

# The Sephardic Song *La Prima Vez* from Phyfe to Bausch, Wenders and Oliveira

## A Canção Sefardita *La Prima Vez* de Phyfe por Bausch, Wenders e Oliveira



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**Abstract:** The music is one of the strong factors that keep language alive in mankind, allowing historical facts to pervade genuine in the minds of people. In this context, the Sephardim and the Ladino have made a significant contribution to the arts around the world since their historical forced migration from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. This article focuses on the rereading of the Sephardim medieval song *La Prima Vez* in the twenty-first century by Owain Phyfe, and how it was used by Pina Bausch, Wim Wenders and Willy Corrêa de Oliveira. For this purpose, each artist was focused individually in order to summarize and interpret the artistic developments involving *La Prima Vez* from the notions of mimesis, evidencing how its melody crossed centuries of oral tradition reaching all continents.

**Keywords:** Sephardim, *La Prima Vez*, Owain Phyfe, Pina Bausch, Wim Wenders, Willy Corrêa de Oliveira

**Resumo:** Música é um dos fortes fatores que mantém a linguagem viva na humanidade, permitindo que fatos históricos permeiem genuínos na mente das pessoas. Neste contexto, os Sefarditas e o Ladino têm significativa contribuição artística em todo o mundo desde a histórica migração forçada da Península Ibérica em 1492. Este artigo enfoca a releitura da canção medieval Sefardita *La Prima Vez*, no início do século vinte e um, por Owain Phyfe, e como ela foi usada por Pina Bausch, Wim Wenders e Willy Corrêa de Oliveira. Para este propósito, cada

artista foi tratado individualmente a fim de resumir e interpretar os desenvolvimentos artísticos envolvendo *La Prima Vez* a partir da noção de mimesis, evidenciando como sua melodia atravessou os séculos de tradição oral chegando a todos os continentes.

**Palavras-chave:** Sefarditas, *La Prima Vez*, Owain Phyfe, Pina Bausch, Wim Wenders, Willy Corrêa de Oliveira

## Introduction

In the materialistic sense, the reflection of ancient music manifests itself as a beam of melodies and sound waves propagating after the impact on a new creation. This new creation would be the separation interface between the periods. The partial or complete renaissance of music from past times comes from a conducting agent of art or the artist. And in this sense, the influence between artists and arts is a basic condition for the continuity of creation through the centuries. (GEBAUER and WULF, 1995, p. 89)

This study identified a current of influence among artists whose interconnection was made by the Sephardic medieval song *La Prima Vez*. The starting point of this current began with the popularization of the old song *La Prima Vez* by the voice of Owain Phyfe in the late twentieth century. His interpretation was included by Pina Bausch in the playlist of the production *Der Fensterputzer* which was later used in the film "Pina" directed by Wim Wenders. Lastly, according to personal interviews with the composer (OLIVEIRA, 2015), impressed with the film, Willy Corrêa de Oliveira wrote the piece for piano. Considered reference in their fields, each artist in question is treated as an independent case, and the uniqueness of Sephardic music and their own activities are observed according to notions of mimesis.

Etymologically, the term mimesis is derived from the Ancient Greek *mimesis*, whose expression carries a range of meanings and its facets awaken aesthetic and philosophical interest. In this vast field of discussion, it was noted in the literary research that, conventionally, thoughts start from similar points to explain mimesis, denoting representation of reality, imitation, mimicry, the act of expression, and the way in which the real world and human behavior is represented in art or literature. (OXFORD) And from there, the expression expands and assumes characteristics according to aesthetic and philosophical views, but, the contemporaries constantly concerned about not standardizing its

meaning. An example of this can be seen right at the beginning of the book 'Mimesis: culture, art, society' where Gebauer & Wulf (1995, p. 1) say that "conventional understandings of mimesis fall short of the complexity and significance of the concept." Essentially, mimesis is one of the oldest and most well-known theories of the philosophy art (TUNALI, 1989, s. 176), and, if until today its use and definition have been discussed, it is due to the philosophers Plato and Aristotle who adopted the term in their aesthetic theories.

In the Platonic view, mimesis was manifested in particulars which compare or imitate the forms from which they are derived; thereby, the mimetic world (the world or representation and the phenomenological world) is inherently inferior in that it consists of imitations which will always be subordinate to their original. For him, the original world is defined also as the nature, the truth, the superior or the divine world. In short, all art is, therefore, mimetic. (BUNCE, 2013, p. 13) (HANÇERLIOĞLU, 1993, p. 163) (KELLY, 1998, p. 234) Aristotle agrees with Plato that mimesis is an imitation of reality as seen in the fourth chapter of the Poetic (ARISTOTELES, 1970, s. 4), "tendency to imitate is instinctive in man from childhood, and because of it, the knowledge is acquired and the pleasure is experienced." Although, Aristotle thinks differently on divine world of Plato. Aristotle took the mimesis notion further purporting that art is self-contained and in fact simulates the world rather than only reflecting it. While Plato has a negative attitude towards artistic beauty – because art is just a copy, therefore inferior – Aristotle thinks that art uses nature as an object appreciating the idea of aesthetics of beauty. Puetz (2002) has made a useful distinction between the two philosophers:

In contradiction to Plato (whose skeptical and hostile perception of mimesis and representation as mediations that we must get beyond in order to experience or attain the "real"), Aristotle views mimesis and mediation as fundamental expressions of our human experience within the world - as means of learning about nature that, through the perceptual experience, allow us to get closer to the 'real'.

Thus, in Aristotle's mimesis, art is a dynamic representation and source of perception in the real world, and, as seen above, the reproductions and artistic representations can cause pleasure to man. Durant (1953, s. 59) categorizes it as intellectual pleasure,

Artistic creation, says Aristotle, springs from the formative impulse and the craving for emotional expression. Essentially the form of art is an imitation of reality; it holds the mirror up to nature. There is in man a pleasure in imitation, apparently missing in lower animals. Yet the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance; for this, and not the external mannerism and detail, is their reality. [...] The noblest art appeals to the intellect as well as to the feelings (as a symphony appeals to us not only by its harmony and sequences but by its structure and development); and this intellectual pleasure is the highest form of joy to which a man can rise.

This view of Aristotle gained strength again in later epochs, as can be seen in the conceptions of aesthetics of the naturalism of the Renaissance, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when aesthetic theory emphasized the relationship of mimesis to artistic expression and began to embrace interior and emotive, subjective images and representations as the real world. The same is not seen in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the aesthetic theories of the Enlightenment moved away from the Aristotelian conception of mimesis (as bound to the imitation of nature), and a move towards an assertion of individual creativity in which the productive relationship of one mimetic world to another is renounced. (KELLY, 1998, p. 236) (PUETZ, 2002) In the twentieth century, mimesis went through massive changes corresponding to ontology and what was considered the real world. In the approaches to mimesis, authors Walter Benjamin, Adorno, Girard and Derrida related the real to social practice and interpersonal relations highlighting the individual factor. (KELLY, 1998, p. 234) The contemporary philosopher and follower

of Aristotle Georg Lukács agrees and completes this thought by arguing that the analysis of a work or art should be done from the personal perspective and historical context. He states that the character of a work or art must be “judged by how profoundly and aptly, how comprehensively and genuinely it is able to reproduce and raise the problems of the personal and historical moment of its creation from the perspective of their enduring importance to the evolution of humanity.” (TUNALI, 1989, s. 177)

The thoughts of individualization of the artist in Lukács is discussed and carried forward by several scholars. Costa Lima, for instance, amplified the thought above adding the recovery of the understanding of mimesis as emulation. The term emulation is seen in Haçerlioglu in *Philosophical Encyclopedia* (1993, p. 162), as synonym of mimesis that precedes historical aspects related to Plato and Aristoteles. Although, Costa Lima gives for the term emulation a constructive sense of rivalry that induces someone to imitate another, either to match up or to overcome it, he clarifies that the emulation is not simply an imitation of reality, but the possibility of someone creating a new reality, in particular. Costa Lima believes that every phenomenon is received by the human agent according to a set of expectations apprehended from the culture to which the agent belongs. Costa Lima discovers a critical modality of mimesis, differing from other critics, when he says that mimesis, as opposed to mere translation of similarity, is not the product of similarity, but the product of difference. Difference, however, imposes itself from a horizon of similarity. (LIMA, 1986, p. 361) It is possible to align Luiz Costa Lima’s thinking with Umberto Eco (2016, p. 700) in ‘*The Name of the Rose*’ where, dealing with intertextuality, the writer draws a bridge between Aristotle’s mimetic philosophy and the current century. He wrote “books always speak of other books, and each story tells a story that has already been told” (ECO, 2016, p. 701), and later he gave technical instructions of how to deal with the echoes of the similarities. In other words, it is precisely in the handling of echoes that the differences emerge. In fact, both refer to the notion of the artist as

creator, who 'asserts' in artistic expression and expresses his way of seeing the real world, with the possession of technical skill. And under the aegis of this thought, the study attempts to ascertain the light of mimesis as the artists Phyfe, Pina, Wenders, and Corrêa de Oliveira expressed in their respective arts and individual contexts, the reality of their worlds through the song *La Prima Vez*.

## The song

The song that awakened respect for the artists mentioned here comes from a long tradition dating back to the fifteenth century. However, before dealing specifically with music, some historical and linguistic observations are complementary to the subject.

In the year 1492, the most populous, distinguished, and important medieval Jewries were expelled from Spain. This event was followed by forced mass conversions in Portugal five years later, ending more than millennial Jewish presence in the Iberian Peninsula. (BENBASSA and RODRIGUE, 2000, p. ix) The term Sephardim is generally used to describe Jews of non-European origin. But, sometimes it turns out to be inappropriate to misrepresent the descendants of the Middle East and Yemen. The Sephardim word comes from the Hebrew *Sefarad* – which means 'Spain' in English – and refers also to member or descendant of the Jews who lived in Spain and Portugal from at least the later centuries of the Roman Empire. The Sephardim initially fled to North Africa and other parts of the Ottoman Empire, and many of these eventually settled in the countries France, England, Italy, Balkans, Macedonia and Holland. (WEINER, n.d.) In fact, the transplanted Sephardim largely retained their literature and native language Ladino, or the medieval Castilian Jewish-Hispanic dialect. The linguistic representations carried forward allowed the continuation of the mimetic aspects of society. In other words, the mimetic representation of social reality and its symbolic aspects over the years did not exist independently of linguistic

representations and, in a certain sense, it was itself constituted linguistically. (GEBAUER and WULF, 1995, p. 221)

Undoubtedly, in the oral tradition, the linguistic representations were also transmitted from generation to generation through music. Relating to music and language in the light of mimetic, Aristoteles (1970, p. 289) states that, "imitation is produced through rhythm, language, and harmony, employed separately or together." Between them – language and music – there are many proprieties in common according to Jackendoff, cited by Rebuschat *et al* (2011, pag. xiii) "both require memory capacity for storing representations (words, chords, etc.) and the ability to combine these representations by means of a system of rules or structural schemata." More detailed observations about musical and structure will be treated later in the piano piece.

Considering that the transmitting process was carried out orally, only the romances from the literary production of the Sephardim are mentioned in manuals of Spanish literary history. Songs are also a special case because until quite recently, they have not been the subject of systematic research aimed at determining their history and the nature of the corpus. More detailed information about the song is scarce. According to Caparros (2009, p. 356-357):

Although the Sephardic songs have antecedents and features that link them to medieval Hispanic songs, there are, before the 18th century, no documents containing the text of such songs; the last examples date back to the second half of the 20th century. [...] Certain texts have entered the oral tradition, which for this reason also serves as a source of these songs. Each song has its own individual author, even though his name may have disappeared, through the process of collective transmission, into oblivion; songs whose author can be identified today are a small proportion of the whole.

As seen, the lack of written documents makes researches seek their sources in oral traditions. And, according to results, it is



mainly in the songs that the greatest artistic plasticity was found in Sephardic poetry. For Caparros (2009, p. 356), “the song is the most characteristic genre of Sephardic poetry, and its purest and most authentic product.” The following example belongs to the song *La Prima Vez*, whose text was edited by the author of the paper in Ladino followed by the translation. The source was the audio of the song that sung by Owain Phyfe. (ALTERNITYSTUDIOS, 2010)

*La prima vez ke te vidi*

*de tuz ojos me 'namori*

*D'akel momento te ami*

*fin a la tomba te amaré*

*Aserkate me kerida*

*selvadora de me vida*

*Descubrite i ávlame*

*sekretos de la tu vida*

[The first time that I saw you

I fell in love with your eyes

I loved you since that moment

and I will love you until the grave

Come closer my dear

savior of my life

Reveal and talk to me

the secrets of your life]

The notable presence of rhyme accents and scheme, regularities lines in eight syllables, refrain, and ritornello gives the text in Ladino the rhythm and music needed in the most evident way. In other words, the text in itself is so musical that it is possible to question who was born first, poetry or music. Without extravagance, with maximum simplicity, poetry and music in partnership express in just eight lines a trajectory of a love story.

## Owain Phyfe

From now, the study treats the four artists that reread and borrowed the song to be used in their respective fields. Taking as

a starting point, it is worth looking briefly at the individual case of Phyfe's (1949-2012) performances who, before dedicating himself completely to music, was in fact an automotive engineer. He devoted himself to recovering songs in various renaissance festivals around the United States, seeking to recreate the spirit of the late renaissance period and medieval repertoire, wearing clothes of the epoch, playing guitar and singing accompanied by a percussionist and dancer, all in the typical scenario of the fifteenth century. It was after his presentation at the Michigan Renaissance Festival in the middle of the eighties that his career boosted and, until the end of his life, he continued singing in similar festivals and having his music aired worldwide. Phyfe was distinguished at festivals, exceptionally, to be able to sing old songs in their original languages such as Italian, French, German, English, Welsh, Russian, Hungarian, Ladino, Provençal, among others with his New World Renaissance Band. And, in addition to singing, he was also an accomplished storyteller who unquestionable contributed to the folk traditions remained alive using the technique of imitation. (JAKOBI, 2002)

In the first instance, the case above may be adequate in the framework of Platonic philosophy, for containing the mimesis aspects of an artist who imitates and represents scenes from centuries ago. Here, the mimetic behavior is viewed as the representation of something animate and concrete with characteristics that are similar to the characteristics to other phenomena (KELLY, 1998, p. 233), by featuring the artist's thrice removal from truth – God creates truth, man imitates, the artist imitates man. (HANÇERLIOĞLU, 1993, p. 163) Nonetheless, in the sphere of aesthetics, the platonic understanding of this first instance is rejected because it positioned mimesis as alienating, inauthentic, deceptive, and inferior. (KELLY, 1998, p. 234) On the other hand, the case is seen according to Aristotle (1970) in *Poetic*, when he elaborates upon the notion of simulation by suggesting that through its formation of methods and conventions, mimesis in art not only raises the status of art but also makes it worthy

of critical study. For this reason, it seems appropriate to frame Phyfe in this thought, since behind his performance, there is a research and theatrical reconstruction of a time he did not live. Logically, much of the mimetic representations that happened in those renaissance festivals are at a remove from the current world. However, the social activities of singing and storytelling with these representations are expressed, are all real, and indeed were an important part of the coin of human exchange and connection for centuries.

And it was what Phyfe achieved with his research work and distinguishing talent bringing the flavor of medieval subjects to the twenty-first century, as in the case of the song *La Prima Vez*, stimulating the pleasure (DURANT, 1953, p. 59) of other artists in other mimetic productions and highlighting each one in their differences.

## Der Fensterputzer

Here is the case of the *La Prima Vez* in Pina Bausch (1940-2009) in *Der Fensterputzer* and later on Wim Wenders (1945) in 'Pina', where the song in the voice of Owain Phyfe reached an international popularization. Both mimetic works employ and achieve different functions, fundamentally because theater and cinema deal directly with concrete elements of the real world. The music between these two arts is abstract and intangible and stays in the background, working as a stimulator of contrasting emotions both for the viewers and listeners and also for the art itself.

In brief biographical words, Pina became known for describing the new parameters of a ballet of her time. The German ballerina, choreographer, and director achieve technical excellence at the Folkwang School in Essen under Kurt Jooss<sup>1</sup>, responsible for her eccentric vision throughout the career. Jooss sought to reconcile the free and revolutionary spirit of dance with the fundamental rules of ballet and relate it to the other arts – opera, music, drama,

sculpture, painting, photography, and design (SERVOS, 2008), and as a consequence of this teaching, Pina reinforced a new genre of art, allying classical dance with elements of mime, acrobatics, sports, music and especially theater. (CALDEIRA, 2011, p. 3) In 1973, she took over the management of the Wuppertal Theater Ballet and stood out as the leader of an artistic movement of considerable importance in the performing arts from the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century: the *tanztheater*, or dance-theater. As a result of the conciliation of dance-theater, the scenery in Pina presented extraordinary innovation at the time. She radically innovated the set of visual elements, bringing heaps of flowers and sand to the stage, as well as preparing the necessary infrastructure to bring plenty of water, creating the illusion of rain and river in the productions. Moreover, outside the theater, she went to the city streets, abandoned places, and open-sky scenarios radicalizing the artistic expression of her productions. The innovative scenarios were the result of her choreographies that depend on the dancer's other techniques and more specific muscular demands. From the eighties and for a period of fifteen years, the Goethe Institute supported Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch in creating works inspired by the cities of the world they visited, making residences to absorb the local place. *Der Fensterputzer* is one of these productions, the result of their residence in Hong Kong in October of 1996 and the fragmentary moments that were emotionally marked in the memory of the dancers during this period.

In the Tanztheater Wuppertal studio, the working materials were turned into proposals and questions so that the dancers themselves could understand the feelings about each theme and so the thematic circle began to be organized. According to Servos (2008), out of the finds brought back from the journey which begins with each new piece, out of the many small scenes and the many dancers, a global image of enormous complexity was pieced together, full of surprising turns. About complexity, Gebauer and Wulf (1995, p. 317) state that mimesis can also be

“an act of freely releasing behavioral schemata into operation”, adding that naming, meaning and choreographic representation techniques are dealt with in a more complex semiotic sphere.

The Tanztheater Wuppertal corpus methodology can be seen in the light of Costa Lima (1986, p. 68) when “every action is received and interpreted according to a set of expectations, depending on the culture which the receiver belongs.” In this same line of thought, Lukács states that mimesis cannot be separated from the artist’s inner process and the work of art is the unity of the two. Artistic creation does not revolve around the artist’s feelings, but around the source of those feelings, being an appropriation of the inner nature of the thing attracting his interest and attention. This does not negate the fact that the mental states he experiences, which are not self-existent but include pre-existing class, value, etc., determinations, act on the mode of appropriation and are thus incorporated into the artistic result. (KEFALIS, 2020) In other words, when the writer creates a work of fiction, he creates it with expectations and intentions about what he wants to awaken in the reader. And the reader already has a culturally socialized expectation of what he should see and understand. (COSTA LIMA, 1986, p. 68)

Examining *Der Fensterputzer* some descriptions can be considered as mimetic gestures. The dark stage with about forty thousand red silk flowers, weighed literally one ton, symbolized the Bauhinia Blakeana, the Hong Kong’s national flower stylized on the national flag. The dramatic concept of the production is represented by a dancer with a bucked and squeegee in hand, who glimpsed the city through the windows, whose colossal task was to clean the glass facades of the Hong Kong skyline, reflected by the crystal chandelier suspended in the air. In the semiotic meaning, windows are the barrier created between artists and the public, men and women, people in general. In a comic conception, the scenes feature tormented rituals of seduction between men and women in the modern life of a metropolis. However, what is transmitted turns out to be loneliness and impiety. About the

contrast of the feelings, Wim Wenders says that “Pina’s priorities were clearly not aesthetic ones, but seemed to be the same questions that are driving contemporary cinema or literature: who we are, what we are here for, how we can love, how we can be understood.” (NAHMOD, 2012, p. 22) In this respect, the music is a contrasting factor that at the same time completes the scenes providing an emotional tension and the emotions are received by the audience differently, according to their real-world, as stated before Costa Lima and Lukács.

The masterful selection of songs established a repertoire ranging from Cesaria Evora to traditional Chinese songs, including Vangelis, Burt Bacharach, Dizzy Gillespie, Romanian gypsy music and the medieval *La Prima Vez* interpreted by Owain Phyfe.

## The film

“Dance, dance, or we are lost” (BAUSCH, 2011) is the Pina’s last words summing up her life and the subtitle of the film ‘Pina’ wrote and directed by the acclaimed German Wim Wenders. For about twenty years, he met with Pina and planned to work together on a film whose inspiration came only when the lightweight 3-D cameras rigs became available. The challenges and risks in transforming the theatre in cinema were mainly in relation to the audience. With this high-technology mimetic machines, Wenders was able to add to the screen the illusion of depth he sought so much, creating the feeling of intimacy between the viewer and the dancer. Moreover, he generated the experience of the spectator to watch a performance of Bausch with the impression that the absolute limit of the screen can be surpassed. The example is given by Nahmod (2012, p. 22),

High atop a cliff, a man madly about, his steps bringing him dangerously close to the edge. Behind him stands a steep hill. He dances from one to the other – the intensity of his movements suggests someone in deep anguish. He dances before a three-

dimensional (3-D) film camera. As he moves closer to the cliff, the breathtaking 3-D visuals underscores the potential danger for him.

The film planned to be shot with the new cameras would consist only of extracts from some of the most noted choreographies that earned her almost every major global award in a career that began in the seventies and continued for four decades. Between them, *Le sacre du printemps*, *Café Müller*, *Kontakthof* and *Der Fensterputzer*. From the theater to the film many adaptations were made, naturally causing differences, however, that communicate mimetically with each other. Focusing on the three minutes of the film that was designated for *La Prima Vez*, a parallel between the productions can be made. The song, the use of colors and the body mimetic impulses (choreography) call attention. For example, the color of the mountain of petals become a bright and heavy dress of an alone woman in the dark stage of the film, who was before in the front stage and isolated from the other dancers in her back. The choreographic were readapted for the film (BAUSCH, 2012) according to the reality of the dancer and her particular inner, however, mimetic body impulsive behaviors were similar. In the playback, the medieval song of two stanzas, carried the mimetic capacity of express the trajectory of a love story with words, characterized by lyric melody and consonant harmony functions symbolizing the subtle world, subconscious and the unreachable. In contrast, the dancer performed in polyrhythms and abrupt gesticulations, typical of contemporaries' choreographies, representing an aggressive reality of the touchable world. All those differences are mimetic dimensions that create relaxing or stressful expectations to for the audience. According to Gunter and Wulf (1995, p. 316),

The commensurability of two worlds is a function of one's symbolic disposition over the prior world, which itself implies a moment of mastery; mimesis is the appropriation of another world. [...] Operative in this procedure on a subterranean level (often unwittingly so) is a declaration of unreality on the part

of the creator and the recipient: this world is not real. With the spread of mimesis into regions that were not previously in its possession, the realm in which such a potential sublation of reality can be undertaken is also expanded. In all areas of mimetic operation there are to be found fluid boundaries among representation, illustration, rendering, and reproduction, but also among deception, illusion, and appearance.

In 2009, during the production stage, Pina discovered she had cancer and died days before filming began, leaving an unforgettable legacy of over forty original choreographies created for the Tanztheater Wuppertal, including fifteen residences. The selected works were filmed by Wenders and the resulting film, released on 2011, was premiered out of competition at the 61st Berlin International Film Festival, in the official section of Berlinale, Telluride, Toronto and New York film festivals and nominated in 2012 for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. The interviews interplayed with choreographies achieved an elegiac quality with an overwhelming sense of loss.

## The piano piece

Born in Brazil, Willy Corrêa de Oliveira (1938, Recife, PE) was immersed in an environment that exemplified the cultural impact of national and contemporary music. Without intending to plunge here into the political details of the time, we may express that it is a fact that one year before the composer's birth, the Brazilian classical music entered in the frames of the New State, the regime headed by Getúlio Vargas, from 1937 to 1945, whose focus was on the organization of national identity aspects. (AMATO, 2007; VELLOSO, 1997)

Just to illustrate, 1937 was marked by the inaugurations of governmental institutions<sup>2</sup> in the cultural area, the University of Rio de Janeiro became the University of Brazil – in a more



patriotic context, and Heitor Villa-Lobos was publishing the book "The popular teaching of music in Brazil: teaching of music and orpheonic singing at schools."<sup>3</sup> In this boom of national rediscovery, coincidentally in 1937, the German musician Hans-Joachim Koellreutter<sup>4</sup> immigrated to Brazil. He, the great responsible for the dissemination of the theories of the Second Viennese School and consequently godfather of the new generation of contemporary composers of the country, caused discomfort among the nationalists. So shortly after his arrival, the traditional composer Camargo Guarnieri argued in public that Koellreuter guided the "formalist current that leads to the degeneracy of the national character of music." (SILVA, 2001, p. 143) Certainly, it was in that conjuncture that Oliveira spent his childhood in the northeast of the country- the cradle of "popular manifestations that openly arrived in the city of Recife" (OLIVEIRA, 2006) and musical traditions that he absorbed with a distinct sensibility. After immigrating to the São Paulo State in the sixties, he met Olivier Toni, Koellreuter's student and a decisive person in the development of the higher music education system. In 1962, under scholarships from the Brazilian and German governments, Oliveira spent some months in Europe, attending the Darmstadt International Summer Courses<sup>5</sup> for New Music. There, Oliveira studied with Hans Werner Henze, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez. Subsequent sojourns in Europe allowed him to study under Henri Pousser, Luciano Berio and attend also various Electroacoustic Music Laboratories. In 1968 he was in charge of the Structures of Political Languages courses at the Higher Institute of Advertising and Publicity in São Paulo. (COMPOSITORES BRASILEIROS, 1975; STANLEY and TYRRELL, 2001)

Three years later he became one of the founders of the Music Department of the University of São Paulo, and in a short time, reference in contemporary music in the country. After reading his doctoral dissertation (OLIVEIRA, 2001) is possible to affirm that the first compositional phase goes until the beginning of the eighties, strongly influenced by European schools. The second phase follows from 1988 and incorporates several peculiarities. The musical confection comes from distinct sources: memory,

dream, literature, poetry, theater, cinema, expressions, animate or inanimate, concrete or abstract being. Besides that, the piano becomes his key instrument for achieving sound. In addition to the abundant musical production, his extensive literary production is an arc of relics to be explored by the next generations. In these texts, Oliveira preaches for around thirty years that there is no contemporary classical musical language in capitalist societies. Convinced that he writes contemporary music in an individual dialect that no one understands, it is common to find explanatory notes together with the musical works. The function is to reveal the meaning of the work properly and to reach ideas that are between the lines. Even aware that the individual dialect will never be fully deciphered, as a condemnation of the capitalist system. (OLIVEIRA, 1997) For this purpose, the above sentence is exemplified with the explanatory text of the piano piece *La Prima Vez* by Oliveira (2015)<sup>6</sup>,

Just after watching the film "Pina" by Wim Wenders, I took note in the pentagram of the melody *La Prima Vez* until deciding what to do. I do not want to risk forgetting it. Later, I learned that the music was an ancient Sephardic melody; very old, time said for itself, long time ago, from the past.

It was a sweet shock for me. My daughter wanted me to write something easy for her to play. Stripped as a result of the music, this was a condensed version of the melody. Simple and with repetition. I decided to remove it. Instead, I wrote a variation. This is to make corrections in the first part of my insertion; each fix forced me to make another fix. (A correction on one side immediately affected the other side, causing loss of balance.) Instead, I wrote a variation. And so I kept on adapting and adapting. Days, weeks later, the balance that I caught convinced me: I had to play again on a detail: so I had to retouch in another section; to ensure the harmony of the whole: many, so many, countless.

(Like a never-ending, recurring dream): so I've been rewriting this work for four years, like the resistance painter showed before the last brush movement, it is possible that this structure is still unfinished, so possible:

In the beginning of the text, the composer shares the risk of forgetting the theme he listened during the film 'Pina' by Wim Wenders. Between the lines of the text, it is understood that there was a pleasure in listening to the music and a decision to do something with it in compositional terms (probably the same happened with Pina). This unique moment, the course of mimesis allowed the artwork to reflect the observer as well as simulate the world. According to Bunce (2013, p. 13), "the observer or listener is limited by their experience and schema of the reality represented or called to mind, this proves fascinating as experience and the development of a schema are inexorably tied to memory." Still, according to the text above, it is clear the composer's hesitation in finishing the work that was first written in 2012, reviewed for the first time in 2015 and in the second time in 2017. In the consultations of the manuscripts provided by the composer, it is noted that this type of revision cases are not frequent in his work, and that *La Prima Vez* is distinguished in this aspect. Perhaps because of his perfectionism and perhaps because the repetitive theme heard from the beginning to the end of the song, it eventually became an obsessive cycle of adjustments and balances of the differences that the composer was creating.

On perfectionism and the need to achieve the absolute art, Willy Corrêa (OLIVEIRA, 2011)<sup>7</sup> wrote in the *Do Diário de Diamantina*, "art is the unfathomable universe in all amplitude. Some experiences are possible for us: not the totality of all possibilities (if they are finite). Perhaps we can say that art is a reflection of the infinite we need and we have yet to achieve." Making a parallel between the artists, similarly, the feeling of not having finished a production was seen in Pina. According to Caldeira (2011, p. 3), "Bausch was always in the audience, taking notes to talk the next day and/or fix something they had danced on the eve. The choreography was never done, but was constantly evolving."

**La prima vez\***  
*para Suzy*  
Willy Corrêa de Oliveira

**Moderato assai (rubato)**

Piano

Pno.

Pno.

Ex. 1. The first page of *La Prima Vez* for piano (OLIVEIRA, 2017)

The perfectionism is also in relation to the structures in Willy. According to the explanatory text, he expresses his concern to maintain the general balance of the work, a fact that relates him to the fidelity of the formal structure. Categorically, “the structural concern for the coherence of musical discourse is universally present in the work of Willy Corrêa”, affirms Bonis (2006, p. 88). Wherefore, the composer’s familiarity with rigorous structures converged with the striking features of Sephardic song metrics.

A central property of both language and music is their structure, which we can characterize roughly as the grouping of individual items into phrases or larger units at different levels of analysis.

[...] In discussing language structure and musical structure the paper in this section focus primarily on phonological structure, i.e. on items that ultimately involve unites of sound and their groupings, and they compare them with sound units and their groupings in music (language and music).

And in this respect, the phonological structure of *La Prima Vez* is shown below in separations of syllables to understand the rhythm, rhymes, regular accents, ritornellos and refrain. For these lines to contain eight metrical syllables, however, the measure of the final line of the first strophe contains a synaloepha (te a). The syllabism of Sephardic song seems to require greater use of hiatus, as can be seen in a meter as frequent as the *octosílabo*. (CAPARROS, 2009, p. 358)

<i>La/pri/ma/vez/ke/te/vi/di</i>	<i>A/ser/ka/te/me/ke/ri/da</i>	- 8 syllables
<i>De/tuz/o/jos/me/'na/mo/ri</i>	<i>Sel/va/do/ra/de/me/vi/da</i>	- 8 syllables
<i>D'a/kel/mo/men/to/te/a/mi</i>	<i>Des/cu/bri/te/i/á/vla/me.</i>	- 8 syllables
<i>Fi/na/la/tom/ba/tea/ma/ré</i>	<i>Se/kre/tos/de/la/tu/vi/da</i>	- 8 syllables

At this point, it is worth reflecting on the mimetic connection between metrics and music. It was stated before in Aristotle (1970, p. 5), the evidence of the meters is part of the rhythm, still the rhythm, language and harmony can be used separately or together. As seen above, the poem is structured mathematically in two strophes with four verses in each. The verses have eight metric syllables being the last oxytone, and its rhymes coincide sonorously. Willy Corrêa wrote the piano piece in ternary compass and in thirty-two measures, structuring each strophe in sixteen bars of measure. Placing the last syllable of the verse on the strong beat of the compass was only possible because the song is in Ladino – a particularity. The same would not be admissible in the Spanish or English language. The poem was arranged in strictly structural

patterns – one strong feature of composition seen in other works and defended by himself. (OLIVEIRA, 2001)

As to the question of timbre and sound height, the composer was faithful to the ancient song, establishing the melody mostly in the central octave of the piano, as close as possible to the register of the human voice. Without the intention of making a harmonic analysis of the work, regarding harmony, it is possible to read the arpeggios chords in the beginning and at the end of the piano piece, as metaphors of the chords played in the guitar<sup>8</sup> by Owain Phyfe. (ALTERNITYSTUDIOS, 2010)

The composer gives indications of interpretation throughout the work, highlighting its lyrical and intimate character. In these first and second measures, it is possible to make a musical correspondence relationship with Phyfe, established between the notes, rhythm, and tonality. What is seen here is the proprieties of art communicating with their effects (ARISTOTELES, 1970, p. 3), but, it would be wrong to understand the work of Willy Corrêa in a case of Aristotelian mimesis, or to say that *La Prima Vez for piano* is merely referential or subordinate to any divine world according to Plato. Naturally, the first correspondence idea is caused by mimesis, which is the sensation of similarity, creating exchange with the resulting frames of references and expectations. (LIMA, 1989, p. 68) Thus, this framework of references and expectations was aggregated and shared in the individual context of the artist. Yet, from the third measure of the piano work, the composer created a new reality for the old song, with the introduction of appoggiaturas, generating a new auditive experience. Gradually, short and strange notes, higher and lower than the real note, appear in the musical speech without affecting the melody until the ritornello. When the melody returns, the appoggiaturas appear in different registers of the piano, expanding the polyphonic layers and dominating the musical discourse. With this compositional technique, Corrêa de Oliveira dealt with the echoes of similarities and, thus, established his reference system in addition to mated the poetic structure to his musical dialect. Confirmed here the notion of the artist as creator. (KNOLL, 1996, p. 74)

Willy Corrêa closed on mimetic communication and figuration in an individual musical language, bringing ancient music into an original twenty-first century writing, in expressive polyphonic pianistic lines.

## Conclusion

This study addressed the issue of the resurgence of Sephardic song in the present century in artistic rereadings in light of mimesis. A brief historical investigation of mimesis from Ancient Greek to the twenty-first century was realized, and according to the examples, it was noted that contemporary references increasingly analyze mimesis, going beyond possible categorization. However, not neglecting the ancient Greek philosophers, but rather, continuing to give historical value to their theoretical ideas. As result of the investigation, mimesis takes on different guises in different historical contexts and no one connotation can evoke the complexity of its interpretation and meaning.

It was considered the Sephardim historical background and linguistic specifications of the old song *La Prima Vez* as the subject necessary to complement the unit of this study. It was demonstrated through a historical approach to Sephardim migration an aesthetic proposal, in which language and music converged in the recreation of a rich cultural legacy in this early twenty-first century.

Absolutely, the artists treated in the study were creators and not imitators, as Plato thought. The choice of the song was a mimetic act, without entering into the merit of being a conscious or unconscious act, but certainly, the artists had a common feeling or intellectual pleasure, as discussed in the study, that propelled them to do something new with the music.

Covering the nature of the rereading by Owain Phyfe, the *Der Fensterputzer* by Pina Bausch, the film 'Pina' by Wim Wenders, and the piano piece *La Prima Vez* by Willy Corrêa de Oliveira, the study specified mimetically the ways in which these expressions of art

communicate with each other and themselves. In the same way, the study treated the socio-historical and technological background to better understand how the works are distinguished from each other. The simplest distinction can be noted when listening to the same music in different works. *La Prima Vez* reached other auditive levels for always incorporating a new reality, due to having become a new referential 'real' world. To conclude according to Luiz Costa Lima, the horizon is the same, similar to each other, however, the artists imitated creating differences and not similarities.

And as a final consideration, the limitation of this study represented by *La Prima Vez* may revive many other examples which carry other levels of listening within them. The definitions of the past-present and time-space unite in one when the differences of the similarities between music and humanity became consciously audible.

## Notes

1 Kurt Joss was one of the cornerstones in the history of German theatre-dance, whose founder was his teacher Rudolf Laban and his contemporary Mary Wigman.

2 "Dentre outras, podem ser citadas: Superintendência de Educação Musical e Artística; Instituto Nacional de Cinema educativo (1936); Serviço de Radiodifusão Educativa (1936); Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (1937); Serviço Nacional de Teatro (1937); Instituto Nacional do Livro (1937) e Conselho Nacional de Cultura (1938)" (RUBIM, 2007, p. 5).

3 Published by Departamento de Educação, Superintendência de Educação Musical e Artística do Rio de Janeiro – Distrito Federal, 1937.

4 It is worth to reflect here on the particularity of Koellreutter's case in reference to the subject of music and migration. He is the incarnation embodiment of the migration term and the convey of new European musical theories to South America. In fact, his migration from Germany



was primarily an anti-Semitism case. Even not being a Jew, he was denounced by his father and stepmother for a dating with a half-Jewish girl.

5 After the Second World War, the Darmstadt became the source of new musical experiments and world center that brought together the future names of contemporary music from the early fifties to the early sixties.

6 “Logo ao término do filme “Pina”, de Wim Wenders, armei indeciso pentagrama e anotei a melodia da *La Prima Vez*. Não poderia correr o risco de perdê-la, e desvanecer-me – sem ela – do pânico que me dera! Empós vim a saber que era uma antiga melodia sefardita, muito antiga, dizia de tempo já – há muito – passado; presentemente, delicioso sobressalto. Minha filha pediu-me que a escrevesse fácil para tocá-la. Resultou em uma versão condensada, despojada, mínima, com sinal de repetição. Uns tempos mais adiante e eu ainda relutava muito em tragar o “da capo.” E intentei uma pequena variante em lugar de repetência. A partir de então, tive que retocá-la para maior equilíbrio entre as duas diferenças: e cada vez que consertei aqui, obriguei-me a remexer ali (onde algo se expunha imediatamente afetado, desequilibrado). E assim venho – de tempos em tempos – reparando aqui, adaptando ali, para que a justeza aconteça. Por dias, semanas, satisfaz-me a proporção alcançada: até que um detalhe tenha que ser trabalhado... e conseqüentemente outra porção exija retoques para a exatidão de melhor harmonia do conjunto: e, desde primeira vez, tantas outras, inúmeras outras vezes e não se atinge a última (como num sonho que não tem fim, recorrente): e assim é que há quatro anos, não paro de re-compor esta peça, mui ao modo de um pintor diante de uma tela, relutando antes da pincelada final. É possível, bem possível – a esta altura – que esta não seja ainda a construção definitiva, acabada:

Willy Corrêa de Oliveira. S. Paulo, 6 de agosto de 2015”

7 “Arte é o universo insondável em toda amplitude. Algumas experiências nos são possíveis; não a totalidade de todas as possibilidades (se é que são finitas). Talvez possamos dizer que arte

é um reflexo do infinito que necessitamos e que alcançamos ainda alcançar.”

8 According to the video (ALTERNITYSTUDIOS, 2010), Owain Phyfe introduces the song *La Prima Vez* with the following sentence: *Una canción del tiempo de Isabella de Castilla y Fernando de Aragón*. In other words, Phyfe was mentioning the Catholic kings Isabella (1451-1504) and Fernando (1479-1516), which marked the episode of the Inquisition and the forced migration of the Sephardim from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. At the time of the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, three basic modes of performance for the songs repertory that emerge from the evidence of the literary sources were: all-vocal; all-instrumental; and vocal soloist accompanied by a plucked instrument such as lute, vihuela or harp. Accepting the hypothesis that the old song *La Prima Vez* was sung and accompanied by one of these instruments mentioned, through oral tradition, its accompaniment went through timbre changes, such as in the nineteenth century with the emergence of the modern guitar. Citing the ‘guitar’ and its ‘metaphors’, the author suggests that Willy Corrêa de Oliveira was inspired by the sound of the instrument played by Owain Phyfe and not the instruments of the time of Catholic kings.

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