

A Brazilian musician in New York: Pan-Americanism in the work of Heitor Villa-Lobos (1939-1945)

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Abstract

This article seeks to analyze the ways in which modernism and nationalism were embodied in the music of Heitor Villa Lobos (1887-1959) on the basis of a study of his exchanges with the musical culture of North America during the 1940s. His musical works and the way they became known in the United States, constituted a dynamic process which involved him entering into a continuous dialogue with other intellectuals – musicians, musicologists, journalists and other artists. Following his first journey to the United States and his involvement in the “networks of sociability” of that country, it was evident that as well as engaging in “social thinking about Brazil”, Villa-Lobos was drawn into an “intellectual culture”. This comprised a dynamic network and was expressed by sharing musical practices and holding conversations with musicologists which had political and social meanings. These are reflected in the way the historico-cultural significance of the works of Villa-Lobos was studied and the spread of his ideas in North-American and Brazilian periodicals.

Keywords

Villa-Lobos; Pan-Americanism; Music.

Introduction

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) is without doubt the Brazilian musician who is most studied by historiography and by Brazilian musicologists. It is a daunting task to analyze the works of this composer because there are various textual typologies on the subject, both in the fields of musicology and anthropology, and of history. A number of biographies were published in the period 1940-1960 which are of crucial importance in enshrining the memory of the composer and his work and allowing them to be viewed as expressions of the essence of Brazilian nationalism. Among the authors who have devoted research studies to Villa-Lobos, it is particularly worth mentioning Vasco Mariz, because his biography has served as a benchmark for various other studies of the Brazilian composer (GIACOMO, 1972 [1959]; MARIZ, 1982; RIBEIRO, 1987; SILVA, 2001).

After the 1960s, another working typology began to appear which was evident from the publication of studies that concentrated on works by the composer that were concerned with modernism, nationalism and the politics of Getúlio Vargas. Examples of this are the research studies of Ademar da Nóbrega and Bruno Kiefer. However, these studies do not include any critical or academic discussion of this matter but cling to the idea of a nationality that does not constitute any form of historical construction. The musical nationalism of Villa-Lobos was seen from an essentialist perspective (KIEFER, 1981).

During the 1980s and 1990s, there emerged more “verticalized” academic studies of Villa-Lobos and his work. These began to lay stress on the relations of the composer with nationalism and modernism, and in particular, with the politics of the New State, by addressing the most complex questions in the realm of history, linguistics and cultural studies in general. Spurred on by the pioneering spirit of José Miguel Wisnik (1982 1983)¹ and Arnaldo Contier (1998; CONTIER *in* NOVAES, 1992) this trend has continued until today.

Among the wide range of issues in the politics of Vargas, the following can be found in current academic works: the relationship between Villa-Lobos and the Educational Plan of the New State, linked to the building of a nationalist political culture; the nationalism represented in some of his works; “orpheonic” songs; and the administrative activities of the composer under the influence of the ideas of educationalist, Anísio Teixeira, and the ideological thinking of the New State. More recent studies have concentrated on the search for an understanding of the role of music in building a national identity between 1930 and 1940. This either took place through the relations of Villa-Lobos with popular music, as shown in the research studies of José Miguel Wisnik, or in his activities in the National Plan of the Vargas government, as highlighted in the works of Arnaldo Contier and Anália Chernavsky (2003)², who stress the importance of the role of orpheonic songs in the search for national unity.

In this re-assessment of the way autobiographical narratives are constructed, nationalism is a key issue for reflection and an area which has filled a large number of pages of reviews,

theses and dissertations that specialize in History, both in Brazil and other parts of the world. Hobsbawm (2007: 86-97) states that: “from the 1980s onwards, there has been a continuous academic debate about the nature and history of nations and nationalism.” What are the reasons for this overwhelming number of studies on national issues? In the view of Hobsbawm, this striking fact is the outcome of an era of international instability that was set in motion in 1989, and he is convinced that its end cannot be foreseen. In effect, it was the era of instability that showed us that we are undergoing a crisis of national identity.

However, in the opinion of Benedict Anderson, one cannot speak today of an “end of the era of nationalism” since this has been predicted for a long time. The author illustrates this by asserting that since the end of the 2nd World War, every successful revolution has been defined in nationalist terms. “But although the facts may be clear, their explanation continues to be the object of a prolonged discussion. The nation, nationality, nationalism all have proved notoriously difficult to define or be subject to analysis.” Anderson refers to the presence of two traditions of nationalism that can be found in historiography and the Social Sciences: liberal and Marxist. He concludes that neither of the two traditions have provided satisfactory interpretations for an understanding of the issue.

In addressing nationalism as a particular cultural phenomenon, Anderson believes that when thinking about historical origins, it is necessary to understand the way in which meanings have been transformed over a period of time. In his view, this procedure explains the reason why this question has such a deep emotional “legitimacy” in the current world. The different kinds of nationalism – as the outcome of a complex interweaving of historical forces – are “capable of being transplanted with varying degrees of self-consciousness to a great variety of social terrains to be merged, and to be merged with, a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations” (2008: 30).

Anderson rejects the formulation of Ernest Gellner, because in his opinion, Gellner veers towards the thesis that nationalism is masked under false appearances, by identifying invention with “forgery” and “falsehood” and not with imagination, which thus suggests that there could exist true communities. Put the other way round, from the standpoint of Anderson, communities should be distinguished not in terms of their falsity/authenticity but by the style in which they are imagined. (*Op. cit, loc. cit.*).

A prominent feature of the book by Benedict Anderson is that it devotes a considerable part of its investigation to nationalism in the Americas and Asia. Moreover, rather than seeking to detect the roots of the culture of nationalism in political theory, it is concerned with unconscious and semi-conscious attitudes and attaches importance to means of dissemination, in particular to newspapers and the written or spoken word in the building of new imagined communities such as a nation. Like the French historians of the imagined world, Anderson recognized the value of the power of the collective imagination and shared images.

The question of nationality can be tackled from two angles which are defined by Stuart Hall as: essentialism and non-essentialism. Today, the essentialist view of nationalism has given way to the constructionist analyses that derive from the current scepticism about the existence of a national being. This disbelief is linked to the state of the post-modern and globalized world. If we agree with Koselleck (2006: 305-327), “after ascertaining that when reflecting on facts, we are linking them to concepts, [...] it has become impossible, although attempts are still often being made, to deal with history without having a precise

idea of the categories through which it is expressed". Thus, it is at some temporal distance that one can observe the historicity of different ideas of the concept of the nation supported in Brazil. This is a debate that has shown, and is still showing, how cherished it is in our thoughts, whether in the field of historiography, literature or the relatively unexplored musicology.

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Before musical identities can be understood, it is essential to have a debate about its links with the different musical practices that have been shaped in the course of its history. The most recent historiography on Heitor Villa-Lobos stresses the role of music in building an imagined world in the trajectory it follows. However, it is not enough to ascertain the prophetic, false and autobiographical character of its narratives in themselves. These studies investigated the cultural world of Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 20th Century, the "Modern Art Week" of 1922 and other nationalist cultural movements. However, according to one of the most recent historians on the complex relations between nationalism and modernism in Brazil, they failed to note the relationship between their different musical identities with the particular features of these different types of modernism.

As an expression of this revised approach, Monica Velloso (2011) states that in its relationship with nationalism, modernism harboured a complex set of changes that took place in the sphere of the arts between the 1870s and the beginning of the 2nd World War which involved the whole of Europe, the United States and countries in Latin America. The main purpose of this article is to examine how (setting out from various ways of imagining Brazil as a musical nation), Villa-Lobos and his nationalist compositions provide a heterogeneous set of fragmented modernist identity patterns. In addition, it explores how these demonstrate that they are linked to a more diverse musical culture embedded in the environment of their "networks of sociability": its relationship with the United States and the spread of his work in that country.

Setting out from his contacts with international projects that involved the position of Brazil with regard to Hispanic America and the United States, Villa-Lobos either forged close links or adopted a stance of detachment; he also entered into a cultural and aesthetic dialogue which was essential for his compositions and his attempts to build an image of himself as a Brazilian musician. From this historiographical perspective, the relationship of Villa-Lobos with *Musical Americanism*, the musicological project of Francisco Curt Lange³, and the twelve-tone technique of the *Grupo Música Viva*, conducted by another German, J. Koellreuter, had particular historical significance. The main purpose of "Americanism" which was formed in 1933, was to integrate the music of the Americas by means of a considerable production of written material and musical compositions. The dialogue entered into with *Musical Americanism* revealed that there was a cleavage between the identity of the Brazilian composer and his work when building an identity, which has still not been addressed by historiography. The different positions adopted by Villa Lobos with regard to *Musical Americanism* and *Música Viva* [live music] are significant features for a study of one facet of nationalism that has until now been unexplored. Its relation with these aesthetic/cultural projects clarifies several aspects of its trajectory between the 1930s and 1940s. (ARCANJO, 2011).

The aim of this article is to conduct an analysis of the way the musical nationalism of Villa Lobos was formed as a part of an "intellectual culture" that was built as a result of his contacts with the United States. This will allow an analysis to be carried out of his musical works as a dynamic feature which involved entering into a continuous dialogue with other

intellectuals: musicians, musicologists, journalists, and other artists. In stitching together these dynamic “networks of sociability”, it is clear that as well as constructing “a social way of thinking about Brazil”, Villa-Lobos was introduced to an “intellectual culture” which consisted of a dynamic network and was expressed by sharing musical practices and discussions about musicology which went beyond his works and encompassed political and cultural meanings.⁴

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According to Mônica Velloso (2011), the use of this concept of a “network” for studies of different kinds of modernism in Brazil, entails studying various structured organizations which often do not take place in a formal manner like academic writings, but represent exchanges and the construction of their own dynamics based on the spread of knowledge. They involve personal relationships where spaces are formed that are designed by the sensibility of ordinary people; these include bonds of friendship, love, coming together and illusions but also detachment, hatred and disillusionment. It also encompasses a history of music that is in tune with intellectual history and is in search of hidden meanings that are implicit in the different positions of the subjects involved, as well as cultural productions – in this particular case, musical output and musicology.

In the search for historico-cultural meanings in the works of Villa-Lobos and his metamorphoses of identity (in the area of musical practices and by entering differentiated “networks of sociability”), it is essential for the historian to restore a network for listening which pervades the cultural world in which research and a “temporal” subject can be incorporated. Hence, in the case of musical studies:

Whatever the research question or approach of the historian may be, it is essential to make a comparison between the written signs that arise from “listening to music” (criticism, articles giving opinions, analysis of works, programs and aesthetic manifestos etc.) with the works in their material form (e.g. phonograms, scores and films). On the basis of this procedure, the historian can find out what parameters were highlighted in the song or instrumental piece, which were the criteria of a particular historical period and how social, cultural and political meanings were conveyed as a result of the social dissemination of this work and its cultural transmission as a part of the collective cultural heritage. (NAPOLITANO in PINSKY, 2005: 235-289).

Apart from the question of form, the reception and representational character of the music are thus essential for historical research. In other words, it is necessary to go beyond an analysis that is concerned with tempo, tonality intensity of expression, musical syntax among other formal elements. The task of the historian can be broadened to include the mapping of “historical listening: the critics, the public, and the artists themselves who are also listening [...] [and] these give historical meaning to musical works”, because they form a wide range of interpretations of a work that bears many of these constructions (*Op. cit.*: 259).

Thus, setting out from this methodology, the relationship between intellectuals and politics acquires other connotations:

Now when one speaks about Brazilian social thinking as the principal means of entry to the history of interpretations of Brazil, it simply rests on the assumption that the whole literary journalistic, fictional artistic and “institutional” output is incapable of providing such an overview. What is definitely not Brazilian social thought is exactly this: it is unable to touch on literature, art in general, theories about cities, poets, story-tellers, columnists, literary critics, cartoonists, caricaturists, composers, or songbooks – in short, a wide range of intellectuals who simply do not

fall within the ill-defined concept of Brazilian social thinking. The trajectory of Brazilian social thinking is accompanied by a constant narrowing down which harks back to what is roughly a multi-regional form of intellectual output prior to the 20th Century. Moreover, it has become established that almost the entire intellectual production is linked to Sociology - in the universities based in the South-East of the country, in particular São Paulo. (...) These are usually able to show authors, thoughts and ideas which are completely detached from their historicity and are largely found as intellectual systems or "thoughts", that have a self-identifiable structural unity that almost represents a kind of perfect ideology. (TOLENTINO, 2013, p.178-179)

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The intellectual networks woven by Villa-Lobos and which involve his relations with the United States include people such as: Francisco Curt Lange, J. Koellreuter, Mario de Andrade and a number of American journalists. The Teutonic and Nietzschean ideas of Curt Lange, his alliance with Koellreuter and the conflict between Lange's "Project" and the Pan-Americanism of the United States, were factors in the building of the musical identity of Villa-Lobos, who did not support Lange's Project, while, at the same time, seeking to demonstrate that this had become a *mirror* for building his national identity. For a clear idea of this, it is essential to understand both the points in common and disagreements that can be found in the correspondence between Curt Lange and Mário de Andrade and other Brazilian interlocutors and between different types of modernism and the Project of Curt Lange. (ARCANJO, 2011)

Before defining the *Musical Americanism* of Curt Lange in conceptual terms, it should be noted that this corresponded to strategies for establishing a Pan-American Union. For this reason, at the request of the U.S. Secretary of State, Lange held the 1st Inter-American Conference on music, at the Library of Congress in Washington. The repercussions of this were as follows: the founding of the Inter-American Institute of Musicology in 1939 (officially recognized by the Government of Uruguay on 26th June, 1940) through the initiative of Curt Lange; a recommendation to hold the 8th International Conference in Lima in 1938; the International Congress of Musicology in New York (1939); and the already mentioned Inter-American Conference of Washington (1939) (MOURÃO, 1990). With regard to these contacts, Kátia Baggio (1998: 9) states that "historically, our country was drawn much closer to Europe and later to the United States than its neighbors. In addition, the relations between Brazil and the Hispanic-American countries were characterized by mutual distrust".

Between the years 1933 and 1944, Villa-Lobos showed a resistance to the plan for a musical integration of Latin America which was later taken over by Curt Lange, and from 1944, his music definitively established close ties with the United States. After 1941, official U.S. bodies extended invitations for concerts to the maestro, as a part of what was called the "politics of good neighborliness". The musician declined them to avoid taking on responsibilities where he had to act as a representative. In 1944, a year before the end of the 2nd World War, the composer visited the United States for the first time to conduct some of his works. What was in play in this "approach"? What were the "sociability networks" formed by the musician in the United States? How was this trip to a U.S. city linked to his musical identities?

Guérios (2005) believed that the main reason for Villa-Lobos deciding to form a close attachment with the United States and which explains the traditional features of his compositions at that time, were the financial difficulties the maestro was experiencing, as well as the expenses for a serious illness which he suffered in 1948 and was the cause

of his death eleven years later. Apart from these personal reasons, it should be noted that this attachment was bound up with the political scene at the end of the 2nd World War when the country emerged as a hegemonic power and later, together with the Soviet Union, a protagonist of the Cold War which involved Pan-Americanism.

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Buscacio (2009) argues that the *Musical Americanism* of Curt Lange underwent resistance from the North-Americans because the United States was not interested in projects that were based outside of its territory. It was also resisted by Villa-Lobos and Mário de Andrade, who did not regard the integration project favorably. Thus, our aim here is to demonstrate, as is recorded in the historiography⁵ (BETHELL, 2009: 289-321; BAGGIO, 1998), that the historical proximity of Brazil to the United States and its distancing from Hispanic America, was the path followed by Villa-Lobos in that country after 1944, since he shared the same perspective.

The idea of integration was raised on several occasions in the history of Latin America during the 20th Century and was a debate that was bound up with relations with the United States and a search for a common identity for all American nations. Brazil's place in this climate was constantly shifting: at one moment the country seemed inclined to being a member of an integrated America, at other times it was different. According to Kátia Baggio:

The need to constitute and strengthen a Brazilian national identity led many historians, social scientists and essayists to underline the difference between Brazil and other American countries. We were unique, unusual and special; these were the recurring terms used by these authors. This detachment of Brazil from the Hispanic countries was, to a certain extent, incorporated by Brazilian society. The way Brazilians are identified as Latin Americans is fluid, variable but generally depends on the circumstances of a historical period. Hispanic America – seen through the eyes of Brazilians – is another America, even though we form a part of this complex and contradictory continent called Latin America. (*Op. cit., loc. cit.*)

More recent studies about Latin America have shown that “there are significant images and representations of discrimination in the Brazilian notions of Hispanic America. This ‘other’ América is seen as a less developed and more chaotic place than Brazil” (DORELLA, 2010:104-122). The first half of the 20th Century is a period when Brazilian intellectuals nurtured feelings of great resistance of the Hispanic-American countries, a feeling that harks back to the period of colonization and rivalry between Spain and Portugal.

Establishing musical dialogues: the spread of the works of Heitor Villa-Lobos in the United States

On 30th January 1961, three years after the death of Villa-Lobos, the Mayor of New York, Robert Wagner, issued a decree proclaiming: “Sunday 5th March as “Villa-Lobos Day in New York City, and that our citizens will be united in the hope that justice and the rule of law will prevail in a world of peace and freedom”.

In that climate of the Cold War and the search for hegemony in Latin America on the part of the United States, the justification by the Mayor for setting aside a day to pay homage to the Brazilian composer, was as follows:

Given the fact that cultural exchanges are the strongest of all the influences that establish close ties that unite peoples, one factor of this universal fraternity which is faithfully reflected is our love for great music, is more than ever necessary in a world where fear and misunderstanding

flourish. This is because Americans in both hemispheres are proud to honor any genius, in particular the great composer from Brazil who resided in New York for several years and through his admirable achievements added lustre and renown to our city, which is the capital of the arts in the world. (*Op. cit., loc. cit.*)

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With regard to this situation, Tacuchian states that:

By 1944, Villa-Lobos had reached the apogee of his career. In so far as he remained aloof from the aesthetic debates spread in the newspapers and the conversations between musicians and musicologists and was busy with frequent trips to the United States, Villa-Lobos kept a distance from the controversy stirred up by *Música Viva*, even though at first he had been considered for the position of Honorary President of the group. Villa-Lobos remained involved in his trips to the United States where he wrote music for Hollywood and Broadway, conducted concerts and published and recorded his music, while at the same time suffering from the crippling disease that led to his death ten years later. (TACUCHIAN, 2006).

The decree issued by the Mayor of New York, endorsed a “coming together” that was put into effect in the period 1944-1945. After 1945, the periodicals together with the musicologist, Lisa Peppercorn, began to spread the idea that the relations between the maestro and the United States were responsible for the rise of his career and for the worldwide recognition of his work. On the basis of this appraisal, Villa-Lobos, the great composer of the Americas, rose in stature as a result of his contact with the United States (1939), and not in France in the 1920s as supported by another view. This position lent support to the assertion by the Mayor of New York that the city was *the cultural capital of the world*.

Lisa Peppercorn, in her article under the heading *Some Aspects of Villa-Lobos' Principles of Composition* (February 1943), published in the respected U.S. magazine *The Music Review*, conducted an in-depth analysis of the musical works of Villa-Lobos. This laid stress on the role of the United States in spreading the works of the Brazilian musician: “*little was known of Villa-Lobos outside Brazil until the United States assigned a special significance to his name a few years ago. This man, whom they have sometimes called the most interesting modern composer of the Americas...*”

This ignited a struggle between France and the United States which involved determining the true *paternity* of Villa Lobos and his works. The modernist tradition of Brazil which had close affinities with the French, and had been formed a few decades earlier, was made clear by the words of Mário de Andrade, who came out in support of the French roots of the modernism of Villa-Lobos. However, the interpretation of Lisa Peppercorn of the role played by the United States in the career of the composer is reproduced in the biographies of the composer that were published posthumously and influenced other research studies on the musician and his work. These describe his presence in Broadway as being the apogee of his artistic career. (ARCANJO, 2011).

Regarding the impression made by his first visit to the United States, Peppercorn states the following in the biography she wrote in the 1940s:

The result of his first visit to the United States was that Villa-Lobos suddenly found himself in the position of a famous composer of an international stature. Eighteen years earlier in Paris, he had to arrange his own concerts with the assistance of Brazilian patrons; and in Brazil he always had to go through hell and high water before he was able to conduct his own works. Now, one moment

he was being invited by the most famous orchestras and universities in the United States; the next moment important newspapers were interested in his music; and then it was proved that he was a great composer whose works should be heard, published and recorded. (PEPPERCORN, 2000 [1989]: 135. First Brazilian publication.)

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In commenting on this article written by the musicologist, Mário de Andrade expressed himself in the following terms:

I believe that due attention has not been paid here in Brazil to the repercussions of this excellent study of the work of Villa-Lobos, published by Lisa M. Peppercorn in last year's February Number of the "The Music Review". This study which has the title 'Some Aspects of Villa-Lobos' Principles of Composition', has some failings but at the same time is a model of impartiality and patience – difficult to maintain when faced with the great composer. However, Lisa Peppercorn begins by making a small mistake when she attributes the international fame of Villa-Lobos to the recognition of his value by the United States. This is incorrect both in chronological and critical terms. The international hegemony of making value judgments in music has still not shifted to the United States although our formidable ally already possesses enough independence to decide on its own tastes. In chronological terms, the international renown of Villa-Lobos originated in Paris, and was evident in the attention accorded by musicians and journals to the Brazilian composer from the second time he was there. In the first stage, it seems that the provincial was carried away by his megalomania, which is so well expressed and interpreted by Ms Peppercorn in the opening paragraph of her study. With regard to the applause in Paris, it should not be forgotten that there were close ties with international virtuosos of the importance of Arthur Rubinstein, to whom Villa-Lobos owed a great deal, the dedication of another great pianist, Tomás Terán, and the studies of Henri Prunières. These studies even reached the point of making the Brazilian composer accepted and honored within his own country... and finally, as confirmation of this support from Paris, the famous publisher Max Eschig, also from Paris, decided to launch the Brazilian composer and this was a decisive factor in making his work well known by the general public. The career of Villa-Lobos was definitely launched and he thus owes this to Paris which then maintained the right to establish reputations in the world. (ANDRADE, 1945).

When examining why Villa-Lobos did not forge close links with Musical Americanism, it should be noted that during the 19th Century, Europe was inundated with international ideological movements – the "*Pan-isms*" – which were designed to bring together countries, peoples and communities of kinship, linked to ethnic linguistic and cultural backgrounds, around a dominant principle. Some examples of these that can be cited are: Pan-Americanism, Pan-Germanism, Pan Slavism and Pan-Islamism. However, the particular feature of Pan-Americanism was its continental geographical character, although it was not without political objectives despite not being on a strictly political plane in doctrinaire terms. (ARDAO, 1987: 157-171).

In the opinion of Ardao (1987), what can be noted as lying behind the concepts of "Pan-Americanism" and "Latin-Americanism", and under the guise of cultural and political integration, are hidden plans for domination both by the United States and France who had embarked on industrial – and hence imperialist – expansion. On the basis of these concepts, it is clear that as well as a search for alliances and domination, there was a question of taking up a position with regard to Hispanic-American nations. It is difficult to say which political projects have come out as victors in this "conflict" over "Latin America". The French project perhaps took place in a slightly more subtle and "cultural" way with the support and spread of Hispanic-American intellectuals tied to France in opposition

to the military interventionism of the United States. In historical terms, the behavior of the U.S. seems to have rubbed out the French “gloss”, or perhaps the historiographer needs to undertake more profound studies of the French plans for an intervention in Latin America.

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It is of great significance to note that the political and administrative activities of Villa-Lobos and the historicity of the relations between Brazilian and Hispanic-American relations, explain the hiatus that exists between the time when Curt Lange attempted to take Villa-Lobos to the United States in the mid-1930s and the time of his first visit at the end of 1944. Whereas on the first occasion, Villa-Lobos was resistant to the idea of a project of musical integration that involved Curt Lange and Hispanic-America, on the second, the Brazilian composer forged a close bond with the United States.

Curt Lange stated that in 1939, he was caught up in a lively political and musical atmosphere in the United States because he had been commissioned by the Secretary of State, Cordell Hill, to organize forty musical concerts by Latin-American composers that would be performed in the United States that year at the 8th International American Conference. According to Curt Lange, it was at this time that it was conjectured that Villa-Lobos had paid a visit to the country although in fact this only took place in 1944 (CURT LANGE, 1988: 25).

In August 1941, Aaron Copland, a member of the Music Committee of the U.S. Department of State, began to make personal contacts with artists from Latin America. On these trips, Copland drew close to Hispanic-American and Brazilian musicians, in particular, including those who did not share the Good Neighborliness policies advocated by Roosevelt. In a climate characterized by the anti-Americanism of Villa-Lobos, Copland made a point of inviting this composer to be his chief interlocutor. (CONTIER, 2004).

The works of Villa-Lobos had already been performed in the United States – for example at the World Fair of New York in 1939. With regard to the performances, under the headline in *The New York Times*, (in the *Words* column) was the following: “Popular rhythms and concertos were the main items in the second program of Brazilian music at the Modern Art Museum last night”. (TAUBAN, 1940: 24).

It can be noted that the North-American interest in the works of the Brazilian composer persisted. This interest was made explicit in an article written by Lisa Peppercorn and published in *The New York Times* on 11th October 1942. In the article under the heading *New works by Villa-Lobos*, the musicologist informed her readers about the new compositions of the Brazilian musician and stated that in Rio de Janeiro:

A series of orchestral works by Villa-Lobos were recently performed for the first time and conducted by the composer at the Teatro Municipal of Rio this Summer. The program consisted of two orchestrations of works for piano (Rudepoema and Bachianas Brasileiras, N.º 4), Discovery of Brazil – Suite No. 3 (the first set was given in New York last year), Choros, No. 6 and 9, and Choros No. 11 for piano and orchestra. (PEPPERCORN, 1942).

In 1940, Nelson Rockefeller, who had been appointed by Franklin Roosevelt as Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics, promoted a Festival of Brazilian Music at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Together with an exhibition of some of the works by Cândido Portinari, two or three of the concerts performed included works by Villa-Lobos. But the debut of the composer in that country was owing to the invitation of the conductor Werner Janssen. The two had met ten years earlier when the U.S conductor had been in Rio de Janeiro for a concert under the

direction of Villa-Lobos. On 26th November 1944, Villa-Lobos performed *Symphony No. 2*, the *Rudepoema [Rude or Savage Poem]* and *Choros No. 6* and conducted the *Janssen Symphony Orchestra at the Los Angeles Philharmonic*. As well as the concert, Villa-Lobos took part in receptions and was honored by the Occidental College by being conferred the title of *Doctorate in Law*. (PEPPERCORN, 2000: 130).

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In December of that same year – 1944, Villa-Lobos travelled from Philadelphia to New York where he composed his *Fantasia for Cello and Orchestra*. The composition was suggested by Walter Burle-Marx, a Brazilian composer and conductor who lived in Philadelphia. In New York, the composer got to know Olin Downes, the music critic of *The New York Times*, who cultivated a taste for this work at the concert of Brazilian music held at the World Fair in 1939. On 14th May of that year, the journalist effusively praised the work of Villa-Lobos in his article under the heading *The Art of Villa-Lobos: works of the Brazilian composer that show genius and naivety* (DOWNES, 1939: 35).

On 28th January 1945, in the auditorium of the Museum of Modern Art, The League of Composers organized a concert which included, in its repertoire, some chamber music composed by Villa-Lobos. In February, he agreed to conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the invitation of Koussevitzky. In the same month the maestro conducted the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the University of Chicago's Women's Choral Ensemble. In March, Villa-Lobos conducted a concert with great success at the Carnegie Hall (DOWNES, 1945).

The composer's friendship with the music critic was of great value to him in enabling his work to become well-known in the country. The first visit paid by Villa-Lobos to the United States featured prominently in the *The New York Times*, where Olin Downes was a columnist. One of these articles appeared under the heading: *Visiting Brazilian Composer Discusses Sources of Nationalism in Art*. In this article which praised the work of Villa-Lobos, the Brazilian composer was interviewed by Downes on American soil and made the following statement:

I ma a nationalist but not a 'patriot', the distinction is extremely important. Laying too much stress on patriotism in music is dangerous. One cannot compose great music in this way but only propaganda. However, nationalism, — the geographical and ethnographic influences which cannot be avoided by the composer, musical idioms and the feelings of the people and the environment — in my opinion these are essential origins for a genuine and vital art. Thus, I believe that the environment and race must be inherent in the music of a composer and I see very little of this nowadays, especially in Brazil where, in some respects we are very fortunate [...] As a matter of fact, our people perhaps have a better opportunity than those further north, of being themselves in musical compositions. It's curious. We are people with a passion fro freedom but yet are content to be slaves of musical conventions — slaves somewhat on the level of showing abject obedience to rules which neither they nor their ancestors invented. (DOWNES, 1944: 7).

This interview with Villa-Lobos is of great significance because by supporting the musical idiom embedded in the musicality of the people in terms of their geographical conditions and race, the composer refers to features on which their modernism was built in previous decades. Moreover, on the basis of this construction, he puts Brazil before the United States with regard to producing a kind of musical "material" which is taken by him as being "genuine". These representations which he formed about his work are in line with the repertoire performed in the United States that year, as cited earlier: *Rudepoema*, [Savage poem] *Bachianas Brasileiras n° 4*, a *Suíte do Descobrimento do Brasil [Discovery of Brazil Suite No.3]*, *Choros No.s 6 e 9*, and *Choros No. 11*.

In the continuation of his interview with the New York Times journalist, Villa-Lobos began to create an image of a kind of music that was misunderstood within the Brazilian musical world. 497

In truth, it is not easy for a composer to find his own way. He is blamed on various grounds for being an amateur, ignorant, a dilettante, a lazy student who is unable to follow the work in his class: and he is accused of deceiving himself with regard to his own objectives and talent. (DOWNES, 1944: 7),

After this outburst by the composer in which he painted himself as someone whose music is misunderstood, Downes made a link between the misunderstood Villa-Lobos and the reception of his music in France in the 1920s. Soon after the extract quoted, he stated that: "it should be remembered what Sr. Villa-Lobos declared to certain colleagues of his in Paris, about where his music was going at the beginning of the second decade of this century" (DOWNES, 1944: 7).

On the one hand in political terms (which can be defined as the end of the 2nd World War, the early stages of the Cold War and the Pan-American policies for the integration of the Americas), the works of Villa-Lobos composed in earlier decades, appealed to the taste of audiences in the United States. However, this did not occur under the tutelage of the *Musical Americanism* of Curt Lange who sought a closer proximity with German musical culture and an integration with Hispanic America.

On the other hand, his compositions were adapted to the culture of entertainment of the United States, which can be seen in the composition of his musical *Magdalena*, in 1948. The creation of this *musical* genre, which is today recognized as a typical example of North-American entertainment, had its origins both in European traditions and certain forms of stylized experiments introduced by European immigrants in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

At the beginning of the 1940s, the producers of Broadway and the theatre critics thought that good songs and amusement was all that the public wanted. The aim was not to produce "great art" in the musical but to distract the public from the hardships they had endured in the Depression of the previous decade and following the outbreak of the 2nd World War in Europe. The 1940s witnessed great changes in the musicals whether as a 'type of art' or business. The Second World War gave a new impetus to the American economy and large-scale musicals appeared throughout the decade, in particular, *Oklahoma!* which to some extent, redefined the genre. (VIANA, 2007: 20).

Viana (2007) states that the idea of the story for the musical *Magdalena* originated in a famous restaurant in New York in 1944, when Homer Curran, Edwin Lester (producers), Robert Wright and George Forrest (librettists and musical adapters) were celebrating the immense success of their first musical for Broadway: *Song of Norway*, with music from the famous composer Edvard Grieg. Curran was the doyen of the theatregoers of the East coast of America and proprietor of the *Curran Theater* in São Francisco, impresario of the *Ópera Ligeira* in that city and an associate of Edwin Lester, Director-General of the *Los Angeles* and *San Francisco Civic Light Opera Association*; he was an extremely competent professional and regarded as a *gentleman of impeccable taste*. Wright and Forrest were in their 30s and had already worked on about 50 films for MGM (including most of the musical films for Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy).

Viana (2007) states that this group then began to discuss what would be their next musical. Although a writer on history Curran said that he wanted to keep as far away as

possible from the “icebergs of Norway” and thought the story should be about a country with an exotic forest and scenery together with the colors of a barbarous world. A few years before, he had read about a place like this – the Magdalena River in Colombia – and was fascinated by the subject. He began to design a map of the Caribbean coast of South America on the page of a menu in the restaurant, to show where Colombia and the Magdalena River were located⁶.

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He explained that, were it not for this river, the interior of Colombia could have remained an unknown indigenous jungle imbued with pagan beliefs and without any influence from the outside world. In his view the Magdalena River was responsible for changing the course of history in that country and went on to tell all he knew about the history of that region.

According to Viana (2007), Wright and Forrest, the two producers, regarded Heitor Villa Lobos as the only possible composer for Magdalena because he was – “the famous Brazilian whose colorful works had been acclaimed by critics and the public in concerts and recordings on both sides of the Atlantic”. However, the two librettists thought that this would require a miracle since, unlike Grieg, Villa-Lobos was still alive, was *worshipped* in Central and South America, adored in London, Paris, Rome, and New York and still actively composing, conducting and organizing concerts.

According to Viana (2007), Villa-Lobos stated that the two librettists had come to Rio de Janeiro in November and made a generous offer, promising several thousand dollars as payment for his work. The invitation was accepted, Villa-Lobos laid down certain conditions which seemed to him plausible and a swift agreement was reached. Villa-Lobos was given a down payment of \$10.000 to compose the work. As the contract had been made well in advance, the two Americans rapidly embarked on the work: this involved studying, analyzing, indexing and exploring the hundreds of works composed by Villa-Lobos, published and made available in the United States.

In the American Spring of 1947, on three occasions Wright and Forrest attempted to visit Villa Lobos in Rio de Janeiro, but were prevented by different circumstances and commitments, Villa-Lobos, decided to go to New York with Dona Arminda and José Vieira Brandão, his pianist/interpreter.

The same strategy that was employed by Villa-Lobos, at the beginning of the century to make his work known, when he invited journalists to his concerts, was employed again in the United States. As a result, before returning to Brazil, Villa-Lobos had a private audition with Olin Downes, who proved to be very enthusiastic about the project. When he had completed his version for voices and piano, the composer returned to Rio de Janeiro, where he started working on the orchestration. While the orchestral parts reached Rio, the weeks for rehearsals were being scheduled despite the sad news that Villa Lobos could not be present for the world première of Magdalena in California. He had been diagnosed with terminal câncer without any prospects of having surgical treatment.

In the period 1947-48, Villa-Lobos was at the apogee of his career: internationally renowned and admired as a composer, he conducted his works with the greatest orchestras in the world, as well as also being known for his work as a musical educationalist in Brazil. His *Choros* and *Bachianas Brasileiras*, as well as several other works, were already known by the concert-going public and in the musical milieu of America.

Villa-Lobos came on to the stage of Broadway at the height of the *golden age* of American musicals – a period called the *belle époque of Broadway musicals*. Apparently, this was the most favorable time for Villa-Lobos to show his *Magdalena* in Broadway. It was in 1948 that the duo, Lerner and Loewe, finally managed to create the musical. With regard to the

music, the problem was (and this was a target of the critics) that it was difficult for the public to assimilate on a first hearing, unlike what generally occurred with the successes of Broadway. Admittedly, the personality, level of knowledge and musical demands made by Villa-Lobos did not allow the composer to create something that would simply please the public, or in other words, to be a hit. At the same time, it seems to us that he intended to make a contribution to the genre and believed that the American public had the capacity to accept something more sophisticated and for this reason, refused to allow any alterations to be made to his work.

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Conclusion

In recent years, historians have shown a great interest in historical players who are caught up in an attempt to form different identities for themselves throughout their lives. This tendency has been reflected in various biographies of musicians, which in reality have been designed by means of an autobiographical “memory”. However, there still persists a belief in a *history of universal music*, which is expressed by portraying a procession of canonized composers who, it is assumed, comprise a *History of Universal Music* in objective terms. The subject/object of music being investigated is generally displayed as a central figure who is unique and rational and this notion is strengthened by biographies which outline a kind of history that is linear, progressive and evolutionary. In this way, the biographers seek to demonstrate qualities of consistency, regularity and originality with regard to identity, while overlooking the constructivist character of biographical discourses and the presence of different musical identities *concealed* by memory.

It was gradually possible to gain entry into the construction of a nation imagined by Villa-Lobos. This entailed examining his aesthetic choices and seeing how the composer *imagined* the Brazilian nation by means of sounds and the elaborate patterns he designed in his scores. This *entry* into the imagined nation by Villa Lobos is much more than a psychoanalytical or even aesthetic task but involved historico-cultural factors since the meanings assigned to his pieces have echoes in other non-musical sources. An attempt to find an originality and *unique* and *consistent* identity for Villa-Lobos himself, requires a breaking down of different kinds of historicity and “sociability networks” that are interwoven throughout his career.

In a search for this originality it was found that Villa-Lobos shared ideas, musical languages and aesthetic projects. Moreover, he adhered to some new practices while rejecting others, fell out with some friends and forged close ties with others. Through this game of identities involving approximations and withdrawals, (constructed through sociability networks observed in the “tessitura” or texture of the pentagram and sonority), he imagined a harmonious nation and constructed a *face* and image of Brasil.

The modernism of Villa-Lobos, which appeared at the beginning of the 20th Century, can be understood by setting out from a study of the relations of this modernism with other international projects that engaged the interest of the composer. However, *Musical Americanism* and *Música Viva [Live Music]* were Pan-American projects for musical integration that were resisted by the Brazilian composer because they involved political as well as aesthetic issues. The first of these questions was linked to the fact that Villa-Lobos wished to keep apart from the German musical vanguard movement which was characterized by the twelve-tone serialism of Schoenberg. (As discussed earlier, two German musicians, Curt Lange and Koellreuter were at the forefront of these musicological projects). The second issue concerns the distrust that Villa Lobos had of the

plan for the the musical integration of the Americas, adopted by Curt Lange. This distrust was linked to the question of the historical proximity between Brazil and the United States and the weakening of Lange's plan by official bodies in the United States who were more interested in a plan for domination that did not depend on intermediaries like the Musical Americanism that was based in Uruguay.

This close relationship of Villa-Lobos with the American public as well as the fact that the musician was fêted during his first visits to the United States (by critics in newspapers and specialist articles), are important matters when thinking about the spread of Brazilian culture outside of the country. The musical productions of the composer in the United States, as well as his musical for Broadway, are important sources of information when examining how a dynamic intellectual culture was established by Villa-Lobos and his interlocutors in that country.

In this way, Villa-Lobos was able to delineate an imagined Brazil in his score which was the result of aesthetic choices that involved both a closeness and detachment from North American culture. His work should be regarded as a means of conducting an analysis of the place of Brazil in the international scene during the 20th Century. At the same time, it should serve as a benchmark for clarifying the images that Brazilians form of themselves with regard to others, when building what we call the "nation".

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Notes

1. Also see: WISNIK, 1983.

2. Among others, the following can be cited: GALINARI, 2004 and LANA, 2005.

3. Franz Kurt Lange, founder of Musical Americanism, Born in Eilenburg, Prussia, now Germany, in 1903. Later when he acquired Uruguayan citizenship, he began to call himself Francisco Curt Lange. He was trained in architecture and musicology at the University of Munich, where he attended courses in philosophy, anthropology and ethnology as well as studying Greek and Latin. Between 1930 and 1940, the musical and musicological movement called by its creator, Americanism after 1933, set out some key objectives which are shown in its writings: the musical and musicological integration of the American continent; providing incentives for publications in the sphere of music and

musicology; the foundation of cultural institutions, discothèques and libraries responsible for looking after the musical and musicological culture of the Americas. Project undertaken by means of publications such as the Latin-American Dictionary of Music; the Latin-American Professional Guide; and, in particular, the Latin-American Bulletins of Music.

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4. On the concept of networks of intellectual sociability and their relation to political history: see SIRINELLI,

5. Leslie Bethell: "Brazil and the Idea of Latin America in historical perspective". *Historical Studies*. Rio de Janeiro, vol. 22, n. 44, p. 289-321, Jul/Dec 2009.

6. The Magdalenaé is the principal river in Colombia and is approximately 1,543 km in length. Its source is in the South-East of the country and it flows through the country from the south to the North. It finally reaches the Carribean Sea.

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