

## BRAZIL MIRRORS ITS OWN NATURE

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**R**ENATO DE ALMEIDA, the Brazilian writer, has observed that the "history of our music is a continuous searching after self-expression." All art is, indeed, based on this desire for self-expression. But it is also affected by other psychic influences, as well as the circumstances of the epoch in which the artist is educated and his work grows. Art is the sum of human experience, and so it is determined by varying heredities and necessities in the struggle for life. The artist's country, its physical conditions, no matter how strenuously he may struggle to be free, give shape and indelible character to all his work.

The music of Brazil cannot properly be indicated by the scanty materials, the tunes, rhythms, instruments, obtained from the native Indian inhabitants of the country, nor by the typical Negro rhythms, the monotonous melodies brought from Africa with slavery. And no matter how popular is the mixture of Negro and European elements, that also fails to encompass a Brazilian art for it neither satisfies our need of music nor reflects our feelings and civilization. Enjoyed by all of us during Carnival time, it is still, after all, a harking back to African customs.\*

Finally we cannot honestly designate as Brazilian the music of composers who are still confined to European patterns and technics. European music first crossed the seas in religious hymns of the missionaries in the songs of Portuguese and Spaniards who settled the country. These early tunes still remain in our folk-lore. They are repeated in children's rhymes and plays and reappear in carols and popular dances at Christmas time, in the *pastoris*, *fandangos*, *reisados*. Moreover, in the centuries that have passed, our musical education has been consistently modeled on that of Europe. But that music cannot really express us since,

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\*These songs and dances have been interestingly modified in recent years. In the States of Minas, Sao Paulo, Rio, Bahia, the Negro dances *Batuque*, *Jongo*, *Samba*, *Maracatu* still maintain their primitive, insistent, sensual rhythms. But elsewhere they have been gradually replaced by a music different in character, movement and tunes. In Pernambuco, for the most part, the African *Maracatu* has given way to the *Frevo* which is a more highly evolved music. The dance, through varied steps, gestures and attitudes has developed a power to express healthy joy.

for one thing, it is never quite understood by the people of Brazil. The beauty and emotion of Europe's most perfect masterpieces we may be able to appreciate, even admire. But since they do not appeal directly to our feelings, we cannot be said to fully realize them.

Today a widespread, earnest seeking for a more genuine accent marks the work of our Brazilian composers. Deliberately relegating the European concepts of their education to the past, they have set their goal toward a music which is to be national according to our necessities and interest. Therefore material is now gathered from all indigenous sources, Indian, Negro and half-caste. Out of such elements they strive to create a music which shall truly express this American nation, blended of so many different peoples, living together in a setting of prodigal nature, of blazing light and heat, amid forests and rich valleys, mountains, seas and impetuous rivers, a sun-drenched land that has molded a Brazilian personality, proud, intelligent and generous.

Inspirations of native and original character can already be traced in the powerful chords of the *Guarani* overture, and the singing of the birds at dawn from the *Schiavo*—works by our great composer Carlos Gomes (1839-1896). Though he had studied music in Italy when that country cast the spell of its art all over the world, Gomes could never quite subdue the impulses of his Brazilian temperament which found spontaneous outlet in much of his writing. A national spirit appears also in the *Serie brasileira* and *Tango brasileira* of Alexander Levy (1864-1892), where folk-themes are introduced in a most delicate and melancholy style. Another pioneer was Alberto Nepomuceno (1864-1920) the first to write songs in the Brazilian language. Incredible as it may now seem, all the "art" songs before his day were sung only in French or Italian. Nepomuceno had studied in Italy and Germany but always kept alive the love for his country, and it is beautifully expressed in the *Garatuja* prelude; the *Serie brasileira*, a rich orchestral work; *Galhofeira* for piano, and notably in songs like *Cantigas*, *Trovas*, *Uyáras*. This last recreates an amazonic legend of mystery, picturing in bright colors the *selvas* and the wilderness.

Francisco Braga, a composer still alive today, once studied in Paris with Massenet. Yet much of his work reflects a special "Brazilian" tendency. The beautiful symphonic poem *Marabá*, inspired by Goncalves Dias's verses, describes the anguish of a half-caste maiden despised alike by native and European families. Native melodies and rhythms also mark his *Gaviao de penacho* from the opera *Contratador de Diamantes*.

A still more definite character has been given to Brazilian music by Hector Villa-Lobos. His work reflects an exuberant personality, rich imagination, and a style all his own. There are plenty of modern expressive effects, dissonances and orchestration. But the prevailing melancholy emotion is expressive of our native psyche; often timid and sweet, sometimes bold and wild. *Choros*, *Serestas*, *A lenda do caboclo*, *Viola*, tell much about the Brazilian soul and in a most fascinating way. In the *Choros Number 10*, *Rasga o coração*, the chorus and orchestra employ native rhythms in a most characteristic movement to set off the theme of a typical "modinha," written in the languid, lyric Portuguese tradition.

Many others have made significant use of our folk-lore. Luciano Gallet, who died early, left several considerable works, the *Morena, morena*, *Eu vi amor pequenino*, *Suspira coração triste*, *Taiêras* and *Dansa brasileira*, for violin and piano. There is also the composer and pianist, Joaquim Octaviano, who has harmonized folk-themes in *Nhapope*, *Anoitecer* and is the author of *As margens do Paraiba*, a piece that attempts to recapture the beauty of our landscape, with its rivers flowing through woods and over rocks.

In such songs as *Noites de Junho*, *Toada para você*, *Meu coração*, and also in *Trio Brasileira*, Lorenzo Fernandez has exquisitely woven together many folk-themes. Still another steeped in folk-lore is Eernani Braga. He has made the lovely harmonization of a very sweet tune, *A casinha pequenina*, a song known all over Brazil and as well in Europe. He has also used several folk-themes in *Prenda minba*, a gaucho song from Rio Grande do Sul, *Côco do Engenho novo*, a popular dance from North Brazil, and has composed of such material a *Trio* for

violin, cello and piano, molded in the suite form.

Even our children's rhymes have been exploited by Francisco Mignone in his *Roseira, dá-me uma rosa*. In *Congada*, and *Maracatú de Chico rei*, he uses Negro rhythms. Barroso Netto, Frutuoso Vianna, Mozart Guarneri, Deolindo Froes, Assis Republicano and Newton Padua are other composers in this expanding Brazilian movement. The tendency is regional also. Everywhere in our country, musicians are seeking, each in his locality, a typical national art. Amazonic legends and myths are sung on lovely melodies in Waldemar Henriques's works, Alagoan tunes and dances mingle with the Negro and "caboclo" in the songs of Hekel Tavares, while Catulo Cearense, who is both poet and composer, tells us in beautiful rhymes about the "set-tanejo's" life and feelings.

In his quest for national traits the Brazilian composer taps the rich soil of musical folk-lore which is spread thickly all over the country. He opens his mind to the wonders of nature about him, studies the mood and feelings of his people and, by harmonizing the many voices rising from this beautiful land, tries to realize in music the fervor, youth and liberty of its American spirit.