

Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras* n° 1: representation of Brazilian identity through the invention of the Cello Ensemble Genre

Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1 por Villa-Lobos: representación de la identidad brasileña a través de la invención del género ensemble de violonchelos

Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1 de Villa-Lobos: representação da identidade brasileira através da invenção do gênero conjunto de violoncelos

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ABSTRACT:

In the years 1930-1945, Villa-Lobos composed nine *Bachianas Brasileiras*, suites that combined elements of Brazilian popular and traditional music with characteristics of the music of J. S. Bach. The 1st and 5th in the series were scored for the highly unusual 'orchestra of cellos', a formation almost nonexistent before. Villa-Lobos' unique stylistic synthesis, combined with his tremendously skillful treatment in writing for the orchestra of cellos, resulted in works that laid the foundation for a new genre, the cello ensemble. *Bachianas Brasileiras* n° 1 and 5, but especially n° 1, have since been embraced and celebrated by cellists and cello ensembles the world over. These works helped to form the now flourishing genre of the cello ensemble and continue to this day to be the finest and most-performed examples of the cello ensemble repertoire.

RESUMEN:

Entre los años 1930-1945, Villa-Lobos compuso las nueve *Bachianas Brasileiras*, suites que combinaban elementos de la música popular y tradicional brasileña con características de la música de J. S. Bach. La primera y quinta de la serie fueron escritas para la instrumentación inusual de una «orquesta de violonchelos», una formación que casi no existía anteriormente. La síntesis estilística única de Villa-Lobos, combinada con su tratamiento tremendamente hábil para la orquesta de violonchelos, dio como resultado obras que sentaron las bases para un nuevo género, el *ensemble* de violonchelos. Las *Bachianas Brasileiras* n° 1 y 5, y especialmente la n° 1, desde entonces han sido adoptadas y celebradas por violonchelistas y grupos de violonchelos de todo el mundo. Estas obras ayudaron a formar el género, ahora floreciente, del *ensemble* de violonchelo y continúan hasta nuestros días como los mejores y más representados ejemplos del repertorio para el *ensemble* de violonchelos.

RESUMO:

Entre 1930 e 1945, Villa-Lobos compôs as nove *Bachianas Brasileiras*, suítes que combinavam elementos da música brasileira popular e tradicional com características da música de J. S. Bach. Duas obras dessa série, a primeira e a quinta, foram escritas para a instrumentação incomum de "orquestra de violoncelos", uma formação quase inexistente anteriormente. A síntese estilística única de Villa-Lobos combinada ao seu tratamento tremendamente hábil para a orquestra de violoncelos, resultou em obras que lançaram as bases para um novo gênero, conhecido como conjunto de violoncelos. *Bachianas Brasileiras* n° 1 e n° 5 foram desde então, adotadas e celebradas por violoncelistas e conjuntos de violoncelos em todo o mundo, especialmente a n° 1. Essas obras ajudaram a estruturar o gênero, agora florescente e, continuam até hoje, sendo os melhores e mais executados exemplos do repertório para conjunto de violoncelos.

1. Introduction

In composing the series, Villa-Lobos artfully brought together characteristics of the music of German baroque composer J. S. Bach with elements of Brazilian popular and traditional music. Taking advantage of an opportune political moment in Brazil, Villa-Lobos produced the works that solidified his role and image as the Brazilian composer nonplus ultra, music that exhibited the composer's distinctly Latin American musical language while dialoguing with the height of Western classical music, Bach. The first work in the series, *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1*, was scored for the unheard-of instrumentation of an 'orchestra of cellos' and refers to the Brazilian folk music types *embolada*, *modinha*, and *choro*. By scoring for an orchestra of cellos, writing with intimate knowledge of the instrument's idiomatic possibilities, and exploring the cello ensemble formation with a sophistication that had never been done before, Villa-Lobos unwittingly invented the cello ensemble genre. Since the composition of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and later *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 5*, the cello ensemble genre has taken on a life of its own in great part due to the remarkable quality of Villa-Lobos' works, and in the past few decades we witness an extraordinary proliferation of cello ensemble activity throughout the world, with Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras n. 1* retaining unrivalled popularity and frequency among cellists. As such, representation of Brazilian identity has spread across the world through the astounding popularity of the omnipresent cello ensemble genre.

2. Nationalism in classical music history

Nationalism in 20th century classical music is a robust and fertile field. In Brazil, contemporary composers have even taken to classifying their works as nationalist or universal, owing to the overwhelming number of national references in Brazilian contemporary music. Musical nationalism is a phenomenon that pervades western classical music of the last 150 years – before that, it was negligible. During the classical period, in the second half of the 18th century, prevailing tastes and preferences were for a cosmopolitan musical style, one that incorporated the finest traits of each nation. Johann Joachim Quantz wrote in 1752, "Today there is but one music in all of Europe...this universal language of our continent" (Grout; Palisca, 1988, p. 543). Only in the second half of the 19th century do we see the first seeds of nationalism taking root, especially in France and Russia as a reaction to the dominance of German and Austrian music. In Saint Petersburg, five young Russians formed their own anti-academic clique; from 1856 – 1870, Mily Balakirev, Aleksander Borodin, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov rejected German models and developed a national Russian musical style. In Paris Camille Saint-Saëns co-founded the Société Nationale de Musique in 1871 to promote French music, counting among its members César Franck and Gabriel Fauré. Dvořák was so successful at evoking the natural beauty and lively spirit of his native Bohemia that he was invited to New York in the 1890s to teach young American composers how to develop their own national style. The beginning of the 20th century saw musical nationalism sprouting up everywhere: Sibelius put Finland on the musical map with orchestral works that somehow communicated the essence of his homeland; and Hungarian composers Bartók and Kodály made spectacular efforts to record and document authentic folk music in various parts of Eastern Europe, using the raw material as inspiration for their own concert works. Villa-Lobos himself was privy to a particular trend of French nationalism while he lived in Paris in the 1920s – during that decade, in reaction to the horrors of World War I and rebelling against pre-war exaggerations of German expressionism and even French impressionism, a cadre of six young headstrong French composers – nicknamed "Les six", propagated a neo-classical French school.

KEYWORDS

Heitor Villa-Lobos; *Bachianas Brasileiras*; cello ensemble.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Heitor Villa-Lobos; *Bachianas Brasileiras*; ensemble de violoncelos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Heitor Villa-Lobos; *Bachianas Brasileiras*; conjunto de violoncelos.

Recibido:
31/05/2020

Aceptado:
25/08/2022

Consciously or not, from a very early age Villa-Lobos had been gathering the raw material and preparing himself to forge a new authentically Brazilian classical musical language directly informed and influenced by the people and nature of Brazil. As a child his father taught him to hear music in everything, from the song of a bird to the chugging of a train; as an adolescent he reveled in the nocturnal musical riches of Rio's *choro* musicians; and his wanderings and travels throughout the vast land of Brazil brought him in contact with diverse and fascinating folk music traditions such as the *embolada* and *desafio* in the northeast.

3. Musical manifestation of Brazilian identity

There was no shortage of quality classical music being produced in Brazil before Villa-Lobos - composers like Carlos Gomes, Henrique Oswald, and Alberto Nepomuceno wrote excellent works. While their music betrayed the irrepressible influence of European classical music, they also began naturally to infuse their works with Brazilian elements. Gomes composed the opera *Il Guarany* in 1870 with a plot involving Brazilian Indians, though the opera's sung language remained Italian; and Nepomuceno composed the orchestral suite *Série brasileira* in 1891 that quoted the Brazilian folk song *Sapo Cururu* and included references to *maxixe* and *batuque*. But the musical language and vocabulary of these Brazilian composers was still wholly entrenched in European styles and models. When we hear those works today, to our modern ears they don't sound Brazilian or South American – they sound Italian, or French, or of some interesting mix of various European styles. Villa-Lobos was the first Latin American composer who succeeded in developing a distinctly national musical language and identity. This became especially evident in his second period (1923 – 1930) with the *Choros* series composed while living in Paris, and fully blossomed in his third period (1930 – 1945) when he composed the *Bachianas Brasileiras* back in Brazil, working towards Brazilian musical education under the Vargas regime. Early works from his first period (1908 – 1923) reveal some latent national traits and characteristics but are overwhelmed by European, particularly French, influences. In his final period (1945 – death in 1959), Brazilian references have become intrinsic and less prominent on the surface, entirely absorbed in the musical gestalt, and subsumed in a universal whole.

Since Villa-Lobos, we have seen other Latin American composers apply similarly effective and successful methods in expressing national identities through music. The most prominent successors were Carlos Chávez from Mexico (1899 – 1978) and Alberto Ginastera of Argentina (1916 – 1983). In the 21st century we now see an overabundance of contemporary music coming out of Latin American nations, much of it dialoguing directly or indirectly with aspects of national identities to varying degrees.

Villa-Lobos himself was eager to propagate his image as a true Brazilian musical representative, the fruit of Brazil's abundant and glorious nature:

Yes, I am Brazilian and very Brazilian. In my music I let the rivers and seas of this great Brazil sing. I do not place restrictions or brakes, nor stifle the tropical exuberance of our forests and our skies, which I transport instinctively to everything I write (Paz, 2019, p. 29)¹.

He also encouraged others to study their culture as a path to finding an authentically national musical voice, "The serious composer should study the musical heritage of his country, whether under the literary, poetic, political, or musical aspect" (Paz, 2019, p. 29)².

By first making a name for himself in Paris as a Brazilian composer in the 1920s, Villa-Lobos gained recognition back home in Brazil. He built on this success and national image with the *Bachianas Brasileiras* series, composed concurrently with many other pieces in Brazil from 1930 – 1945. These works, in addition to his activity with Brazilian musical education, solidified his role as the premiere representative of Brazilian classical music at home and abroad. So much so that when the world reopened after World War II in 1945, Villa-Lobos was inundated with international invitations, mostly from the USA, commissions for new works and engagements to conduct abroad, with the majority of his whirlwind activities focused in the USA until his death in 1959.

4. Young Villa-Lobos, Bach, and the cello

Along with Brazilian music, Villa-Lobos' youth was filled with classical European music of all kinds, in various settings. His father hosted chamber music parties at their home, and Rio de Janeiro enjoyed a bustling classical music scene, with certain preferences for French and Italian fare. Villa-Lobos' father taught young Heitor to play the cello, beginning at the age of 6 by adapting a viola with a makeshift endpin. At the age of 8, he would sit under his Aunt Zizinha's piano, listening to the preludes and fugues of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Years later, Villa-Lobos would arrange some of those same preludes and fugues for the mass choral spectacles of *canto orfeonico* as part of his national musical education project, as well as arranging some for an orchestra of cellos³. Playing the cello proved useful for an adolescent Villa-Lobos to earn some money as a gigging musician, playing in cafes and cinema orchestras. As a young man Villa-Lobos travelled extensively across Brazil, encountering different folk music and styles. Barros wrote, "he was astounded to ascertain that many modulations and countermelodies in the manner of Bach live in these faraway places" (Barros, 1951, p. 35). Villa-Lobos performed some of his early works for cello and piano with his first wife, pianist Lucilia Guimarães in concerts around Rio in 1915 (Pilger, 2013, pp. 69 – 79); and in 1931, just when the *Bachianas Brasileiras* were percolating in his mind, Villa-Lobos and his wife undertook a marathon chamber music concert tour along with a few other musicians, performing 54 concerts throughout the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Paraná (Mariz, 2005, p. 108).

5. Evolution of the cello ensemble

Before Villa-Lobos composed his seminal works *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and *5* for orchestra of cellos⁴, a few composers had already contributed to the evolution of the cello ensemble genre. Its origins were in the opera repertoire - Gioachino Rossini's *Overture* to the opera *Guillaume Tell* (1829) begins with about three minutes of cello ensemble writing for 5 solo cellos with a bit of support from pizzicato basses and a few timpani rolls to illustrate distant thunder. Towards the end of the 19th century, cello pedagogue Karl Davidov composed a *Hymn* (year unknown) for 10 cellos, 2 basses and timpani, probably inspired by Rossini's overture. Another important cello professor, Julius Klengel, followed Davidov's lead and composed his own *Hymnus* for 12 cellos (1920). These hymns by Davidov and Klengel treat the ensemble of cellos as a choir – beautiful, slow music, singing lines in rich harmonies, with little activity, complexity, or contrast. The cello ensemble genre took a giant leap forward a few years later, when Pau Casals, one of the most important performers in the history of the cello, composed *Sardana* (1926) for an orchestra of cellos! Here we find for the first time the designation 'orchestra of cellos', and indeed Casals' 6-minute work treats the ensemble more as an orchestra than as a choir with complex rhythms, idiomatic figurations and gestures, and cantabile melodies perfectly tailored to the instrument (Hoefs; Suetholz, 2018, pp. 22-23).

Villa-Lobos had contact with Casals in Paris in the 1920's – Walter Burle Marx wrote of his experience observing Casals sight-reading Villa-Lobos' *Cello Sonata n° 2* in front of the composer (Burle Marx, 1975, pp. 179-186). Whether Villa-Lobos actually heard Casals' *Sardana* for cello orchestra, or looked over the score, or simply knew that it existed, it must have given him the idea for composing for an orchestra of cellos. That idea commingled and converged with his activities of conducting masses of schoolchildren singing Bach for *canto orfeonico* and with the Brazilian folk music he had encountered throughout his life, and all was linked back to his own instrument, the instrument he learned first and played best, the cello.

6. Bachianas Brasileiras

Villa-Lobos composed the set of 9 suites from 1930 – 1945 during the Vargas regime. Convenient for the political moment but also true to the composer's nature, the works served to celebrate Brazilian identity while placing Brazilian culture on par with the most revered of European composers, J. S. Bach. The homage to Bach was in keeping with the recent trend of neoclassicism that swept Europe in the 1920's, adopted wholeheartedly by French composers such as Milhaud, whom Villa-Lobos knew well. Each movement of each of

the nine *Bachianas Brasileiras* suites (with a few exceptions) has two titles, a curious binomial nomenclature – one Bach-like title, and one Brazilian title. The Bach-like titles are the same as those used by Bach in many of his works: *Prelude, Fugue, Aria, Toccata, Fantasia*, etc. The Brazilian titles refer to Brazilian folk styles and practices with which Villa-Lobos was intimately familiar: *Modinha, Desafio, Choro, Embolada, Ponteio*, etc. For the first work in the series, *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* for orchestra of cellos, Villa-Lobos designates the three movements with the following Bach-like/Brazilian double titles:

- I. Introduction (*Embolada*)
- II. Prelude (*Modinha*)
- III. Fugue (*Conversa*)

Villa-Lobos said,

The *Bachianas Brasileiras*, numbering nine suites, are inspired by the musical atmosphere of Bach, considered as a universal folkloric source, rich and profound, with all popular sound materials from all countries, (a source) intermediary between all peoples. The music of Bach comes from the astral infinite to infiltrate itself in the earth as folk music (Béhague, 1994, p. 105).

6.1. *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1*

Villa-Lobos composed what would become the work's second and third movements, the *Prelude (Modinha)* and *Fugue (Conversa)*, in São Paulo in 1930; he completed the work by composing the eventual first movement, *Introduction (Embolada)*, in 1938. The 2nd and 3rd movements were already performed a few times before the 1st movement was written – the premiere of the incomplete work without the *Embolada* occurred in Rio de Janeiro at the Teatro Municipal, in 1931 (Correa do Lago, 2012, p. 25) or in 1932 (Barbosa 2005, p. 257). Other performances were held in Berlin and Buenos Aires soon thereafter. The complete three-movement work was premiered in Rio de Janeiro in 1938 at the Casa D'Italia, organized by the Sociedade Propagadora da Música Sinfônica e de Câmara – Pró-Música. The composer conducted, and his orchestra of cellos consisted of Iberê Gomes Grosso, Alfredo Gomes, Antonio Jorge Junior, Erio de Vicenzi, Jose Guerra Vicente, Nelson Cintra, Newton Padua, and Raphael Jannibelli (Barbosa, 2005, p. 257). Villa-Lobos dedicated the work to the eminent Catalan cellist Pau Casals, who was not only the most highly regarded cellist of the era but was pivotal in Villa-Lobos' invention of the cello ensemble genre, as we saw above.

I. Introduction (*Embolada*)

Sharing some similarities with modern-day rap music, the *embolada* is a text-driven Brazilian folk music practice, the participants improvising verses hovering around the same few fast musical notes, following predictable patterns and cadences, with rhythmic accompaniment on percussion instruments such as the *pandeiro*. Béhague defines the *embolada* as

a musical-poetic form often associated with northern dances such as the *cocos*, alternates a fixed refrain with stanzas (sometimes improvised). It consists of a



Figures 1a and 1b: Excerpts from *Bachianas Brasileiras no. 1, I. Introduction (Embolada)*. *Embolada* characteristics of fast repeated notes hovering around three notes, like improvised text in *embolada* folk music (Villa-Lobos, 1948, pp. 4, 10).

recitative-like melody with small intervals, repeated notes and small note values. The text, often comic and satirical, stresses onomatopoeia and alliteration which, with a fast tempo, enhance the rhythm of the song (Behague, 2001, p. 34).

We can easily find these characteristics adapted for cellos throughout Villa-Lobos' first movement – in many places different cello voices declaim quick passages with repeating notes, hovering around the same three notes for a while before finally descending in a terminating cadence (see figures 1a and 1b).

Villa-Lobos also writes infectious rhythmic grooves and ostinatos for the cellos that have their roots in typical percussion and guitar behavior from various kinds of Brazilian traditional music including *embolada* (see figures 2a and 2b).

Traditionally the *embolada's* text was humorous, with good-natured teasing:

Among the aspects that characterize the themes dealt with in *coco-de-embolada*, satire and ridicule constitute performance elements of great attraction between audience and *coquistas*. In general, the audience is attracted not just to the singer's mastery, but also to the 'naughty' content of the words (...). Disrespectful verses and forms of insult to the partner of the duo, to family members and to the audience, are frequent (Santos; Barbosa, 2014, p. 71)⁵.

A humorous and playful spirit is evident in Villa-Lobos' first movement, especially in certain sections (see figure 3).

Besides treating the orchestra of cellos as human voices, singing in declamatory styles like the *embolada* or *desafio*, and as percussion instruments like the *pandeiro* or *cuica* as well as the guitar or *cavaquinho* in rhythmic patterns and ostinatos, Villa-Lobos treats the ensemble like an orchestra, employing a phenomenally idiomatic cello language that reveals an intimate understanding of the instrument's intrinsic capabilities and potentialities while extending it to encompass all the roles in an orchestra – woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings of all tessituras. One keen listener observed this already at the first performance. Witnessing the premiere of the complete work in 1938, Muricy wrote, "In the *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1*, gigantic guitar rips - a cello orchestra too...with an imperious bass warning, in which they seem to sound, not cellos, but dozens of double basses..." (Pilger, 2013, p. 105)⁶.

Looking closely at the voicing, the division of different cello voices, it stands to reason that Villa-Lobos wrote the *Introduction – Embolada* seven years after composing the other two movements. We find that the 2nd and 3rd movements stay mostly in four voices, sometimes dividing to eight, but always within a simple texture – in fact the 3rd movement *Fugue – Conversa* is written in straight four-part voicing and could even be played by a cello quartet (one passage has *divisi* for cellos V and VI, just parallel octaves playing the same descending line). The 2nd movement *Prelude – Modinha* was conceived more like choral



Figures 2a and 2b: Excerpts from *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1*, I. *Introduction (Embolada)*. Rhythmic grooves on the cello, emulating percussion, and guitar roles in Brazilian traditional music (Villa-Lobos, 1948, pp. 1, 7).



Figure 3. Excerpt from *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1*, I. *Introduction (Embolada)*. Humorous, playful music to match the improvised comic and satirical texts of traditional *emboladas* (Villa-Lobos, 1948, p. 9).

writing (except for the *Piu mosso* section), also basically confined to four-voice texture but with lots of divisi, so that a minimum of eight cellos is essential. The *Introduction - Embolada* however is much more complex and elaborate in the division and differentiation of parts across the eight voices of the orchestra of cellos.

II. Prelude (*Modinha*)

The *Prelude – Modinha* can easily be considered among Villa-Lobos' finest creations. This exquisitely beautiful piece is in ABCDAB form, an extension of the simple ABA form that Villa-Lobos often used. Section C, *Piu mosso*, is the most instrumental/orchestral section of the movement, with arpeggiated multiple-stop chords, frequent accents, and unison staccato gestures. For the rest of the movement, the cello ensemble is treated more as a choir than an orchestra. Section B is the real jewel of the work – here Villa-Lobos employs a technique that he would return to in subsequent works of this series, notably in the *Fantasia - Devaneio* of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 3*: a simple descending stepwise melody with written-out baroque ornamentation is accompanied by a circle-of-fifths chord progression with suspensions. Béhague demonstrates the link with Bach:

Villa-Lobos makes frequent use of circle-of-fifths progressions where the seventh of one chord resolves to the third of the next and so on, a common procedure in Bach, Rameau, Vivaldi, and other eighteenth-century composers (Béhague, 1994, p. 110).

When the B section returns at the end of the movement, that melody is played by one solo cello, to strikingly poignant effect.

The term *modinha* has proved difficult to define:

Modinismo was the term used by Mário de Andrade to encompass the repertory of romantic, sentimental songs of European derivation which remained visible in many subsequent genres of popular songs (Béhague, 2001, p. 45).

In addition to referring to many kinds of romantic, sentimental songs, the *modinha* often traces a descending line, as is the case in section B of this movement. Here Villa-Lobos creates a remarkable sound world with music that transcends Brazilian folk influence and Bach-like contrivances somehow capturing elements of a universal, cosmic resonance (see figure 4).

III. Fugue (*Conversa*)

Villa-Lobos said of the final movement,

The top of the initial theme is characterized by a kind of transfiguration of certain melodic cells, typical and popular among the old serenaders of the Federal Capital, in the manner of Satiro Bilhar. Bilhar was an old and incorrigible bohemian *choro* musician, singer and guitarist who combined the functions of a civil servant with that of a regular serenader (Kiefer, 1986, p. 103)⁷.

Mariz wrote of the movement, “The composer wished to portray a conversation of four *choro* musicians, whose instruments fight over the thematic material, in successive questions and answers” (Mariz, 2005, p. 180)⁸.



Figure 4. Excerpt from *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1, I. Prelude (Modinha)*, section B. Among Villa-Lobos' finest music: *Modinha*-inspired sentimental melody with baroque ornamentation combined with Bach-like circle-of-fifths harmonic progression for cello choir (Villa-Lobos, 1948, p. 18).

In addition to the influence of choro musicians and particularly Satiro Bilhar, this fugue sees a return of the playful spirit of the first movement *Embolada*. Syncopations and unexpected accents on weak beats abound in the opening theme, and these agogic games make me think of the *saci* from Brazilian folklore, a fictional forest spirit who hops on one leg, sowing mischief through pranks and roguery. Villa-Lobos portrayed the *saci* in the final movement of his *String Quartet n° 1*, and I would suggest that this final movement of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* is even more deserving of a *saci* title description (see figure 5).

Present at the first performance of the complete work in 1938, the important figure of 20th century Brazilian cultural history Mario de Andrade wrote of the work's vivid expression of Brazilian identity:

Seldom would the great composer go further in the way of classically treating the themes of our populace, eradicating their illiterate virginity, without losing sight of the national essence. In spite of the classical deformations, in spite of the virtuosic audacity that shapes the whole piece, it is felt at any given moment that we are in a national Brazil (Pilger, 2013, pp. 105-106)⁹.

7. Dissemination of Villa-Lobos' works for cello ensemble

Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and *5* received ever-increasing performances after their premieres. A concert with 48 cellists in Buenos Aires, organized by Alfredo Schiuma in homage of Pau Casals, presented the 2nd and 3rd movements of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* in the early 1930s (Correa do Lago, 2012, p. 26). The works quickly caught on in the United States; at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, Walter Burle Marx conducted the first movement *Aria-Cantilena* of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 5* (Hess, 2013, p. 110), which had just been composed the year before, the second movement of which would only be composed in 1945. Villa-Lobos himself first visited the United States in November of 1944 and stayed for a few months, arriving in Los Angeles, and passing through Chicago and New York among other major cities for concerts and engagements. He conducted cellists of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* at the University of Chicago in late February 1945 (Mariz 2005, p. 120; Peppercorn, 1992, p. 91). Years later, in 1957, the composer conducted the cellists of the New York Philharmonic in *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* two days after appearing on NBC television to speak about Brazilian instruments and his music (Peppercorn, 1992, p. 101).

The man responsible for Villa-Lobos' first American visit, conductor Werner Janssen, recorded *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* in Los Angeles in the early 1950s with local cellists including Eleanor Aller and George Neikrug in what seems to have been the first recording of the work (the LP does not list the year), predating the composer's recording conducting the cellists of the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française from 1958.

Cello ensemble fever was beginning to spread throughout the United States, and cello societies sprang up in major cities. The Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, successor to Casals as the most important cellist of the 20th century and instigating force behind the creation of quintessential cello repertoire from Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Britten, and many more composers, first visited and toured the USA in 1956. On this trip Rostropovich was



Figure 5. Excerpt from *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1*, III. *Fugue (Conversa)*. Opening fugal subject, syncopated accents suggesting off-balance one-legged *saci* of Brazilian folklore (Villa-Lobos, 1948, p. 22).

introduced to Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* in Los Angeles, and further north in California he was invited to a gathering of 100 cellists in San Francisco. On the same 1956 trip Rostropovich was invited to the foundation of the New York Violoncello Society – two years later that society would commission a third work for orchestra of cellos from Villa-Lobos, the *Fantasia Concertante*, which the composer conducted in a recording in December 1958 with a cello ensemble of 32 cellists in New York. It would count among Villa-Lobos' final compositions and recordings, as he died the following year. Returning to Russia, Rostropovich was bitten by the cello ensemble bug, bringing back with him the scores of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and 5. He organized, lead, and played in numerous cello ensembles in Russia and elsewhere, usually with his soprano wife Galina Vishnevskaya singing the *Aria-Cantilena*. Together they performed the *Aria* from *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 5* in Leningrad in 1966 with over 100 cellos (Wilson, 2008, pp. 150 - 152). Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya first recorded the *Aria* in the late 1950s, taking a brisk tempo, Rostropovich producing a full, magnificent tone in the solo. Elsewhere in Europe, in 1952, *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* was performed in Zurich by an ensemble of 108 cellos (Negwer, 2009, page 224).

Meanwhile in the United States, performances of Villa-Lobos' cello ensemble work reached occasions and platforms of great significance and visibility. Leonard Bernstein included the *Aria-Cantilena* from *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 5* on one of his nationally televised Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic in 1961, on a program billed as "The Latin American Spirit." And conductor Leopold Stokowski, who had previously worked with Villa-Lobos in 1940 when he traveled to Brazil with his All-American Youth Orchestra and supervised recordings of Brazilian traditional and folk music, in 1963 conducted *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* at Carnegie Hall in New York as part of a series honoring the United Nations (Hess, 2013, p. 140).

The twelve cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic, universally recognized as the best cello ensemble in the world today and indeed in the history of the genre, began their activities in 1972 with a radio broadcast of Klengel's *Hymnus*. In the 48 years of their existence, through numerous concert tours and recordings, they regularly include *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and 5 on their programs.

The number of performances of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and 5 in the 21st century is remarkable, and any attempt to calculate or register the number would be pointless, as it would be in the thousands. Three categories of cello ensembles are vigorously active today: the professional ensemble, the university ensemble of professor and students, and the festival ensemble that unites different cellists from all over and exists for a few days at most. For all three categories, Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and 5 are the most frequently programmed works. This is significant, as the works are not easy to perform – they are simply the best all-around original repertoire for cello ensemble.

8. Conclusion

What began as a musical work that represented aspects of Brazilian folk music and traditions has taken on a life of its own - *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* has served as the basis of a flourishing genre. In my own experience over the past decade, I've led more than 100 concerts of Villa-Lobos' works for cello ensemble. Most have been with the Unicamp Cello Ensemble, a group consisting of my cello students at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. But I've also led cello ensembles performing Villa-Lobos' works in Alaska, California, Germany, Poland, and Spain, collaborating with an international amalgam of professors and students. In all cases, Villa-Lobos' works for cello ensemble provide challenges and rewards both individually and collectively, as well as technically and artistically for the participating cellists. I always make a point of explaining to the cellists, as well as to the audiences at concerts, that these works of Villa-Lobos laid the foundation of the cello ensemble genre – and invariably, cellists and audiences are surprised and interested to learn of the Brazilian folk roots of the works. I myself am American, yet I identify strongly with this music, and I have met many cellists in Europe and North America who feel the same. In fact, I confess that *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* is my favorite piece in all of music history – I love it more than Bach's cello suites, Beethoven's symphonies, Wagner's operas - for a cellist, nothing beats it. From the cellist's perspective, the work is so well written, so much fun to play, so challenging, and so interesting and rewarding

● VILLA-LOBOS' BACHIANAS BRASILEIRAS N° 1:
REPRESENTATION OF BRAZILIAN IDENTITY THROUGH THE INVENTION OF THE CELLO ENSEMBLE GENRE ●
LARS HOEFS

in all aspects; and we cellists are entrusted with every role in the orchestra of cellos. Through the staggering presence of *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 1* and *5* in countless performances all over the world, Villa-Lobos' initial representation of Brazilian identity has transformed to encompass and embody the universal genre of the cello ensemble, with *Bachianas Brasileiras* at its core. Representation of Brazilian identity continues to be reshaped, revived, and renewed through the proliferation of the cello ensemble genre throughout the world.

NOTES

¹ Translated by the author: “*Sim, sou brasileiro e bem brasileiro. Na minha música eu deixo cantar os rios e os mares deste grande Brasil. Eu não ponho breques nem freios, nem mordaza na exuberância tropical das nossas florestas e dos nossos céus, que eu transporto instintivamente para tudo o que escrevo*” (Paz, 2019, p. 29).

² Translated by the author: “*O compositor sério deveria estudar a herança musical do seu país, quer sob o aspecto literário, poético e político, quer música*” (Paz, 2019, p. 29).

³ He recorded his arrangements of 3 preludes and 3 fugues, for cello orchestra, conducting the New York Violoncello Society in 1958.

⁴ At the end of his life Villa-Lobos composed a third work for orchestra of cellos, *Fantasia Concertante*, written in 1958 as a commission of the New York Violoncello Society. Villa-Lobos conducted the first performance and first recording of the work in New York in 1958, and until recently it has fallen into obscurity. I recently led performances of the *Fantasia Concertante* with cellists in São Paulo, California, and Poland – the concert in Poland was the European premiere of the work, and the concert in California also included a studio recording session. The recording will be released soon.

⁵ Translated by the author: “*Entre os aspectos que caracterizam os temas tratados no coco-de embolada, a sátira e as ridicularizações constituem elementos performáticos de grande atração entre plateia e conquistas. Em geral, a audiência se vê atraída não apenas pela maestria do cantador, mas também pelo conteúdo ‘malcriado’ de suas palavras (...). As letras desrespeitosas e com palavras de insultos ao companheiro ou companheira da própria dupla, aos familiares e à plateia, são frequentes*” (Santos; Barbosa, 2014, p. 71).

⁶ Translated by the author: “*Na Bachianas Brasileiras nº 1, gigantescos rasgados de violão – uma orquestra de violoncelos também (...) com uma advertência imperiosa do baixo, em que parecem soar, não violoncelos, mas dezenas de contrabaixos*” (Pilger, 2013, p. 105).

⁷ Translated by the author: “*A cabeça do tema inicial se caracteriza numa espécie de transfiguração de certas células melódicas, típicas e populares dos antigos seresteiros da Capital Federal, a maneira de Satiro Bilhar. Bilhar foi um velho e incorrigível chorão boêmio, cantador e tocador de violão que acumulava as funções de funcionário público com as de seresteiro habitual*” (Kiefer, 1986, p. 103).

⁸ Translated by the author: “*O compositor desejou pintar uma conversa de quatro chorões, cujos instrumentos disputam a primazia temática, em perguntas e respostas sucessivas*” (Mariz, 2005, p. 180).

⁹ Translated by the author: “*Poucas vezes o grande compositor terá ido mais longe na maneira de tratar eruditamente os temas do nosso populário, destratando-lhes a virgindade analfabeta, sem com essa transposição perder de vista a essência nacional. Apesar das deformações eruditas, apesar mesmo da audácia virtuosística que desenha toda a peça, sente-se em qualquer momento que estamos num Brasil nacional*” (Pilger, 2013, pp. 105-106).

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