23</sup> Cazes, "O Choro" p. 15

<sup>24</sup> Ibid chapter 2

<sup>25</sup> Miller, "The Guitar in Brazilian Choro," chapter 1

Two things become apparent: firstly, Cazes accentuates the fourth sixteenth note at the beginning of each phrase; secondly, the melody is heavily embellished with passing tones in the ending phrases. The upbeat orientation of this passage is found in many styles of Brazilian music and is distilled to its most elemental form in the *Toque Angola* rhythm played on the berimbau in capoeira percussion ensembles:

Toque Angola

### **Example 3**

As for the passing-tone embellishment, this is characteristic of the way choro musicians improvise in their music. In a conversation, the choro musicians Joatan Nascimento and Fred Dantas lucidly explicate this style of improvisation:

**Nascimento:** Improvisation is done by those who can improvise. It is not an obligatory part of choro. But this variation which is generally done around the melody, or the counterpoint is a very common thing. I think that improvisation in choro is very different from the concept used in American music.

**Dantas:** [Choro] improvisation is not provoked....[it] is sometimes just a subtle variation, and you return to the theme in the middle [of it]. Improvisation and the theme both become mixed.<sup>26</sup>

In short, the style of improvisation is horizontal and not vertical; it is more concerned with counterpoint rather than working within a harmonic structure. This grew out of the original European materials that were incorporated into choro. Polkas and other dances were often written for the piano, and the *chorões* would read directly off of the

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<sup>26</sup> Mika Kaurismaki, Director, *Brasileirinho*, 2005

piano sheet music instead of arranging it for an ensemble. The melody would often be picked out by high wind instruments such as the flute, while lower brasses and woodwinds would fashion contrapuntal lines out of the harmonies. Even the guitar, with its affinity for vertical harmonies, has a distinctly contrapuntal role in choro.<sup>27</sup> What started out as a necessity for orchestrating piano scores soon became a stylistic convention.

With the aforementioned examples, one comes closer to a complete definition of the choro, but one characteristic has yet to be mentioned, and that is the social environment. It appears that this is a facet of choro that is just as important as any strictly musical qualities. In a speech given in France entitled “What is choro?” (Qu’est-ce qu’un choro?), Villa-Lobos seems to highlight this exact point. In a loquacious, convoluted, and possibly intoxicated tangent (in the recording you can hear him slurring some words), he describes the social circumstance:

But really, the choros are always [played] by musicians, good and bad musicians, who play together because of pleasure, often at night, through improvisation....often these are musicians from an orchestra who play concerts at the opera and who get out of the concert around midnight....and we decide that we will do something like a serenade, [but first we] look for someone to eat [with] and drink cachaça.<sup>28</sup>

This point is corroborated by the contemporary choro guitarist Zé Paulo Becker:

I can be a finalist in an international contest, play classical guitar, but not to know how to play Brazilian music, my music...So I went around the bars, which are, I think, the great school of choro, of Brazilian music.<sup>29</sup>

And again by the canonical mandolin player Ronaldo do Bandolim:

To understand the culture of choro, it’s not just a question of learning the music. You must learn to discuss,

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<sup>27</sup> Cazes, *O Choro*

<sup>28</sup> Miller p. 26-30

<sup>29</sup> Kaurismaki, *Brasileirinho*

feel the atmosphere.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that intrinsic to choro is an air of informality, sociability, and comradeship. This fits perfectly with the style's other convention of improvisation for ensemble. While this seems to be vital to the style, it is left behind when developed by Villa-Lobos in the *Doze Estudos*. After all, the work is for solo guitar and is most often performed in the concert hall, not on the bar stage. However what remains are the rhythmic and melodic elements that are characteristic of the style. While it does not evince the same social quality found in choro, Villa-Lobos transcends the boundaries of this folk music, creating a set of works that has recognizable influence but daring and unique character. With this question in mind, the essay now proceeds with an analysis of the etudes.

## The Reconciliation of Antagonistic Influences:

### *Os Doze Estudos*

(1924-1929)

#### **Discovering French Impressionism**

During his twenties Villa-Lobos underwent marked changes both as a composer and a musician. While still devoting much time to composition, he advanced in his musical career mostly due to his work as a cellist. He won a seat in Rio's *Teatro Nacional*, the preeminent venue in the city for opera, ballet, and orchestra. During his

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

time there he was exposed to the contemporary European and Russian masterpieces. The Ballet Russe performed there and brought with them the works of Stravinsky, Debussy, Tchaikovsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Villa-Lobos was also exposed to the works Ravel, as well as the operas of Puccini and Strauss. Not only did Villa-Lobos have the opportunity to hear these works, but also since he was a house musician they seeped into his own consciousness during the long hours of rehearsal.

During this period his writing began to take on even stronger resemblances with French impressionistic works. His piano piece of 1914, *O Gato e o Rato* consisted of whole-tone scales, tone clusters, and the use of extreme registers.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he began writing his scores in French. While his compositional efforts during this period were largely experimental and didn't evince much of his own personality, they show a radical shift from his adolescent style. His compositions of this period suggest that he was particularly struck by the impressionists' use of Asian musics as creative sources. The element of exoticism found in many of the impressionist work is also present in Villa-Lobos compositions of this period, however in his compositions Brazil takes the roles the Far East and Near East play in the impressionists' work.

Pieces such as the *Danças Características Africanas* and the symphonic poems such as *Amazonas* and *Uirapurú* make use of Brazilian subjects. While Villa-Lobos chose Brazil as the symbolic locus of his compositions, he was composing these works in a distinctly French style. Such works estranged the composer from his own culture and led to poor reception by critics in Brazil. In a review of his first two symphonies, Villa-Lobos work was criticized as being too deeply entrenched within a "Debussyan style, preoccupied with crazy enharmonic negotiations, in which one searches for an idea

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<sup>31</sup> Lisa Peppercorn quoted in Corbin, "Three Wind/Choral Works," p. 15



without ever finding it, [revealing] the immoderate desire of musical scandal.”<sup>32</sup>

During this same period Villa-Lobos made the acquaintance of two French musicians that would further strengthen the composer’s ties with Europe. In 1917 Darius Milhaud arrived in Rio as the assistant to a French diplomat. The two composers struck up a fond friendship that had an impact on both composers’ works: Milhaud introduced Villa-Lobos to the works of Erik Satie, while Villa-Lobos introduced Milhaud to the musical virtuosity of the chorões. The influence of Brazilian music on Milhaud can clearly be seen in two compositions. First in *Saudades do Brasil*, Milhaud makes use of Brazilian melodies and rhythms. Later, in the piece *Scaramouche* Milhaud quotes one of the most famous and timeless choros, “*Brejeiro*,” in its entirety. The original composer, Ernesto Nazareth, is given no citation.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, the ideas stirred within Villa-Lobos by the compositions of Satie can be seen in his piano piece *Rudepoema*, which he wrote for the second Frenchman he befriended; Milhaud introduced Villa-Lobos to the French Pianist Arthur Rubenstein at a party in 1918. The composer and pianist soon became close friends as well, and Rubenstein became one of the most vocal supporters of Villa-Lobos’ music

Both Milhaud and Rubenstein were instrumental in the advancement of Villa-Lobos reputation in Europe. Milhaud wrote the first review of Villa-Lobos work in a European publication. Similarly, Rubenstein performed Villa-Lobos’ works during performance tours all across the world. He also recorded many of Villa-Lobos works, which were then distributed throughout France. Some years later Rubenstein would broker the meeting between Villa-Lobos and the publisher Max Esching, whose

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<sup>32</sup> Cernicchiaro, quoted in Corbin, “Three Wind/Choral Works” p. 16

<sup>33</sup> Cazes, *O Choro*, p. 35

publishing house now prints Villa-Lobos complete guitar works.<sup>34</sup>

What had the greatest impact on the Brazilian composer was Milhaud's insistence that he discover a "more vivid and original manner" through which to express his Brazilian nationalism, rather than just using the tools of his French contemporaries.<sup>35</sup> However, this encouragement of Villa-Lobos friend stuck out in stark juxtaposition with the opinion of the carioca elites. It was not until Modernism came to Brazil in a markedly equatorial form that public opinion began to change.

### **The Beginnings of Brazilian Modernism**

On February 17th 1922 the Week of Modern Art began in São Paulo, and with the weeklong expo, Modernism took hold in the country. The modernists sought to define the symbols of Brazilian national identity, and in doing so they also intended to wipe the slate clean of old artistic prejudices. The main catalyst of the movement, Mario de Andrade, described the movement as "the art and music of a generation of artists and musicians who repudiated nineteenth-century European traditions and demanded freedom to establish their own principles of artistic creation."<sup>36</sup> Most importantly for Villa-Lobos, the expo was where he gave a sensational performance of his work *Quator*.

While it had been performed before, this work was staged with lights and scenery at the expo to create what Villa-Lobos described as a "strange atmosphere, mystic woods, fantastic shadows, all symbolizing my work as I imagined it."<sup>37</sup> The performance left

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<sup>34</sup> Sun Joo Lee, "A Study of nationalistic Expression of the Choro in Heitor Villa-Lobos' Chamber Works with Bassoon" (Ph.D. Dissertatio, University of Cincinnati, April 1 2005), p. 20

<sup>35</sup> Appleby in Corbin, p. 17

<sup>36</sup> Appleby quoted in Corbin, "Three Wind/Choral Works," p. 24

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p. 21

quite an impression on his audience, so much so that Villa-Lobos was granted a fellowship to promote Brazilian music in Europe. Villa-Lobos left for Paris in 1923, and his music was received abroad with such enthusiasm that upon returning his compositional style had changed yet again. As Lisa Peppercorn writes, “he renounced his past, took leave of traditions, and broke almost completely with everything to which he had adhered previously.”<sup>38</sup> Upon his return to Brazil, Villa-Lobos would begin composing the works that are now possibly his most well known compositions for guitar: *Os Doze Estudos*.

### The Tupi's Lute

#### O Trovador (The Troubadour)

Sentimentos em mim do asperamente dos homens das primeiras eras...	Sentiments in me of the harshly of the men of the first eras....
As primaveras de sarcasmo intermitentemente no meu coração arlequinal...	The springs of sarcasm intermittently in my harlequin heart...
Intermitentemente...	Intermittently...
Outras vezes é um doente, um frio na minha alma doente como um longo som redondo	At other times it is a sick man, a cold in my soul sick like a long round sound
Cantabona! Cantabona!	Cantabona! Cantabona!
Dlorom...	Dlorom....

Sou um tupi tangendo um alaúde!

I am a Tupí strumming a lute!

-Mario de Andrade (1922)<sup>39</sup>

The poem above is one of the inaugural poems of the modernist movement, and it illustrates kinds of mythology that was being created. Andrade's poem looks to the past, romantically invoking a primordial savagery, and uses it as a source for the creation of

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p. 24

<sup>39</sup> Author's Translation

modern national culture. The modernists saw Brazil's primitive history not as anathema to development, but rather as the raw materials with which they could develop modern cultural sovereignty. Central to this notion was the symbolic power of the guitar. It had the potential to "mediate between the local cultures of the nation's popular classes and the 'universal' aesthetics of high art."<sup>40</sup> The poet Manuel Bandeira published an article contemplating the place of the guitar in Brazil:

For us Brazilians the guitar had to be the national, racial instrument. If the *modinha*<sup>41</sup> is the expression of our people, the guitar is the instrumental timbre to which it is best suited...

Unfortunately up to now the guitar has been cultivated among us in a careless manner...

The guitar has also been resisted for its fame as an instrument of the low-minded, of intrigue and as an accomplice to roguery in seductive late-night revelries...

However despite the sordid history Bandeira describes, he was also aware of the instrument's reputation in Spain, where it had served to promote national musical identity. The poet goes on to suggest that the instrument have a similar social role in Brazil:

It has been rehabilitated...[by] foreign artists, who revealed its resources and the true school of the great Spanish virtuosi to our amateurs. Our guitarists have composed very interesting pieces with a Brazilian character. Yet we have only heard about them. This is the case of the *maxixes*<sup>42</sup> by Arthiodor da Costa, João Pernambuco, Quincas Laranjeiras and others of equal merit...

With the recent success of Villa-Lobos' Quartour at the Week of Modern Art, the composer is in the forefront of the poet's mind as the ideal candidate charged with task of refining the Brazilian guitar. However, it is clear that at this point the composer himself is of an opposing opinion:

Villa-Lobos...,who is now in Paris...played the guitar when he was young. And he composed quite a bit which is tightly locked away...And I don't know if he has thrown them into the sea...He doesn't like to speak of this. This prejudice is not modern and it

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<sup>40</sup> Bennet and Dawe, *Guitar Cultures*, p. 168

<sup>41</sup> a popular dance

<sup>42</sup> Another popular dance

isn't the least bit national.<sup>43</sup>

This article was written in 1923, while Villa-Lobos was living in Paris. While he may not have agreed with Bandeira at that time, his opinion had changed by the time he returned to Rio in 1924. The work that was finished five years later is a true testament to his mature style. It incorporates elements of choro and French art music in a unique manner that blends both influences with a newfound confidence. The resulting is a work of virtuosity and supreme beauty that is not an imitation of either influence, but a set of compositions penned in an original voice that makes use of materials from both sources. As Bandeira suggests, the addition of this repertoire “rehabilitates” the Brazilian guitar, raising it to the status of an instrument of high art.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Os Doze Estudos***

It is clear that these twelve studies were intended to be a complete set instead of just independent works that Villa-Lobos composed separately and only later compiled. This is clear because the etudes follow harmonic pattern of an extended circle of fifths. This begins quite simply movement throughout the keys in the first half of the etudes, but in the second half the relationships become a bit more convoluted. As guitarist David Tanenbaum notes “the final note (as in nos. 7 and 8) or chord ( as in nos. 9 and10) of one etude can act as a kind of dominant to the next.<sup>45</sup> Apart from the harmonic material, there seems to be a deeper cognitive division between the first half and the second half of the piece; The first half use Italian expression marks, while the second half use French markings. While this points to a shift in Villa-Lobos’ thinking, it is unclear as to what the

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<sup>43</sup> Bennet and Dawe, *Guitar Cultures* p. 168

<sup>44</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Coelho, *Oxford Companion to the guitar*, p. 187

significance is.<sup>46</sup>

With regard to the compositional materials used, the influence of both choro and French impressionism are evenly distributed throughout the works. The studies make ample use of quartal and quintal harmonies and planing as well as –to a much lesser extent- bitonality, whole-tone passages and modes. When considering on whether or not Villa-Lobos employed these techniques specifically to invoke the French impressionism, one is presented with a chicken-and-the-egg sort of problem. Both quartal and quintal harmonies occur naturally on the open strings of the guitar. Bar chords, which allow a guitarist to play many chords using the same hand position, are an essential tool for guitar harmony that moves chords around without changing the voicing, thus resulting in parallel motion. The question then becomes, did Villa-Lobos use these compositional devices because of his contact with French impressionism, or was it simply a matter of necessity for composing on the guitar?

The evidence of other compositions of this period points to the former possibility, as these devices appear in other compositions that do not use the guitar. For example, in the ending of Choro no. 3, a work for chamber instruments a chorus, one of the penultimate chords in the chorus is comprised mostly of quartal harmony.

### **Example 3**

Taking a closer look, one notices that the top interval is major third. These five pitches not only make a chord mostly quartal in nature, but they also are the exact same notes

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<sup>46</sup> This is not true of the 1990 edition of the Etudes, but only for the original 1956 publication.

found on the guitar, only dropped a half step.<sup>47</sup> This suggests that Villa-Lobos considered this to be but one tool in his larger toolbox of musical materials. While this textual evidence doesn't prove which came first, it is clear that Villa-Lobos used such harmony for more than just as a means to simplify composition for the guitar.

Planing is taken to extremes in some of the studies, such as Etude number one. In this study, a diminished chord moves in parallel motion for twenty-two bars, descending from G# diminished to Bb diminished. Parallel motion appears in other studies such as three and four. In both cases it is employed to heighten tension at a point of arrival at in the etudes' phrases.

#### **Example 4**

#### **Example 5**

#### **Example 6**

#### **Example 7**

Villa-Lobos also often employs the technique to reach the highpoint of a melodic arch. In Study six it appears in a particularly idiosyncratic fashion, arching upwards in jumps of a third and then descending a step before jumping another third.

#### **Example 8**

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<sup>47</sup> Corbin, "An analysis of three choral/wind works," p. 70

This style of planing occurs throughout his guitar oeuvre, remains a compositional tool he uses throughout his career. The same style of planing occurs in Prelude number one of 1940

### **Example 9**

Etude five is a particularly good example of the use of modes and whole-tone passages. The work is an etude meant to improve the player's ability to different melodic lines and begins with a circular motive of parallel thirds that focuses on the lower pentachord of the G Lydian scale.

### **Example 10**

The piece develops through the manipulation of this circular motion and transitions to a second section through a descending whole-tone passage.

### **Example 11**

Such resources are used sparingly, and in doing so Villa-Lobos avoids falling in the pitfall of mimicry which he had succumb to before in his piece *O Gato e o Rato*.

One can see the use of cluster chords in study seven. The penultimate chord of study seven is comprised of seconds and by itself sounds ambiguous, however the spacing and positioning within the work suggests that it functions as an altered dominant.

### **Example 12**

Study twelve contains similar structural ambiguities, but these point more towards bitonality rather than cluster tones. This is suggested by the constant switching between extremely sharp and extremely flat tonal areas.

### **Example 13**



While the compositional nuances mentioned above pull the etudes towards the direct influence of French impressionism, they are counterbalanced by techniques commonly employed in choro music. While the harmonic structure of these pieces is much more complex than that found in choro, the melodic embellishments and rhythmic devices come directly from the choro tradition. The musical resources that come from choro are fewer than the French compositional tools, but they are equally partitioned among the pieces. The characteristic arpeggios, which approach the tones in an arpeggiated chord through lower-neighbor tones, is one of the most universal tools used for choro improvisation. This occurs in the end of study one as well as in the middle of study three.

**Example 14**

**Example 15**

Another melodic embellishment commonly used is slurring of arpeggiated notes. This creates a syncopation in the work that emphasizes the upbeats. The most salient examples are in study three and eight.

**Example 16**

**Example 17**

Another rhythmic influence is the choro rhythm of sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth, which appears in etudes four, seven, eleven and twelve.

**Example 18**

**Example 19**

**Example 20**

However, what is striking in these etudes, are Villa-Lobos' ability to incorporate

both musical resources as elements in an overarching musical language. He is not simply cutting and pasting French and Brazilian themes, but it sublimating both in his own unique style. The examples above fit smoothly into the overarching structure of the works, without any insincere mimicry.

## **Conclusion**

The first two guitar works of Villa-Lobos are the result of two distinct cultural forces acting within the composer. The Brazilian material that Villa-Lobos felt strongly was at first disregarded for the pursuit of French high art influences. This tension between his two influences intimately linked with the instrument he is most closely associated with: the guitar. While this antagonism was present in his early years, the composer could not manage to resolve this tension until he composed the *Doze Estudos*. This work was the result of a synthesis of both influences into a unique style, which not only brought Villa-Lobos into his own right as a mature composer, but also served to elevate the guitar to the level of a solo instrument capable of performing high art.

