

New Selection 1

National music : Portuguese

Cultural Field: Sight and sound

Cultural Current: Music, Popular culture (Folk music)

Cultural Community: Portuguese

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Fuelled by the 1880 celebrations of the tercentenary of Camões's death and the Ultimatum of 1890, national consciousness increased in the last decades of the century; this also affected musical life, as a quest to identify and create a distinctly "Portuguese music" preoccupied composers, musicians and music critics. In 1884-85, Joaquim José Marques used the occasion of the Lisbon première of Augusto Machado's opera Laureanne to publish an article series on "national melody" and "national music". Appearing in the newly established musical periodical *Amphion*, they addressed state indifference to art music and its public institutions; as such they followed the denunciations, brought into currency by the Generation of 1870, of the decadence of Portuguese political, social and cultural institutions. Marques linked the "Portuguese national melody, so original and plangently modulated by our ancestors" to the libidinous *lunduns* and *modinhas* described by earlier foreign visitors and still subsisting, it was claimed, in brothels, taverns and prisons, performed to guitar accompaniment by *fado* singers and criminals, with erotic and vulgar lyrics and lascivious gestures. The sad loss of that unique and original Portuguese musical "character" (owing to the pernicious influence of operatic *contrafacta*) was also denounced by Marques in an extensive article published in the *Revista de Estudos Livres* in 1884-85. In keeping with the positivist and republican outlook of the *Revista de Estudos Livres*, Marques followed, in proclaiming the uniqueness of the "national song", the literary, historical, and anthropological studies of the review's main editor, Teófilo Braga. He adopted the ethnic nativism of that *maître à penser*, rejecting, for instance, for the folk-song "São João de Beja", not only the theories of Arab and Muslim musical descent, but also the idea of affinity with traditional Spanish chants. By the same logic, the author suggested more generally that the "Portuguese melody" was derived from the pre-Roman Turdetani tribe, and coeval folk-songs, so it was asserted, had retained the Portuguese "original" musical "character". Marques concluded with a call to collect, study and develop the folkloric and urban musical instances of "national melody" as part of the country's "musical



Júlio Neuparth



Victor Hussla



Vianna da Mota, José
Lisbon (PT) 1957

nationalization”.

Distinguishing between “popular” and “popularized” themes, Greenfield de Melo in 1890 also called for an immediate and thorough collection and genealogical study of those “ancient”, “spontaneous”, “characteristic” and “anonymous” songs which were kept alive, in their “primordial and genuine expression”, by the country’s remote communities (but exposed, even there, to the withering influence of cosmopolitan urban songs). Mentioning Alfredo Keil’s *Donna Bianca* (1886; an opera on Almeida Garrett’s *Donna Branca*), Melo denounced the neglect and heedlessness concerning popular songs in musical circles.

Conversely, João de Melo Barreto in 1891 found folk-songs unsuitable for Portuguese opera owing to their lack of “artistic taste” and their “insignificance”, and instead argued that Portuguese opera could gather its national character from the use of Portuguese historical themes and the choice of language for the libretto. Another Amphion contributor, the composer and prominent music critic Júlio Neuparth, replied in the same and the following year that such requirements, while patriotic in nature, fell short of founding either a Portuguese national opera or instrumental music style: for that purpose, recourse to the nation’s ancient, “characteristic”, and “spontaneous” genre, the repository of traditional folk and urban songs, was indispensable. Like-minded critics, such as Manuel Ramos, denounced the self-alienating importation of foreign models and instead pointed to the collection published by Adelino das Neves e Melo in 1872, as well as some printed songs and fados (failing to mention the earlier *Álbum de músicas nacionais portuguesas*, arranged for piano or voice and piano by João António Ribas in 1857).

In response to this music claim for folk-song collection, César das Neves and Gualdino de Campos published a large, though indiscriminate, compendium between 1893 and 1898 containing folk and urban songs, national anthems and patriotic songs, religious chants and “vulgarized” themes collected by the authors and their collaborators. The melodies were harmonized for voice and piano with an eye to private and public performance including orpheonic singing. A set of *Cantos regionais da Beira* collected by Pedro Fernandes Tomás appeared in 1896, earning praise from the press for the careful transcription of the “diction and metrification of the popular communities” and for retaining the “character” of their songs.

In 1903, Ernesto Vieira distinguished two trends in the “national” musical production of the time, emphasizing the importance and scarcity of “Portuguese music”: on the one hand a few pieces which “aimed to raise Portuguese [folk and urban] songs to the path of art music”, and on the other hand an abundance of “music by Portuguese composers”. The most renowned work in this latter category was undoubtedly José Vianna da Mota’s *Symphony À*

pátria, composed in 1894, which programmatically signalled its national-mindedness by invoking a Camões quotation for each movement; it was premiered as a piano reduction in Lisbon in 1894 by the composer, and in orchestral form in Porto in 1897 and in Lisbon in 1911. As late as 1908, Vieira's account of Portuguese music followed Marques's (and, by implication, Braga's) nativist-traditional approach to folk-music as a long-standing, separate and continuous tradition and as the prime inspiration (more so than contemporary national schools elsewhere in Europe) for an aspirational national-Portuguese musical school.

The debate on national music overlaid an established practice of using folk and urban songs for solo bravura pieces, domestic music for piano or accompanied voice, choral arrangements, symphonic compositions and operatic fragments. A pioneering nationalist composition, based on Portuguese traditional songs, appears to have been the first (of five) Portuguese Rhapsodies (1891 ff.), by Viana da Mota (a pupil of Liszt). Composed abroad, it premiered in several German cities in 1891 and in Lisbon in 1893. Around the turn of the century, Portuguese publishing houses published numerous fado collections, notably those arranged for piano by Alexandre Rey Colaço between 1894 and 1903. The composition of nationally-themed symphonic works was also in evidence in the last quarter of the century, as musical taste began to shift from the operatic towards the symphonic. Several nationally-themed symphonic works (Liszt's Hungarian rhapsodies, Brahms's Hungarian dances, Lalo's Rhapsodie norvégienne, Grieg's Danse norvégienne, Dvořák's Slavonic dances) prepared the ground for Portuguese composers to use genres like the rhapsody, the paraphrase, the symphonic poem, the symphony and the suite for Portuguese art music. In 1892, Victor Hussla, director/conductor of the orchestra of Lisbon's Academia de Amadores de Música, premiered his *Tres rapsodias sobre motivos populares portuguezes* for orchestra, dedicated to King Carlos I; a fourth symphonic rhapsody followed in 1899. Given the ties of the Academia de Amadores de Música with the royal family, Hussla's rhapsodies (as well as those by Viana da Mota) had a royalist tinge rather than aligning with the Braga-inspired republican tradition.

Hussla's efforts on the use of folk and urban songs of various Portuguese mainland regions (Minho, Coimbra, Alentejo, Ribatejo, Lisbon) and of the more scantily repertoried Portuguese dependencies (the Azores, Cape Verde) were hailed by Júlio Neuparth, who argued that the *Tres rapsodias* were the first successful attempt to create Portuguese symphonic music. Neuparth himself seems to have been the first to make use of the musical genre of the orchestral "paraphrase" for compositions on Portuguese traditional motifs, having produced two such nationally-themed works in 1897 and 1901. Unlike the

rhapsody, which typically involved a succession of different folk and urban themes, the paraphrase relied on a single melody or theme. The genre had been previously used by Liszt for his bravura pieces based on a specific operatic number, social dance or related anthems. Another possible model may have been the Paraphrase (on Portuguese themes) op. 3 by Henri Kowalski, dedicated to King Luís I, composed during (or even before) the composer-pianist's 1868 Spanish tour, decades before the debate on Portuguese musical nationalism.

In the wake of Hussla and Neuparth, Portuguese composers worked in those genres for various works based on Portuguese traditional songs, scored for orchestra or wind-band. This production (a very extensive corpus, of which only compositions from the first quarter of the century will be mentioned here) falls into two main trends. One unites a diversity of "traditional songs" from different regions into a national palette (António Ribeiro do Couto, *Fantasia[s] característica[s]*, 1899, 1902, 1905; *Colecção de Fados*, 1905; *Pot-pourri de canções populares*, 1907; João Pedro Rio de Carvalho, *Rapsódia de cantos populares portugueses*, 1905; Miguel Ferreira, *Rapsódia*, 1905; António Maria Chéu, *Rapsódia de cantos populares portugueses*, 1912; Manuel de Figueiredo, *Rapsódia portuguesa*). The other anchors a nationally-themed composition in a specific region of the country or its colonies (António E. da Costa Ferreira, *Suite. III: Paráfrase de uma canção popular*, 1903; António da Cunha Taborda, *Rapsódias africanas*, 1905; A.C. Taborda, *Cantos indianos*, 1905; Filipe da Silva, *Canções portuguesas (Rapsódia da Beira)*, 1911; David de Sousa, *Cantares portugueses: Rapsódia de cantos populares do Algarve*, 1918; Ernesto Maia, *Paráfrase*; João Carlos da Silva Morais, *Rapsódia do Minho; Uma festa no Minho; Rapsódia do Porto; Festa na Serra do Pilar (Porto); [Rapsódia do] Baixo Alentejo*, all composed before 1919, and others; Manuel Ribeiro, *Rapsódia nr. 3 [Algarve]*, op. 77, 1920; *Danças transmontanas*, op. 98; *Rapsódia nr. 4 [Trás-os-Montes]*, op. 106, 1924, and others).

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