

THE PIANO CONCERTO IN PORTUGAL: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

CONCERTO PARA PIANO EM PORTUGAL: UM BREVE OLHAR

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Abstract: This article aims to present a brief overview of the *genre* of the piano concerto in Portugal from the 18th century until the present. To date, there is only sporadic information given about the topic. This article, with the help of the contributing composers, also presents a synthesis of the works by Portuguese composers and by foreign composers residing in Portugal.

Keywords: Piano repertoire; Portuguese piano concerti.

Resumo: Este artigo pretende apresentar uma breve visão sobre o gênero concerto para piano em Portugal desde o século XVIII até o presente. Existem apenas informações esporádicas para precisar datas sobre o tema. Este artigo, com a ajuda de compositores colaboradores, também apresenta uma síntese de obras de compositores portugueses e estrangeiros residentes em Portugal.

Palavras-chave: Repertório para piano; Concertos portugueses para piano.

Introduction

Portugal has been associated with the piano almost from its inception, when performances on the early fortepiano were frequently heard in the court of João V (r. 1707-1750).¹ Moreover, a growing interest in ownership of the piano is verified in the 19th-century by a register of 12 pianos in 1809 that quickly grew to 500 in 1821.² Nevertheless, the piano concerto as a *genre* has had little presence until the 20th century. This fact is perhaps due to the upheavals and socio-political instabilities that began in the 16th century and ensued in a progressive decline of Portugal's fortunes until today. However, it cannot be overlooked that the Portuguese temperament remains inclined more for poetry, singing, and theatre than towards the piano even though the oft-quoted phrase “to play the piano and to speak French” were considered a measure of cultural attainment gleaned from the cottage industry of home tutoring, a practice that continued into the 20th-century in spite that at least one medical doctor advised young women not to take up the study of the piano – “this disgraceful instrument” – until the age of twelve nor to practice too much before the age of fifteen or six-

teen for fear of creating nervous disorders.³ No wonder that the Piano Concerto would not become a staple in the repertoire before the 20th-century.

18th and 19th Centuries

Early evidence is found in two concertos for harpsichord (playable on fortepiano) attributed to Carlos Seixas (1704-1742): *Concerto em lá maior*; *Concerto em sol menor*. Also, a “Concerto” or Quintet, (1785) by the Spanish José (Giuseppe) Palomino (1755-1810), a violinist of the Royal Chapel in Lisbon is extant.⁴ Other examples may have been lost in the devastating 1755 earthquake that destroyed vast numbers of manuscripts and books.

In the 19th-century, a *Concerto de Pianno* for piano (titar), *clarim*, and strings is ascribed to Joaquim Casimiro Júnior (1808-1862).⁵ João Domingos Bomtempo (1775-1842), who achieved success in London and Paris and was published by Clementi before returning to Portugal where he founded the National Music Conservatory in Lisbon (1835), brought significant attention to the concerto *genre* through his various works for piano and orchestra.⁶ The removal of the Portuguese court to Brazil (1808-1921) and the co-mingling of their composers, such as Marcos António Portugal (1762-1830) and José Mauricio Nunes Garcia (1767-1830),⁷ left no marks on the piano concerto repertoire.

The second half of the 19th-century, for the piano concerto in Portugal, is clearly inspired by the figure of Franz Liszt (1811-1886). Even though his visit to Lisbon (1845) and the resulting “Lisztmania” did not immediately bring new piano concerti works from such composers or performers as João Guilherme Bell Daddi (1813-1887),⁸ the Lisztian model is observed in several piano concerti. It is important to note that the Portuguese secular musical scene was dominated by theatrical productions. Pianists, instead of being centre-staged with opera singers, often had to be content with replicating arias through piano transcriptions and fantasies of non-Portuguese composers, usually for solo piano. Liszt’s benefit concerts, frequently given in the Teatro San Carlos with noted opera singers, reinforced this predilection. A work by one of his pupils, Artur Napoleão dos Santos (1843-1925), a pianist-composer from the northern Portuguese city of Por-

to who later took up residence in Rio de Janeiro, glorified this practice: *L'Africaine, Ópera de G. Meyerbeer: Grande Fantasia pour piano avec accompagnement d'orchestre*, op. 28 (ca. 1886).⁹ Artur's brother, Alfredo Napoleão dos Santos (1852-1917), preferred to draw upon Lisztian and Chopin piano concerti models for his two works for piano and orchestra: *Concerto para piano e orquestra em Mi bemol Maior* (the same tonality as Liszt's first piano concerto) and the *Andante et Polonaise de Concert pour piano avec accompagnement d'orchestre*, op. 27.¹⁰ Closing the 19th century, Liszt's last living pupil,¹¹ José Vianna da Motta (1868-1948), remembering his master's second piano concerto, composed the *Concerto em lá maior* (1886-1887) around the time of Liszt's demise, followed by the *Fantasia dramática* few years later (1893).¹²

20th Century: 1901-1949

Portugal preserved the Romantic spirit well into the 20th century. The departure of almost two million Portuguese people to Brasil, USA, and elsewhere, from mid-19th century until around 1950¹³ because of unfavourable conditions at home, had an impact on cultural life. The end of the monarchy in 1910 and the establishment of the First Republic (1910-1926) brought some short-lived hope for stability. In spite of modernist attempts by various Portuguese composers who studied abroad, Portugal remained several decades behind mainstream Europe. For the piano and its concerto *genre*, this lethargic state was somewhat beneficial. The gradual evolution towards the modern-day piano concerto yielded many and ripe fruits in the 20th century, many of which portrayed a growing nationalistic pride.

The piano concerto in Portugal during the first half of the 20th century, while not abundant, nevertheless has a dignified representation. The most significant early example is the *Balada para piano e orquestra* (1917) of Luís de Freitas Branco (1890-1955). Freitas Branco studied with Debussy in Paris and later, after returning to Lisbon, became known as the “father of Modernism.” His *Balada* has Fauré's *Ballade*, op. 19 (1881), as a precedent. In the north, Pedro Blanco (1883-1919), Spanish pianist-composer resident in Porto since 1903, composed his virtuoso three-movement *Piano*

Concerto, op. 15 (1918) in the style of Tchaikovsky or Grieg.¹⁴ The ensuing turbulent years did not produce large-scale piano concerti.

The installation of the dictatorship and the New State (1926-1974) gradually gave rise to a new cultural climate. The already respected composer, Ruy Coelho (1892?-1986), whose studies at home (his home town) with Tomás Borba and Rey Colaço as well as his travels abroad that brought him in contact with Humperdinck, Schönberg, Bruch, and Falla, made important contributions to the *genre*. His fecund style and ambition to give musical expression to the “soul of the nation”¹⁵ are present in many *genres*, especially in ballet and cinema. He produced works for piano and orchestra, such as: *Rapsódia portuguesa* (1936), *1º Concerto para piano e orquestra* (1939), *Noites nas ruas da Mouraria* (1943), *2º Concerto para piano e orquestra* (1948), and *Concertino para piano e orquestra*.¹⁶

The Spanish composer, Ernesto Halffter (1905-1989), who had married the Portuguese pianist Alicia da Câmara came to Lisbon during the Spanish Civil War where he completed his *Rapsodia portuguesa* in December 1937, which was dedicated to the memory of Ravel. The work has Portuguese *fado* and *fandango* influences, as well as that of Halffter’s mentor, Manuel de Falla (1876-1946). It was premiered on 20 June 1940 by the Marie Antoinette Freitas Branco in Lisbon, the Madrid National Orchestra with the composer conducting.¹⁷

The prolific piano output of Fernando Lopes-Graça (1906-1994), whose nationalistic and folkloric reliance as well as the foreign influences of Bartók, Stravinsky, and Falla, led to the creation of his first concerto: *Concerto para piano e orquestra, nº 1* (1940). The piano concerto (1940/1942) with the same title by his colleague Francine Benoît (1894-1990), a respected French musician resident in Portugal, remains unperformed.

The remaining years of the 4th decade of the 20th-century produced *Catavento* (1944) by Cláudio Carneiro (1895-1963), the *Fantasia sobre temas populares portugueses para piano e orquestra* (1945) by Armando José Fernandes (1906-1963), two concerti by Ivo Cruz (1901-1985) – *Concerto nº 1 “Coimbra* (1945); *Concerto nº 2 “Lisboa”*(1946), as well as Coelho’s *Concerto nº 2 para piano e orquestra* (1948). These works brought to a close the first half of the century in a more defined national identity than heretofore present.

20th Century: 1950-2000

In the second half of the 20th century, the *genre* of the piano concerto, or rather works for piano and orchestra, is nearly doubled from the first half. One of the most important of all Portuguese works – Lopes-Graça's *Concertino para piano, cordas, metais e percussão* (1952/1954), whose strong Bartokian influence is irrefutable – appears (is composed). At the same time, Graça completed his *Concerto n^o 2 para piano e orquestra* (1954), which is joined by (coupled with) a work of Luiz Costa (1879-1960), the *Fantasia para piano e orquestra* (1954).

From the mid-1950's, there is a notable change in the piano concerto as composers become more open in their approach. The auto-didactic Armando Tavares Belo's (1911-1993) unabashed *Concerto romântico* (1957) has strains of Richard Strauss, Liszt, and Gershwin, while Victorino Almeida's *Concerto n^o 1 para piano* (1959/rev.1977) is also in a lighter vein and accessible to the public. Álvaro Cassuto (b. 1938) rejects the large-scale orchestral formation in his *Concertino para piano e orquestra de cordas* (1966), while Armando José Fernandes constructs an energetic and passionate *Concerto para piano e orquestra* in the same year, which is followed by Joly Braga Santos' *Concerto para piano* (1973) in full symphonic garb.

The third period of 20th century Portugal – that of the Revolution (25 April 1974) and establishment of a democratic state – finds the piano concerto in various guises including one of a nationalistic flavour, another with an utterance of personal license, and yet another that is more traditionally articulated. These works, respectively, are: Lopes-Graça's *Fantasia sobre un canto religioso da Beira Baixa* (1975), Victorino Almeida's *porno-fonia*, op. 52 (1977) and Rui Soares da Costa's (b. 1958) *Concerto para piano e orquestra* (1979/rev.1999). The *avante-garde* composer, Jorge Peixinho (1940-1995), defies the piano concerto in a singular moment by writing his clavichord concerto – *Concerto para clavicórdio* (1980).

The remaining decade of the 20th century manifests various forms and styles of the piano with orchestra. Maria de Lourdes Martins (1926-2009) is commissioned by one of the main funding sources for cultural activity in Portugal, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, to compose her *Concerto para piano* (1989). Prize-winning João Pedro Oliveira (b. 1959) pits the pia-

no against and with the orchestra in his fractal *Tessares* (1991), a Messiaen-inspired work that will generate permutations. Victorino d'Almeida returns to the Romantic period when he orchestrates *3 valsas de salão* (1994) for piano and chamber orchestra. António Chagas Rosa (b.1960), in spite of his contemporary language, portrays the Romantic spirit with grand orchestral writing. His virtuosic, multi-movement piano concerto, *A ascensão de Ícaro/Icaro's Ascent* (1994/1995), is based on Shakespeare's *King Lear*. By contrast, the prolific Sérgio Azevedo (b. 1968), a protégé of Lopes-Graça, presents the intimate *Concertino para piano e cordas* (1996), which will be followed by other *concertante* works. The British composer-conductor-theorist-professor who resident in Portugal, Christopher Bochmann (b. 1950), offers *Monograph Expanded* (1997), a work for piano and 32 instruments in an orchestral version inspired from his earlier solo piano work *Monograph* (1994), which was commissioned by the Serralves Foundation in Porto. The imaginative Amílcar Vasques Dias (b. 1945) composes not a piano concerto but a keyboard concerto: *Branda (Concerto para teclas, chovalhos e rebanho virtual, piano, sampler, sintetizador e controlador digital de sopros)* in 1998 for the Expo '98 in Lisbon.

The timbric use of the piano to highlight texture is found in Miguel Azguime's (b. 1960) *Derrière son double*, a work in which the piano is used with electronics. In Victorino d'Almeida's two suites on *Capitães de Abril*, op. 115 (1999), the piano is used as another orchestral voice. Sérgio Azevedo's *Concertino para piano e 14 instrumentos* (2000), which follows his chamber-like harpsichord concerto *Concertino para cravo solo* (1999), brings to a close the Portuguese piano concerto works in the 20th century.

21st Century Trends

While a general pessimism is noted about the fate of classical music around the world, composers in Portugal do not seem to share this opinion. Works composed in the first decade of the 21st century have already matched the production of piano concerti in the first half of the 20th century.

Victorino d'Almeida has composed two works for piano and small orchestra, both in 2002: *La Campanella*, op. 128 and *Rapsódia sobre temas*

de Peter Marinoff, op. 129. In the same year, Fernando Lapa (b. 1950) has written a double concerto – his *Concerto para flauta e piano com orquestra de cordas* – Sérgio Azevedo has composed another type of “double” concerto: his *Concerto para dois pianos* (2003). The British composer resident in the Lisbon area, Ivan Moody (b. 1964), has created *Linnunlaulu* (2003) for piano and chamber orchestra, which combines ideas of nature and spirituality. Luís Tinoco (b. 1969) has composed a work for piano and large orchestra entitled *Díptico* (2004/2005). Harpist-composer Clotilde Rosa (1930), whose piano style often emulates that of the harp gesture, has created *Concerto para piano e orquestra* (2006), while the young Sara Claro (b. 1986) has written the “anti-piano concerto” for piano and ensemble, *Concertante* (2007). Joaquim Gonçalves dos Santos (1926-2008) has composed *Concerto para piano* (2007), as has the Madeiran composer and author of its “Hymn”, João Victor Costa (b. 1939). Finally, in 2010, there are two versions of a new work by João Pedro Oliveira, entitled *Mosaic*: one for piano, toy piano and electronics, and the second a version for piano and electronics (to be premiered on 1 October 2010 in Viseu, Portugal, by pianist Madelena Soveral).

Conclusions

The piano concerto in Portugal, having suffered through enormous growing pains in the 18th and 19th centuries, reached its maturity and has found a place amongst other musical *genre*, such as opera, symphonies, and chamber music. Not only has awareness by the public been heightened, but sponsoring institutions are also interested in supporting composers’ endeavours in this field whether through direct commissions, prizes, publications, and/or recordings.

The reliance on foreign models, so prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries, gradually began to be supplanted in the 20th century by composers proudly drawing on the rich Portuguese popular and folk traditions. Although some foreign influence is inevitable and is discernible, partially because of globalization and partially because of the generous governmental support of young composers for foreign study abroad, there is no doubt that composers in Portugal today have the freedom of expression and the

wealth of means at their disposal to create unparalleled works that have receptive publics and are performed by excellent musicians.

The role of foreign composers living in Portugal has changed dramatically. Their function, in the 18th and 19th centuries, generally was to contribute to the formation of apprentice musicians. Although to some extent this pattern has continued into the 20th-century (such as with the professors in higher education in Portugal), it is gradually dying out. The foreign composers-professors are now well integrated into mainstream musical and educational life without being placed on the perennial pedestal, in a healthy and mutual respect. In considering the specific role that foreign composers have played in 20th-century Portugal, there is no strong evidence that Portuguese composers have followed their piano concerti models (Pedro Blanco, Ernesto Halffter, Christopher Bochmann, Ivan Moody). On the other hand, one composer – Francine Benoît – became acculturated into Portugal in spite of returning for a year of study in her native France with Vicent d’Indy at the Schola Cantorum in 1918-1919.

In 20th century Portugal, the piano concerto has been the subject of some unusual treatment. Particularly notable are the following works: *Concertino para piano, cordas, metais e percussão* by Lopes-Graça, *Tessares* and *Mosaic* by João Pedro Oliveira, *A ascensão de Ícaro/Ícaro’s Ascent* by António Chagas Rosa, *Branda* by Amílcar Vasques Dias, the double concerti of Fernando Lapa and Sérgio Azevedo and the “anti” concerto of Sara Claro.

In the 21st century, Portuguese composers clearly are confident within themselves in whatever direction they take. The variety of thought and creativity expressed in their piano concerti and in the manner of getting their works to the public reveals a healthy competitiveness. With the arrival at maturity, the piano concerto in Portugal in the 21st century is poised to thrive in a most interesting and original way.

Notas

¹ A copy of a 1767 Antunes piano resides in the Shrine to Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota. For more information, please see the National Music Museum site: <http://orgs.usd.edu/nmm>.

² Brito & Cymbron, p. 105

- ³ “Perigo do estudo ao piano” do *O jornal do pólo* (26 de Agosto de 1899), vol. 14:
O Dr. Waetesold afirma, após uma informação colligida por um jornal francez, que uma grande parte dos ehlorosos e das nevrozses que soffrem as meninas devem ser attribuídas ao abuso do piano.
E indispensável, diz elle, abandonar o habito mortal de compellar as meninas a martellar um teclado antes de 15 ou 16 annos.
O dr. Waetzold mostra que em mil meninas que estuam o piano antes da idade de 12 annos, seiscentas eram atacadas, em consequências d’isso, por perturbações nervosas; duzentas somente eram affectadas d’estas mesmas perturbações entre as que começaram este estudo n’uma idade mais avançada. Em fim, cem meninas somente em mil são atingidas de perturbações nervosas entre as que nunca tocaram este desgraçado instrumento.
 O estudo da rabeca produz efeitos talvez mais desastrosos ainda.
- ⁴ This work has recently been published in a new edition, available on AvA Musical Editions: <http://www.editions-ava.com>.
- ⁵ The partial musical score is found in the *Biblioteca Nacional* in Lisbon with the identification number of A.M. 158.
- ⁶ These nine works include: *Concerto para piano n° 1*, op. 2 (Eb Major); *Concerto para piano n° 2*, op. 3 (F Minor); *Concerto para piano n° 3*, op. 7 (G Minor); *Concerto para piano n° 4*, op. 12 (D Major); *Cinquieme Concerto pour le Forte Piano*, op. 24 (C Minor; C Major); *6.me Concerto pour le Forte Piano* (E Minor/Major, incomplete, c.1840); *Concerto Fantasia para piano e orquestra*; *Capricho para piano e orquestra*; *Divertissement sobre temas de La Dona del Lago de Rossini* para piano e orquestra.
- ⁷ <http://books.google.pt/books>, accessed on 30 July 2010. “19th-century Portuguese court composers” in *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel, p. 121., 4th ed. 1986, 2003.
- ⁸ Daddi was a Portuguese pianist of Italian origin whom Liszt invited to perform with him in Lisbon (an act that created problems for him owing to the jealousy of his colleagues). He was responsible for initiating public chamber music sessions in Portugal. <http://armandapatrio.paginas.sapo.pt/biografias.html>, consulted 30 July 2010.
- ⁹ Other themes elaborated by Artur Napoleão were based on operas such as *Traviata*, *Guilherme Tell*, *Luisa Miller*, amongst others, but for solo piano.
- ¹⁰ Published by A. Napoleão & Miguez Narciso, Rio de Janeiro.
- ¹¹ José Vianna da Motta (1868-1948) was born after another Liszt pupil, the Scottish pianist Frederick Lamond (1868-1948), and survived him by only a few months, thus becoming Liszt’s “last living pupil”, as well as the youngest. Although there is a current trend to “modernize” Vianna da Motta’s spelling to “Viana da Mota”, the pianist-composer himself preferred the former spelling.
- ¹² Both of these works have been recorded by the Portuguese pianist Artur Pizarro. Please see the Selected Discography.
- ¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Portugal, accessed on 31 July 2010.
- ¹⁴ <http://pedro-blanco.blogspot.com>, consulted on 30 July 2010.
- ¹⁵ http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruy_Coelho, consulted on 31 July 2010.
- ¹⁶ This last work has not been verified in *Enciclopédia da Música em Portugal no Século XX*, vol. 1, pp. 301-305, by Manuel Deniz Silva, but appears on the site <http://sites.google.com/site/patrimoniomusical/coelho-ruy>.
- ¹⁷ Silva, Manuel Deniz (2010) “Ernesto Halffter” in *Enciclopédia da Música em Portugal no Século XX*, rev. Salwa Castelo-Branco., vol. C-L, pp.605-606.

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