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# Brazilian elements in Villa-Lobos's "Assobio a Jato"

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BRAZILIAN ELEMENTS IN VILLA-LOBOS'S ASSOBIO A JATO

a Treatise

Presented to the

School of Music

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by Nancy J. Ebel

December 1995

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## ABSTRACT

Heitor Villa-Lobos was particularly lauded for creating a unique Brazilian style of art music. He imbued in his works a flavor of the many facets and cultures of Brazilian life, from the jungles of the Amazon to the street musicians of Rio de Janeiro. One of his late works, a piece entitled Assobio a Jato (The Jet Whistle), demonstrates this Brazilian flavor, even though the composition was written later in Villa-Lobos's life when the Brazilian element was not so obvious as in his earlier works.

The purpose of this paper is to present a brief background about Villa-Lobos and an overview of Brazilian popular and folk music. Further, a discussion about how Villa-Lobos incorporated this music into his own compositions follows, and an analysis of Assobio a Jato with regard to its elements of Brazilian music concludes the paper.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Background of Villa-Lobos's Life

#### Introduction

Heitor Villa-Lobos was particularly lauded for creating a unique Brazilian style of art music. He imbued in his works a flavor of the many facets and cultures of Brazilian life, from the jungles of the Amazon to the street musicians of Rio de Janeiro. One of his late works, a piece entitled Assobio a Jato (The Jet Whistle), demonstrates this Brazilian flavor, even though the composition was written later in Villa-Lobos's life when the Brazilian element was not so obvious as in his earlier works.

The purpose of this paper is to present a brief background about Villa-Lobos and an overview of Brazilian popular and folk music. Further, a discussion about how Villa-Lobos incorporated this music into his own compositions follows, and an analysis of Assobio a Jato with regard to its elements of Brazilian music concludes the paper.

#### Villa-Lobos's Life

Heitor Villa-Lobos was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on March 5, 1887, according to the date on his baptismal certificate, as no record of birth exists. He was the second of four surviving children of Raul and Noemia Villa-Lobos. His father Raul was of Spanish descent. Raul, an intellectual as well as an amateur artist and a fine musician,

worked at the National Library in Rio de Janeiro as a librarian. Heitor's mother Noemia, who was of Portuguese descent, was a teacher before she married Raul and raised the family.

Heitor was the only child of the Villa-Lobos family who showed any interest in music. In his childhood he took music lessons from his father in ear training and violoncello, which became his major instrument. After his father died, his music instruction was sporadic, but included some courses at Rio de Janeiro's *Instituto Nacional de Musica*, some harmony lessons with Agnelo Franca and advice from composer Antonio Francisco Braga (1868-1945) (Peppercorn, Villa-Lobos: The Music 108). Essentially Villa-Lobos was a self-taught musician, which had a profound impact on his compositional style.

In July 1899 Raul died of smallpox, leaving the family in poor financial condition. Dona Noemia was forced to seek income outside the home. Heitor also helped support the family by playing cello for cinema and theater orchestras in Rio de Janeiro. Whenever he had the opportunity, Villa-Lobos would play with the local street musicians. These groups consisted of instrumentalists who played popular music, known as *choros*. He would stay out late many nights listening to and playing with these musicians. This experience would later prove to be an important influence on his compositional style.

The year 1900 began a decade in which Villa-Lobos traveled through various

parts of Brazil. At the age of eighteen he left Rio de Janeiro to travel to northern Brazil, a trip financed by selling several rare books inherited from his father's collection. During the years 1905 -1911 he was absent from his home in Rio de Janeiro except for brief periods (Appleby, Heitor Villa-Lobos 4). Villa-Lobos absorbed many of the characteristics from the indigenous music of the places he visited. Vasco Mariz records that on these trips Villa-Lobos took down more than one thousand melodies in musical notation, many of which appear in his anthology, Guia pratico (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 121). Villa-Lobos was very fond of relating these adventures to people throughout his life, including his run-in with a cannibalistic tribe. He gave many conflicting accounts of his voyages, none of which can be confirmed or denied, so it is likely that the exact nature of some of these trips will never be known (Peppercorn, Villa-Lobos: Collected Studies 25-7). It is probably most accurate to say that Villa-Lobos traveled through parts of Brazil, although the more extreme and unbelievable experiences were likely enhanced by his own vivid imagination.

In 1912 Heitor met Lucilia Guimaraes (1886-1966), an accomplished pianist. They were married in 1913, which ended Villa-Lobos's period of travels and began his serious journey as a composer. Lucilia was an able partner for Villa-Lobos and an adept interpreter of his piano compositions. During these years in Rio de Janeiro, Villa-Lobos gained his way into many of the musical salons, and even organized concerts himself.

In 1915 the first concert of Villa-Lobos's compositions was given by Villa-Lobos,

Lucilia and a friend in Nova Friburgo, a town in the state of Rio de Janeiro. In July of the same year, some of his works were performed in a concert in Rio de Janeiro. This concert marked the first time his works had been heard in that city. His compositions during this period were written in traditional forms and included works for guitar, piano, a few chamber music works, short songs, and pieces for band or chorus.

In 1918 Villa-Lobos met Arthur Rubinstein, who was on a concert tour of Latin America. Rubinstein soon became one of Villa-Lobos's strongest advocates, beginning a relationship which lasted throughout Rubinstein's life. He programmed many of Villa-Lobos's works in his concerts, which gave them exposure that they otherwise may not have received. Rubinstein's performances of Villa-Lobos's music were among the first to take place in Europe.

In 1923 Villa-Lobos journeyed to Paris for a year's sojourn. The Brazilian government had provided a grant that was supplemented by several benefactors' donations for the presentation of concerts of Brazilian composers' music. On May 30, 1924 a concert of Villa-Lobos's works was held in the *Salle des Agriculteurs* in Paris, the most important concert of his works to that date. This first trip abroad greatly helped Villa-Lobos to cement his own unique Brazilian style. He realized that in order to contribute something to the vast world of music that he would need to do something unique.

In the years between 1923-30, Villa-Lobos spent most of his time abroad,

primarily in Paris. In his apartment on the *Place St. Michel*, he held many salon concerts. His apartment became a popular meeting place for many artists and musicians in Paris at the time. The compositions from this period of his life were among the most innovative and successful, and included the Choros and Nonet.

In 1930, Villa-Lobos returned to Brazil, intending to stay for a brief vacation. Despite his plans, he spent many years there working to improve the music education system. He invested a great deal of time trying to reorganize public school music instruction, first in Sao Paulo, then in Rio de Janeiro (1932), and finally on a nationwide basis (1942). Villa-Lobos organized extensive large-scale concerts of Brazilian folks songs, patriotic songs, and instrumental works in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro with as many as 30,000 and even 40,000 performers, in order to draw public attention and interest to Brazilian music.

During this time, Villa-Lobos wrote the Guia Pratico (1932), an educational anthology, containing 137 Brazilian children's songs and folk songs from all regions of the country. Most of these were commonly known melodies, not the exotic material which he reportedly collected in his earlier travels (Behague, Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul 6). Villa-Lobos wrote suitable harmonizations for accompaniment of these songs.

All of this national activity was during the term of Getulio Vargas, an authoritarian president who gained control of the country in the early 1930's. Villa-Lobos

assisted Vargas by writing much educational music for nationalistic propaganda. This music was disseminated by Vargas's government. Therefore, much of Villa-Lobos's compositional output at this time was for nationalistic purposes and generally did not contain his best work. However he did compose several important works during this period, including the Ciclo brasileiro for piano (1936), the four suites for orchestra, Descobrimento do Brasil (1937), and several of the Bachianas brasileiras.

In 1936, Villa-Lobos was separated from his wife Lucilia, as divorce was not possible in Brazil at that time. His companion for the last twenty-three years of life was Arminda Neves d'Almeida, a former pupil. She changed her name to Villa-Lobos by deed-poll upon the death of Lucilia (Peppercorn, Villa-Lobos: Collected Studies 100).

In the autumn of 1944 at the age of fifty-seven, Villa-Lobos made his debut in the United States with the Janssen Symphony of Los Angeles in a program of his works. During this visit his works were presented in New York, Boston and Chicago with gratifying success. Following that initial success, Villa-Lobos returned to the United States every year until his death.

In 1945, Vargas's government was overthrown, beginning a new period in Villa-Lobos's life. The last years of his life, 1946-59 were spent as an unofficial Brazilian "Ambassador of Art." The major center of his activity was the United States, where he was hailed as a distinguished composer. He composed many commissioned works for accomplished musicians and major orchestras. During this stage in his life he did not

compose his most brilliant works, perhaps because of the large number of commissioned pieces he wrote. However, there are some shining examples of his compositions from this period. Many of these works were in traditional forms, and include some of his finest works, such as the opera Yerma, his symphonic poems, the last string quartets, Symphony no. 10 for solo voice, mixed chorus and orchestra, and the choral composition Bendita sabedoria. He also finished some of his distinctively Brazilian works, such as the Choros and Bachianas brasileiras.

In the last year of his life Villa-Lobos traveled abroad and continued his busy schedule of composing, conducting, and arranging until July, when his physical condition worsened and he required hospitalization for uraemia and kidney congestion in Rio de Janeiro. He died at home on November 17, 1959 at the age of seventy-two, having composed between six and seven hundred works, depending upon how his rewritten works are counted (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 117).

In 1960 the establishment of a museum to honor Villa-Lobos was decreed in Brazil. On January 20, 1961 the doors were opened with Arminda Villa-Lobos as the director. The Museum holds yearly festivals, competitions, and publishes books and recordings pertaining to the music of the composer (Peppercorn, Villa-Lobos: The Music 114).

## Chapter 2

### Overview of Brazilian Music

#### Native Brazilian Music

Villa-Lobos's music, though uniquely his own, deliberately uses many aspects of Brazilian life as inspiration. Villa-Lobos incorporated indigenous Brazilian folk and popular music into his compositions in order to portray the culture of Brazil. He did this by directly quoting certain songs or by composing in a certain style that was reminiscent of a particular type of Brazilian music. He also sought to portray extra-musical sounds from Brazil, such as the jungles, animals, and carnivals.

Villa-Lobos's sources included texts, melodies, and rhythms from the native populations. As Native Brazilian music did not survive European acculturation very well, the true native melodies that Villa-Lobos used were collected by explorers who came in contact with tribes during the colonial period, or by tribes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who had limited contact with other peoples. Characteristics of Native Brazilian folk music that are apparent in Villa-Lobos's music are pentatonic melodies, step-wise ascending and descending lines, and some large melodic intervals (Peppercorn, Villa-Lobos: the Music 55).



### Origins of Brazilian Folk and Popular Music

Classifying Brazilian music as folk or popular music is not easy, considering the vast array of influences and types. The distinction between the two is further blurred because, according to David Appleby, Brazil lacks a tradition of folk music handed down from generation to generation by oral tradition, and a written record of popular melodies is scarcely one hundred years old. This is not to say that Brazil lacks either folk or popular music, only that it is difficult to categorize melodies as one or the other (The Music of Brazil 95). This paper will use the common terms "folk" or "popular" where possible, but the reader should understand that distinctions are sometimes not easily made.

The content of Brazilian folk and popular music includes characteristics and influences from native Brazil, Portugal, and Africa. Native Brazilian contribution to modern day folk and popular music is relatively small because the cultural re-orientation of the native Brazilians by the Portuguese was so successful that little of native Brazilian influence has survived in the mainstream of Brazilian musical history. The Portuguese arrived in Brazil in 1500, and the Jesuits soon arrived in force to "teach" the natives new ways. However, from the native populations came additions to the music such as rattles of the maraca type, certain choreographic genres, and some performance characteristics (Behague, "Music of Brazil" 223-244).

The music of Africa was an important influence in Brazilian music. Africans first

came to Brazil in 1538 as slaves to work on the large colonial plantations. By the time the slave trade was abolished, several million Africans had been brought to Brazil. From African musical roots came specific scales that are attributed to that continent. This includes the pentatonic, mixolydian mode, and major hexatonic without a seventh degree. In African music rhythm is very important. This manifests itself in Brazilian music in the use of polyrhythms, and in the use of percussion instruments. Music of African influence is frequently in duple meters and is often syncopated. African rhythmic traits also include the hemiola. Other African musical traits visible in Brazilian music include the use of polyphony, use of short melodic motives, and improvisation and variations on these motives. Call and response patterns evident in Brazilian music are also important in African music (Behague, "Music of Brazil" 223-244).

As Portugal was the country that colonized Brazil, there is substantial European influence in Brazil's music. Portuguese melodies can still be recognized in Brazilian tunes, especially in children's songs. Melodic organizations that follow European patterns tend to have arched melodies with conjunct motion. If leaps occur they tend to be at the beginning of the song, followed by conjunct descending motion. Short symmetrical phrases in antecedent and consequent order also show an European influence. Songs closely associated with Iberian folk traditions use 3/4, 6/8 or 9/8 meters. The Portuguese material in Brazilian music has undergone essential modifications but certain stylistic characteristics remain, as found in Iberian folk polyphony. The harmonic

system in Brazilian music is for the most part of European heritage. Portugal, in particular, was probably the most influential contributor to the present day style of Brazilian music (Behague, "Music of Brazil" 223-244).

### Urban Popular Music

The folk and popular tunes of Brazil are extremely varied in style. The following types are often found in Villa-Lobos's compositions. The *lundu* and *modinha* are two nineteenth-century forms that are the parents of urban popular music. Villa-Lobos used these forms in many of his compositions, even titling them "lundu" or "modinha." The characteristics of the *lundu* are simple accompaniments based on primary chords, use of large skips in the melodic line, avoidance of the tonic note of the scale at the end of melodic phrases, use of syncopated rhythmic patterns, frequent use of duple meter, and a pattern of stanza and refrain in which the stanza is declamatory and the refrain is choreographic.

The *modinha* is a sentimental love song, typically accompanied by a guitar. There is a vagueness, rubato and delayed melodic execution in its rhythm (Behague, Heitor Villa Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul 94). Other characteristics of the *modinha* are ornamentation of the vocal line, a romantic lyric character, wide leaps of the melodic line, and modulations to the parallel minor and subdominant key (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 68). Many of the *cantabile* attributes of the *modinha* can be traced to the influence of Italian opera aria style.

Villa-Lobos also sought to evoke the feeling of Brazilian city life in his works. His most successful compositions from the 1920's capture the spirit of the *choros*, a group of musicians that performs urban popular music. The players of the group are known as *choroes*. The instruments of the ensemble often include flute, clarinet, *cavaquinho* (Brazilian guitar), *ophicleide* or trombone, and percussion. They play popular instrumental music in the open air, comparable to a serenade. In a typical *choros* one of the instruments plays a solo part, while the others accompany. The melody would typically be passed from one instrument to another. The music is of an improvisational nature and of infinite variety.

Characteristic rhythmic formations of urban popular music are the organization of eighth note patterns within a duple meter into variations of 3 + 3 + 2 units. This disturbance of the pulse and careful control of the length of pauses is typical of this style of music (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 80). The *choroes* often perform dances of European origin at popular festivals. Sexteto mistico is a piece that emulates the timbres of the *choro*.

Much of Brazilian popular music is closely connected with the dance, as is popular music in African and native Brazilian cultures; for this reason, many of the most popular music styles are dances. These include European dances such as the waltz, polka, mazurka, and schottische that lost their original characteristics and assimilated Afro-Brazilian elements (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 42). Probably the best known

Brazilian dance is the samba. The term *samba* is applied to many different types of dances. However they all have the general characteristics of a sung dance of African origin, which is in binary rhythm with an obligatory syncopated accompaniment (often sixteenth, eighth, sixteenth) (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 112).

### Chapter 3

#### Brazilian Elements in Villa-Lobos's Works

##### Early Period Works

Villa-Lobos's compositional evolution can be studied in chronological sections as there were major life changes that had an impact on his compositional style. The early years of his life and the beginnings of his career as a composer were spent in Brazil (from 1887 to 1923). These early period works are not as individualistic nor as Brazilian in character as his later works. Villa-Lobos was searching for a compositional identity, as do many beginning composers. His works at this time show the influences of others (including Debussy and Tchaikovsky), and do not show a particularly unique style. These early compositions contain many works that were composed in traditional forms, such as symphonies, concertos, sonatas, etc. In these compositions, there was a conflict between traditional European structures and forms, and the beginnings of the incorporation of Brazilian elements. The duality at this point was erratic and unconsidered.

Many of these compositions bear Villa-Lobos' indelible mark, as they contain the first of many references to Brazilian society and culture. The examples of Brazilian influence are not as prolific nor as obvious as in some of his middle period compositions,

but there are hints of what is to come. His first elaborations of thematic material based on folk music include the Suite dos Canticos Sertanjos (1910), Petizada (1912), Brinquedo de Roda (1912), and Cancoes typicas brasileiras (1919).

In Uirapuru (1917), a ballet tone poem written for orchestra, there are many examples of Villa-Lobos's inclusion of Brazilian elements. The piece itself is composed around several Native Brazilian stories about the mystical jungle bird, *Uirapuru*. Villa-Lobos uses native folk instruments, including the *reco-reco*, *tambor*, *pratos*, and *bombo*. He also uses the violinophone to imitate the nose-flute of the Parecis Indians.

Figure 1. Uirapuru



The score contains an impression of the nocturnal jungle life. Villa-Lobos uses piano and percussion fragments, and filigree woodwind motifs to imitate the rustlings and twitterings of the jungle (Wright 19-20).

Figure 2. Uirapuru

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Uirapuru". It consists of several staves. The top staff is a single melodic line, likely for a flute, featuring a trill marked with a '6' and a forte dynamic (*ff*). Below this are two grand staff systems (treble and bass clefs). The first grand staff system contains a piano accompaniment with sustained chords and a section labeled "Réco-Réco solo" with the instruction "(suono grave)". This section includes a "raspando" effect and a dynamic marking of *mf sonoro*. The second grand staff system is mostly empty, with some notes in the bass line.

Another early composition that shows Villa-Lobos's interest in his native Brazil is Sexteto místico, written in 1917. This was Villa-Lobos's first attempt at imitating the characteristic timbres of the *choros* that he knew so well. The composition is scored for a *choros*-like ensemble of flute, oboe, saxophone, and guitar. It also shows an Impressionistic influence in the use of celesta and harp. The piece captures the improvisational nature of the *choros* by such techniques as the flutist's melodic decorations and the saxophonist's seemingly spontaneous scale and arpeggio passages. The music often breaks into passages of



contrapuntal rhapsody (Wright 34-5).

Figure 3. Sexteto mistico, Bars 1-4

The image shows a musical score for the first four bars of 'Sexteto mistico'. The score is arranged in six staves, each representing a different instrument: flute (fl.), oboe (ob.), alto saxophone (E-flat) (alto sax. (E $\flat$ )), guitar (gtr.), cello (cel.), and harp (hp.). The music is in 4/4 time and features a complex contrapuntal texture. The flute part begins with a melodic line marked *mf*. The oboe and alto saxophone parts enter in the second bar with their own melodic lines, also marked *mf*. The guitar part includes a section marked 'harm.' (harmonics) in the second bar. The cello and harp parts provide a harmonic and rhythmic foundation, with the harp featuring a prominent triplet figure in the fourth bar. The overall mood is mysterious and intricate, characteristic of Villa-Lobos's style.

### Productive Period in France

The second phase of Villa-Lobos's compositional life centered around his activities in Paris. This period was his most productive and contains many of his best works. It was during this time that he developed a more individualistic style and a more well-defined Brazilian character in his music. Rather than trying to imitate other composers or fit his music into traditional forms, Villa-Lobos solidified his own style which worked much more successfully for him. In this manner he created a Brazilian form of art music that incorporated the vast landscape of Brazilian life.

During this period (1923-1929) Villa-Lobos used freer, sectionalized

compositional forms which suited him much better than the traditional European forms of statement, development, and recapitulation. This use of multi-sectional forms enabled him to express his ideas more fully.

The thematic material that Villa-Lobos used during this time included shorter and more concise statements than had occurred in previous works. The rhythmic elements were also shorter and more concise (Peppercorn, Villa-Lobos: the Music 44).

Nonet, a work composed in 1923 for ten instrumentalists and chorus, was the first composition that really solidified Villa-Lobos's own style of composition. It was a sign of things to come. Nonet is a geographical impression of Brazil, constructed in a mosaic-like score. It shows Villa-Lobos's impressions of Brazil from the vast untamed landscapes to the tropical cities to the singing games of children. The work opens with a saxophone solo that is surrounded by improvisatory decorations in the piccolo, oboe and clarinet parts, suggesting the music of the *choroes*. The chorus provides a synthesis of children's games, *macumba* rites, and Native Brazilian chant. The special muting of the clarinet suggests the sound of a particular Native Brazilian trumpet. The climax of the piece includes the chorus singing four different Native Brazilian chants at once. Villa-Lobos also used many Brazilian percussion instruments in Nonet, including the *xocalho* (a type of rattler), *reco-reco* (a guiro), *cocos* (two coconut shells), and *cuica* (a friction drum). These percussion instruments create an intricate and formidable underlay of polyrhythms, over which the melodies are played out (Wright 40-1). In addition, the

composition contains a large number of rhythmic patterns that are associated with Brazilian urban popular music (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 122).

Figure 4. Nonet, Bars 52-55

The image displays a musical score for a nonet, covering bars 52 to 55. The score is arranged in a multi-staff format. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Clar.), Saxophone (Sax.), Trombone (Tbn.), Trumpet (Tym.), Xylophone (Xyloph.), Tambourine (Tamb.), Bombo, Soprano (Sop.), 1st Contralto (1<sup>st</sup> Cont. div.), 2nd Contralto (2<sup>nd</sup> Cont. div.), Tenor (Ten.), Baritone (Bar. div.), Bass (Bass. div.), and Piano (Piano). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *allarg.* and *mf*. The vocal parts have lyrics in Portuguese, including "Oh! Quêh! Vi-ôh! Vi-ôh! Vi-ôh! Vi-ôh!" and "Pa-né - pé! Toupané - pé! Toupané - pé! Toupané - pé! Toupané - pé!". The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes.

A very important set of works of this time period is the Choros, a series of works which embodies Villa-Lobos's vision of Brazil. Villa-Lobos composed them primarily

during the years 1924-29. With the Choros Villa-Lobos created a style which differed in essence from his earlier music. He partly realized the aims he had been striving for: a national style of music with a Brazilian character. Villa-Lobos used the term *choros* for a variety of works with no definite musical form, scored for ensembles of various sizes. The term *choros* refers, more accurately to a type than to a form of composition. Despite this, Villa-Lobos describes these works as a form of composition: "... (they) represent a new form of composition which merges the different aspects of Brazilian popular and Indian music" (Peppercorn, Villa-Lobos: the Music 50).

Choros no. 1 (1921) composed for solo guitar, contains elements of urban Brazilian dance forms, such as the use of anacrusis and sixteenth, eighth, sixteenth note figurations.

Choros no. 3 (1925) scored for male chorus and seven wind instruments, is an example of Villa-Lobos's use of material imitating indigenous sounds. He used onomatopoeic sounds to imitate the native languages. This is the only major work entirely dependant on authentic Native Brazilian music for its content.

Choros no. 10 (1926) is written for a large orchestra and mixed chorus. It is subtitled "Rasga o Coracao" ("Rend the Heart") and is a very good example of the Brazilian scene, as it contains many different aspects of Brazilian life. A solitary cry from the solo flute at the beginning of the piece represents the song of the rare forest bird, *Azulao de Mata*. The Native Brazilian presence is established by many motifs related to

the indigenous chants "Mokocece maka" and "Nonzani-na", one pentatonic, the other making use of quarter-tones in the original form. Above the polyrhythms and syncopations of the Native Brazilianisms is superimposed the legato lines of an urban schottische based on a popular melody entitled "Yara" by Ancleto de Medeiros. "Yara" was traditionally sung to the poem "Rasga o Coracao" by poet Catulo da Paixao Cearense, hence the subtitle of the work (Wright 69-71). Villa-Lobos orchestrates the sounds of many birds typical to Brazil in this composition by the use of harmonics in the violins, and by the use of high-pitched notes with grace notes in the flutes and other woodwinds. The percussion section includes Native Brazilian instruments, such as the *reco-reco* (guiro), rattlers, and *puita* (friction drum). The writing is polyrhythmic in many places, and contains the use of rhythmic ostinatos, which is indicative of its African roots (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 132).

Figure 5. Choros no. 10, Bars 8-9

The image shows a page of a musical score for "Choros no. 10" by Villa-Lobos, covering bars 8 and 9. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Clar.), Saxophone (Sax.), Bassoon (Fag.), three Cornets (I, II, III), Trumpet (Tromb.), Piccolo (Piccolo), Cavaquinho (Cav.), Triangle (Triâng.), and Gong (Gong.). The piano and harp parts are grouped together. The vocal parts include Soprano (Sop.), Contralto (Cont.), Tenor (Ten.), Baritone (Bar.), and Bass (Baix.). The lyrics are written below the vocal staves. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *pp*.

Lyrics for Soprano: re - - fle - - cta - - don

Lyrics for Contralto: - jó, Tá-ya, Tá-ya, Sa-ba-rimba ka-ma-rim-ba ma-ra - jó, Ta-ya-pó ka-yó-pó-lá, Ta-ya-pó ka-yó-pó-

Lyrics for Tenor: - lá, Ta-pi-tó pa-la-pa-lá, pa-la-pa-lá, pa-la-pa-lá, Ja-ka-tá ka-ma-ra-já, Ja-ka-tá ka-ma-ra-

Lyrics for Baritone: - jó, Kyi Kyi Kyi tá - cêi Tá-hé-ré ki-mé-ré-jé, Tá-hé-ré ki-mé-ré-

Lyrics for Bass: - jó, Tá-rá-tá ka-rá-ta-tá, ka-rá-ta-tá, ka-rá-ta-tá, Tá-hé-ré ki-mé-ré-jé, Tá-hé-ré ki-mé-ré-

### National Endeavors

Villa-Lobos spent the third period (1930-1945) of his compositional life in Brazil, devoting much effort to nationalistic pursuits, including music education. His

compositions of this period definitely have a nationalistic flavor, but are not as innovative as are the previous period works. Most of this output was in fact of a national or educational nature. He wrote the Guia pratico during this time.

During this period, he wrote an important set of compositions, the Bachianas brasileiras. This is a set of nine suites, which began as a series of genre pieces for cello and piano. These were a result of Villa-Lobos's attempt to meld the concept of two ideas, Neo-classicism (writing in the style of Bach) and Brazilian musical material. Most of the movements bear a title in the baroque style, such as "Aria" or "Prelude" and a subtitle that is suggestive of a type of Brazilian popular music, such as "Choro" or "Embolada."

Bachianas brasileiras no. 4 is a work of fairly prolific Brazilian content. It is in four movements, originally scored for piano, and completed in 1940. It was scored for orchestra in 1941. The first movement, "Preludio" is in the style of Bach, and does not contain any obvious folk elements. The second movement, "Chorale Prelude" contains a song of the backlands, enhanced by the call of the *araponga*, the blacksmith bird of the *sertao* (interior), heard as a continuous high B flat (Wright 92). The third movement, "Aria" contains a folk theme, "O mana deixou ir" which is from northeast Brazil. The fourth movement, "Danse," is subtitled "Miudinho" (meaning "tiny"), which is the name of one of the dance steps of the *samba*. This small step idea is represented by three-note cell patterns within a duple meter, causing a continuous sensation of metric instability. This creates a continuous rhythmic counterplay of duple against triple. There is also a

frequent "delayed downbeat" effect achieved by the tie from a weak to a strong beat, which is taken from the syncopation common to Brazilian urban music. The folk melody "Vamos Maruca" which is included in Villa-Lobos' collection of folk melodies, Guia pratico, appears in measure eleven (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 135-8).

Figure 6. Bachianas brasileiras no. 4 Dansa ("Miudinho"), Bars 1-24

*MUITO RITMADO • ANIMADO*

8º abaixo ..... 19 • V. L.

### Brazilian Ambassador

The last years of Villa-Lobos's life, from 1945-1959, were frequently spent



traveling abroad as an unofficial Brazilian ambassador to the world. His compositions from this time do not generally include his best works (perhaps because of the many commissioned works he composed), and are not so obviously nationalistic as before. These compositions generally incorporate an ethereal, other-worldly manner, which was the final refining process in Villa-Lobos's long artistic evolution (Wright 98). Villa-Lobos sought out a purer, less exotic compositional style than before, using a sparse, cerebral style of writing. These pieces are not so openly Brazilian as previous works were, although the elements are still present in many cases.

Typical of Villa-Lobos' later works is the abandonment of any overtly Brazilian folk idiom. The melodic material is now of a cosmopolitan Brazilianism rather than of an obviously folkloric one. One of his most outstanding later works is the String Quartet no. 17, written in 1957. Aptly, Simon Wright describes this work: "The lean, contrapuntal textures of Quartet no. 17 are far removed from the charming 'Old Republic' cameos of the first quartet, or the folksy gaiety of no. 5: they represent a supreme distillation of Brazilian spirituality" (140). The spirit of Brazil is present in the quartet, but not conspicuously so as in earlier works. The one obvious use of a folk idiom is the use of *modinha*-type melodies in the second movement (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 138).

## Chapter 4

### Brazilian Elements in Assobio a Jato

#### Introduction

One of Villa-Lobos's many chamber works for flute is Assobio a Jato. This piece was composed for flute and cello in 1950, during the last period of Villa-Lobos's life. The work is dedicated to Elizabeth and Carleton Sprague Smith. Carleton Smith was the former chief of the Music Division of the New York Public Library. The premiere of the composition was in Rio de Janeiro on March 13, 1950 at *the Auditorio do Ministerio da Educacao e Cultura*. The flutist was Ary Ferreira; the cellist was Ibero Gomes Grosso (Appleby, Heitor Villa-Lobos 110).

The title Assobio a Jato (The Jet Whistle) is given to the piece as a description. The flutist at the end of the third movement blows into the flute as though warming it up while playing ascending scales, a sound which is supposed to imitate the jet whistle. This work, although a later composition, still shows evidence of Brazilian musical characteristics. The devices employed are less obvious than in earlier compositions, some of which quoted folk music directly.

#### Brief Analysis

Assobio a Jato is a three movement work, consisting of an *Allegro non troppo*,

*Adagio*, and *Vivo*. The movements are essentially three character pieces, as there is no overt thematic relation. The movements of this work are in sectional forms rather than developmental forms. The first movement is an ABAB form, the second is an ABACABA form, and the third is an AB(A)AB Coda form.

The texture of Assobio a Jato is contrapuntal. Typically one of the instruments will have an important melodic line while the other supplies multiple-voice counterpoint. One voice is almost always the soloistic part, while the other is accompanimental.

This work is tonal, but it does not use traditional tonal voice leading. There is much chromaticism present, and the lines do not move harmonically but contrapuntally. The first movement is in D minor. The second movement is harmonically ambiguous but ends in A minor and the third movement returns to D minor. At times the harmony is almost not a consideration as the texture is sparse, but at other times there is clearly functional harmonic writing.

The rhythmic material in Assobio a Jato is not technically difficult when each part is considered individually. The first and third movement are in 3/4 meter with basic duple or triple divisions of the beat. The second movement is in 6/8 meter with fairly straightforward compound rhythmic figures. Although there are fairly standard rhythms throughout, there are interesting features to note in the interplay between the two instruments: the extensive use of two against three, the use of syncopation, polymeter and hemiola.

### The First Movement

The first movement, *Allegro non troppo*, contains many Brazilian elements. One of the definitive Brazilian elements is in the writing of the flute part. The use of the flute itself is indicative of Brazilian urban popular music, as it is the most popular of the *choros* instruments. The writing of the flute part in Assobio a Jato is *choros*-like, especially in the first and third movements. A quote from The Music of Brazil describes the playing of flutist Joaquim Antonio da Silva Callado (1848-1880), who led the most popular *choros* group in Rio during the late nineteenth century: "Callado's style of playing was characterized by great virtuosity, rapid modulations, and octave leaps in the melodic line performed in a manner that created the illusion of two flutes playing simultaneously an octave apart" (Appleby 72). As can be seen, this description of Callado's playing also accurately describes Villa-Lobos's writing in Assobio a Jato. There are many virtuosic passages in the flute part that are technically demanding, especially the quick modulations in the third movement (measures 148-151 for instance). Also present in the first movement is the writing of compound melody in the flute part (measures 40-45). This style of writing is also reminiscent of Bach's use of compound melody, a technique that Villa-Lobos used in an earlier set of works, the Bachianas brasileiras.

Figure 7. *Assobio a Jato*, Bars 37-41

Other aspects of the first movement are also reminiscent of the *choros*. The rhythm and meter (3/4) suggest a waltz, especially as the cello plays strong melodic notes on beat one, while the flute plays supporting material on beats two and three. The waltz is a dance of European origin which gained much popularity in Brazil, as well as some Brazilian characteristics. The *choros* musicians played many waltzes in their repertory of dances.

The melodic character of the first theme of the *Allegro* movement is perhaps also reminiscent of a *modinha* folk song in certain aspects. The *modinha* was another song type played by the *choros*. It is described by Appleby as containing ornamentation, a romantic lyric character, wide leaps of the melodic line, and modulations to the parallel minor and subdominant key (The Music of Brazil 68). The *modinha* imitated the

*cantabile* character of the Italian opera aria. As can be seen, the character of the first movement melody is very romantic with sweeping movements that include wide leaps of the melodic line (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Assobio a Jato, Bars 1-6



Examples of the *modinha*-like ornamentations that frequently occur in the first movement are grace notes and triplet figures that fill in skips or turn about a note.

Figure 9. Assobio a Jato, Bars 33-39

The rhythmic character of the melody in the first movement is not characteristic of a *modinha*, however, as it is too straightforward. The true *modinha* has a delayed

downbeat and rubato feel that is not evident in this melody. Also not evident is any modulation to the parallel minor or subdominant (although the flute melody is the correct fugal answer to the cello's first theme).

Another characteristic of Assobio a Jato that gives it a Brazilian flavor is the use of improvisation and variations on the thematic material. These techniques are reminiscent of the African influence in Brazilian music, a technique which is also a hallmark of the *choros* musicians. Part of this improvisatory style is the passing of the melodic material between flute and cello. These techniques occur quite frequently. In the first movement the flute imitates the cello's opening melody for three measures, but then it digresses to different variations on that theme, becoming more and more improvisational. The flute and cello trade the important melodic line back and forth, alternating cello, flute, cello, flute, which also makes the piece sound as if it were an impromptu performance.

Figure 10. Assobio a Jato, Bars 1-6

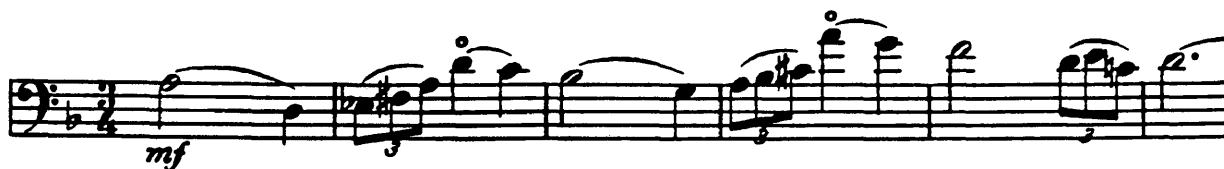
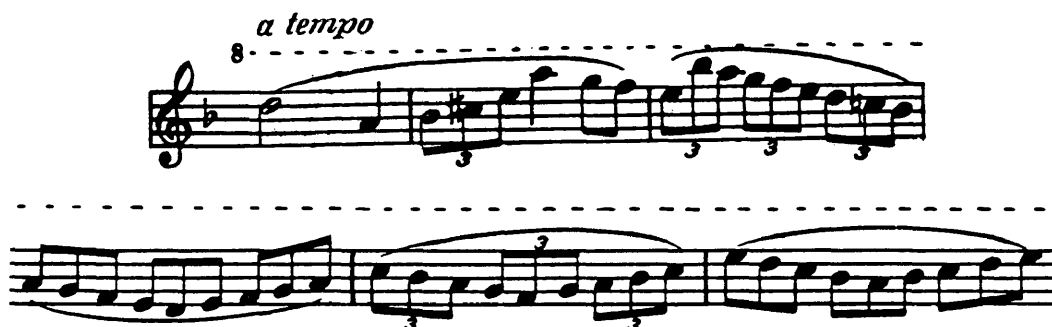
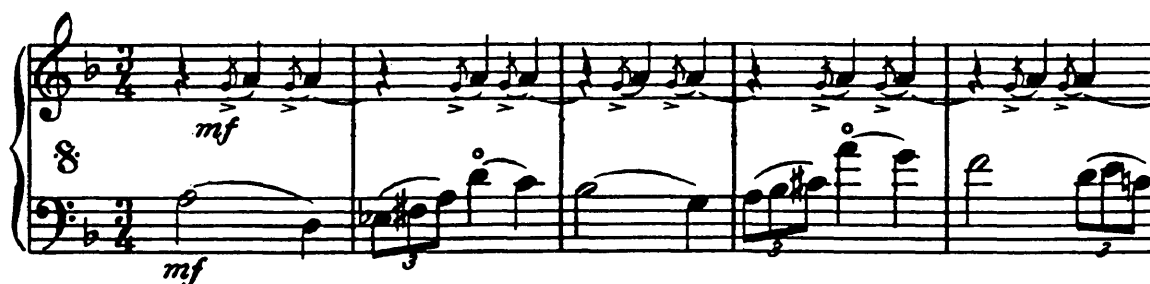


Figure 11. *Assobio a Jato*, Bars 49-54

Another indication of Brazilian music in this movement is the juxtaposition of a long-breathed melodic phrase with reiterated syllabic patterns. This occurs in the first few measures of the first movement, as the cello plays a lyrical melody while the flute plays recurring quarter notes on the same pitch. According to Wright, this type of combination is imitative of native Brazilian incantation (61).

Figure 12. *Assobio a Jato*, Bars 1-6

### The Second Movement

The *Adagio* movement also contains many elements that suggest Brazilian music, especially with regard to rhythm. This movement contains many syncopations, including



a "delayed downbeat" effect which is created by tying a note from a weak beat to a strong beat. Syncopation and the "delayed downbeat" are very common elements in urban popular music (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 138).

This movement also displays many characteristics of the *modinha*, which include rhythmic vagueness, rubato and delayed melodic execution. The feeling of rhythmic vagueness is created by the use of polyrhythms and polymeters between the flute and cello. The feeling of rubato and delayed melodic execution is created by the many tied notes from the weak beat to the strong beat.

Figure 13. Assobio a Jato, Bars 69-73

There is a lack of synchronism between the melody and accompaniment which is typical of the *modinha*. The flute and cello are often moving in counterpoint so there is a weakened feeling of pulse or synchronism.

Figure 14. *Assobio a Jato*, Bars 104-108



The cello part of the second movement is particularly guitar-like, which is reminiscent of the *modinha*, as the guitar is the primary accompaniment for the *modinha*-singer. This is evident in the use of sixth-chord progressions and the descending melodic bass lines. (Behague, *Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul* 82)

Figure 15. *Assobio a Jato*, Bars 86-94

The second movement also contains melodic elements of the *modinha* as there is ornamentation and wide leaps within the melodic line. There is also a motion from E

minor at the beginning to the subdominant A minor, which is another characteristic of the *modinha*. (See Figure 15.)

One of the melodic elements in the second movement is reminiscent of Villa-Lobos's earlier imitations of Brazilian birds. Villa-Lobos frequently imitated the sounds of jungle birds in earlier works by using grace notes, appoggiaturas, woodwind filigree-type patterns and string harmonics. In Assobio a Jato there are several places that are reminiscent of these techniques, although Villa-Lobos was probably not intending anything so literal in this work. The opening grace notes in the flute of the first movement sound bird-like as do the thirty-second note patterns of the flute part in the second movement.

Figure 16. Assobio a Jato, Bars 72-73



### The Third Movement

Once again in the third movement there are many references to urban popular music and the *choros* musicians. This movement is marked *Vivo* and is very quick. There are many melodic elements which suggest the *choroes*, especially the many examples of chromaticism and virtuosic writing.

Figure 17. Assobio a Jato, Bars 148-151

Also typical of the *choros* style of playing was the passing of the melodic material between instruments in a spontaneous manner as in live performance. This occurs quite frequently between the flute and cello parts in the third movement. For example the cello ends the first section with a theme that was first stated by the flute. The cello also imitates the flute melody of measure 158 several measures later. This improvisatory-sounding writing is found throughout the work.

Figure 18. Assobio a Jato, Bars 120-125Figure 19. Assobio a Jato, Bars 309-314

In the third movement there are many rhythmic elements that are indicative of Brazilian urban popular music. Villa-Lobos was very creative in writing many different kinds of syncopations. One of the primary rhythmic devices of the movement occurs in the interplay between the flute and cello, as the cello is often playing a duple pattern while the flute plays a triple pattern. Most frequently the flute plays in a triple simple meter, but there are also occurrences of duple compound and triple compound meter played against the cello's duple pattern. This two against three pattern occurs regularly, and is characteristic of the urban popular music style as it is very lilting and suggestive of a dance. It is a particular style that Appleby notes as representing a dance step in the *samba* called "Miudinho" (The Music of Brazil 137).

Figure 20. Assobio a Jato, Bars 136-140



Villa-Lobos also creates syncopations through melodic means as is evident in both the flute and cello parts. He does this by writing compound melody in syncopated patterns.

Figure 21. Assobio a Jato, Bar 124



African influence on the urban popular music of Brazil is especially evident in the third movement. The use of hemiola occurring in the cello part, and the many polyrhythms and polymeters between the two instruments attest to the African influence.

Figure 22. Assobio a Jato, Bars 187-193



Yet another Brazilian rhythmic element in the third movement is found in the flute part. There is an occurrence of a 3 + 3 + 2 configuration in the eighth note groupings. This is a very common rhythm of urban popular music (Appleby, The Music of Brazil 42).

Figure 23. *Assobio a Jato*, Bars 141-142



Another interesting feature of this movement is the guitar-like writing for cello, a writing technique Villa-Lobos often used to evoke the *choros*. There are sixth-chords and pizzicato techniques used that are reminiscent of the Brazilian style of guitar playing.

Figure 24. *Assobio a Jato*, Bars 207-210



In the third movement there is another example of the imitation of the indigenous style of incantation. The cello plays a lyrical melodic line, while the flute plays a recurring double-tongued pattern against it.

Figure 25. Assobio a Jato, Bars 309-312



### Conclusion

As can be clearly seen in the musical example of Assobio a Jato, Villa-Lobos continued to employ Brazilian musical techniques in his later compositions. Particularly evident is the imitation of the *choros* musicians and urban styles of music. There is much syncopation, improvisational and virtuosic writing, and dance influence evident in this composition.

These Brazilian elements may not be as readily identifiable as the techniques used in some of Villa-Lobos's earlier compositions. Nevertheless, the later Villa-Lobos compositions cannot be discounted as lacking in Brazilian musical idioms. Although the Brazilian elements in the later compositions appear in a more subtle manner, Villa-Lobos continued his stylistic portrayal of Brazil throughout his life.



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