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Música Antiga: Spotlight on Brazil

By Shulamit Kleinerman

The characteristic brio of the Brazilian lifestyle carries over into the way early music is presented and performed

WHEN MARÍLIA VARGAS was 17, she took a 21-hour bus trip from her home city of Curitiba, in the southern Brazilian state of Paraná, to Juiz de Fora, 540 miles to the northeast. The International Festival of Brazilian Colonial Music and Early Music she attended was the young soprano's first early music immersion experience. She spent two weeks singing everything from Monteverdi to Couperin. "My mind was totally changed. It was the madrigal teacher" – the Brazilian Homero Ribeiro de Magalhães Filho, living in Paris – "who told me, 'Child, you should study early music in Europe.'" Her mind was made up before she got home, and 18 months later, Vargas was enrolled at the Schola Cantorum in Basel.

The Juiz de Fora festival's dual emphasis – on early music as a whole and on Brazilian early music specifically – reflects a particularly South American relationship to early music. Under the Portuguese colonial court, European-style Baroque music-making and composition flourished. The country's modern-day early music revival, however, has advanced more slowly than in countries with a wealthier arts infrastructure. For several years, Vargas assumed she would have to stay in Europe to have the career she wanted.

But after she completed her master's degree, personal matters drew her sights homeward. Vargas looked harder and saw that there were ensembles, conductors, and directors to be found who were working at the same level she'd known abroad. "Most importantly, I distinguished what is really special and different about musical life in Brazil: the joy people experience when they make music – their vigor, their thrill and

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enthusiasm." Since 2005, she has maintained a home in both Switzerland and São Paulo.

Vargas's colleagues, both at home and abroad, seem to agree with her characterization of their nation's musical spirit. I asked seven Brazilian musicians what makes their musical culture unique. Charleston-based countertenor José Lemos, who performs with the Baltimore Consort and in operatic produc-

tions across Europe and the U.S., gave a typical response: "We have a tendency to be a little bit more casual but at the same time more passionate in our delivery – to perform with more spontaneity and almost an improvising element to it." These days, Lemos's only regular musical connection with his homeland comes when he meets fellow Brazilian performers in Europe – but he still declares Brazil, without reservation, "the most musical country in the world!"

Flutist Laura Rónai elaborates. "Brazilians are generally less stressed than Americans, less competitive, less bothered if a note fails or if there is a technical flaw, more able to improvise – in life and in music alike – and more aware of the undercurrent of passion which is the true stuff music is made of. This is a strength and a defect at the same time, but being a Brazilian myself, I tend to favor this more passion/less rigor stance. It always melts my heart when I see someone who has everything working against him or her surmount all difficulties and play beautifully."

"It's a tropical country," Cléa Galhano emphasizes. Living in Minnesota since 1992, Galhano teaches at Macalester College, is executive artistic director of the St. Paul Conservatory of Music, and enjoys a performing career as a recorder.

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soloist and chamber musician. She is a founding member of the Belladonna Baroque Quartet, which has performed several times in Brazil. "Every time, the other players say, 'It's so much fun!' Foreign musicians always talk about how enthusiastic the audience is, the way they stand and clap. It has to do with the culture. Here in Minnesota, people are quieter."

Anima

Early music has a whole other life in the post-colonial tropics. Perhaps no group is exploring this meeting of worlds more boldly than the ensemble Anima. Now in its 15th year, Anima began when Valeria Bittar returned home after seven years of study in Europe.

"I was looking for a way to perform early music with the recorder in Brazil. The first feeling I had was that I needed to know Brazil and Brazilian music better." She joined forces with a harpsichordist friend, Patricia Gatti, and founded Anima as an ensemble for Medieval and Renaissance music. Brazil has a significant repertoire of Baroque music composed during the colonial era, but Bittar was looking for something else. "The initial need to reach an intimacy with the Brazilian 'ancient' music led us to other musical paths, until we were faced with Brazilian instruments whose timbres brought us an ancient history – a history older than Brazil itself."

The traditional instruments Bittar began coming to terms with were the Brazilian fiddle and 10-string guitar, along with their repertoire – "music that was not notated, ancient music that is still alive in contemporary Brazilian 'traditional' societies of unlettered communities, far from mechanical thinking and industrialization, where a chronological time line does not exist." In some of their publicity, Anima refers to such places as "islands of medievality." The musicians trace the ancestry of the Brazilian *saboa* and the improvised singing styles of the country's *cantadores* back to the Middle Ages.

"The absence of the need for notation in Medieval culture and in traditional societies led Anima's musicians, in the beginning of the '90s, to think that both

societies gave importance to the moment of performance rather than to the score itself. We started to create arrangements collectively." Another co-founder, fiddle player José Eduardo Gramani, who died in 1998, started to compose new pieces, "and Anima arranged, or 'dis-arranged,' them."

Anima treats Medieval and Renaissance compositions as traces of oral tradition in a musical landscape of Brazilian folk music. Their most recent CD, *Espejo* (2006), features the 14th-century virelai "Stella Splendens in Monte," the cantiga "Rosa das Rosas," the florid 14th-century dance "Chominciamento da Gioia," the Comtesse de Dia's "A Chantar," and a 17th-century Portuguese villancico, in the midst of a dozen Brazilian traditional songs. There's even a piece of Gregorian chant delivered like a tribal cry.

Bittar says that Anima has never shared "the goal of the 'official' early music market, which sells the illusion of doing early music *as it was done at that time*. We would sink if we thought that historical research would be our last objective as interpreters."

"The most exciting thing about working in Brazil," adds Anima's present fiddle player, Luiz Fiaminghi, "is exactly the possibility of reinventing the past. We consider the term 'early music' broader than the concept of restoring the European pre-Classical musical practices documented in libraries. As the semiologist Paul Zumthor says, to interpret Medieval poetry, the reader should make a *theatricalization* of the past. This could be one of the ways that Anima thinks of doing ancient music." The ensemble draws inspiration from cultural theory and contemporary theater; while Fiaminghi pursues his doctorate at the University of Campinas in the history and music of Brazilian fiddles, Bittar is earning hers in theater arts.

The members of the ensemble handle much of their own administrative work. Guitarist Ricardo Matsuda is recording and mixing director and contributes original compositions, while Bittar and Fiaminghi deal with production, graphic design, legal issues, repertoire research, and tour management. The

ensemble often rehearses as much as five days a week, and their most intensive tour, for the recording *Anares* in 2005, involved 60 concerts in 73 days. They made their U.S. debut in 2000 and were featured on NPR's *All Things Considered*.

Fiaminghi insists that the array of administrative tasks doesn't detract from the musicians' artistic development. "On the contrary, it obliges us to develop a large and increasing view of the action of making music: as a whole manner of communicating with people."

In Brazil

In her book about the history of 20th-century early music performance in Brazil (*Um Olhar sobre a Música Antiga: 50 anos de História no Brasil*, 1999), Kristina Augustin traces the movement's origins back to 1949, with the founding of Brazil's first professional early music ensemble by a Bulgarian immigrant. Augustin's own career, as well as those of others living and working in Brazil, helps fill in the picture of early music's subsequent development.

By the time Augustin was a teenager, the recorder was extremely well-established in Brazil – she'd been playing it since the age of six – but early strings were much less visible. Augustin heard a Jordi Savall LP and taught herself treble viol from a book. She went on to study in Switzerland with Paolo Pandolfo and in England with Sarah Cunningham. Today she teaches viol at the Fluminense Federal University, as well as music history in the university's extension program, and performs across the country as a soloist, in a duo with gambist Mario Orlando, and in their quartet *Quatro Antigos*.

In a country whose early music culture is still establishing itself, "Everything that we play is new; we have freedom to create."

But such freedom is limited by external pressures. "Although the quality of the professionals is getting better nowadays, the spaces for concerts are becoming less available, and the festivals, too. The producers and sponsors focus on large concerts with symphonic orchestras and choruses." She misses the "ideal movement of the '80s," before some of the festivals went on a long hiatus, from

Brazilian Baroque

James Middleton is a specialist in the art and culture of the South American Baroque. As founder and artistic director of the Twin Cities-based opera ensemble *Ex Machina* (1986-1997), he produced the U.S. premieres of several early New World operas. Now working in the New York area, he is currently co-producing "A Fiesta of Mexican Baroque Music" with *The Church of St. Luke in the Fields* and *Polyhymnia*. Middleton writes:

Unlike the Spanish New World, where already-urbanized native populations fostered the development of homegrown colonial idioms in both the visual and musical arts, Brazil had an indigenous craft tradition that made little sense to the Portuguese colonists. For a while, this lack of understanding inhibited the growth of a *mestizo* Baroque style in Brazil comparable to those of Mexico and Peru.

When such a style finally developed in the later 18th century in Minas Gerais, it was largely thanks to the imported populations of black and mulatto slaves and freedpersons who worked in the fabulously wealthy diamond and gold mines of the district. (Often found in North America, the term "mulatto" is embraced in many languages and cultures originating in South America, Africa, and the Caribbean.) Some of the slaves were able to purchase their freedom. With the traditionally less stringent Iberian attitudes towards liberty and intermarriage/interbreeding, they managed to do better for themselves than the slaves of British America. They sponsored religious confraternities that in turn produced lavish festivities for every conceivable event in the liturgical year.

The two most famous exponents of the Brazilian Baroque were both freeborn mulattos, though only one was in fact an artist of the Baroque era. The sculptor Antônio Francisco Lisboa (1730 or 38-1814) was known as "Aleijadinho" ("Little Cripple") for the disfiguring leprosy that gradually cost him his fingers but not—interestingly—his skill as a sculptor. Flourishing in the Minas district in the mid-to-late 18th century, he produced works in a vigorous though slightly retardataire version of Portugal's own Baroque style, which was already somewhat behind the times in Europe. His work is pretty clumsy—but amazing, considering that his chisel was strapped to the stumps of his hands. In Brazil he is recognized as a folk hero.

His musical counterpart is José Maurício Nunes Garcia (1767-1830). Though an approximate contemporary of Beethoven and Schubert, Nunes Garcia is nevertheless claimed as a (or the) composer of the Brazilian Baroque. A mulatto priest, keyboardist, and prolific composer, he worked in Rio and had the good fortune to be made *maestre de capela* when the Portuguese court, fleeing Napoleon, descended on Brazil in 1808.

My own favorite Brazilian Baroque musical work—because it is just totally over the top—is the *Missa e Credo for Eight Voices* of Padre João de Deus de Castro Lobo (1794-1832), which reminds me of Spontini in his more frivolous moments. The music is hilarious and much more interesting than the formulaic work of Nunes Garcia.

If you Google "Teatro Municipal Ouro Preto," you can get to the site of the 1770 Casa da Ópera in Vila Rica, the third oldest theater in the Americas, built during the district's great mining heyday. Late-model Italian operas were presented in this hinterland by companies of black and mulatto performers. The works of Niccolò Jommelli were particularly popular. There was a mulatto prima donna in the late 18th century who actually went to Portugal and had a career in opera.

which they are only recently returning.

In a country where travel can be complicated, she also laments the difficulty of establishing collaboration between geographically distant colleagues. Brazil has large early music centers in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, plus others in such places as Minas Gerais, all of which are somewhat independent. "It is not easy to work with early music in a country with many social and cultural diversities," Augustin notes. "We have individual actions, not a movement."

American flutist and scholar Tom

Moore took part in Brazil's early music "actions" from his first visit to the country, in 1998, as a tourist. Moore had discovered an online Brazilian CD store whose listings included performer-produced early music recordings, and he included these in the lists of new recordings he presented in *EMAg's* predecessor, *Historical Performance*. The website operator's wife, harpsichordist Rosana Lanzelotte, invited Moore to play a concert with her – along with Kristina Augustin and Laura Ronai – while he was in the country. ▶



Nunes Garcia



Valeria Bittar (center) and the members of Anima.

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— Valeria Bittar**

Moore visited again the following year to do research on 19th-century Brazilian music and served as a visiting professor in the graduate music program at the University of Rio from 2005-2006. He is now back in the states as music librarian, professor, and collegium director at Duke University.

Moore agrees with Augustin's description of the funding situation: "Classical music in general is more dependent on government and corporate funding than in the U.S.A. These sources tend to be more conservative, and from their point of view, early music is innovative."

He compares other types of institutional support with what is available in the United States. "The Brazilian university system is considerably smaller, so that the nurturing of early music in collegia, et cetera, was much less common. Only now is early music really gaining a prominent place in university music departments. Brazil also has a relatively

weak choral tradition, so that institutions like the Handel and Haydn Society in Boston, with a centuries-long tradition of performing oratorios, have no analogues in Brazil. Although Brazilians are great singers, they are not used to singing in ensembles, and groups performing Renaissance polyphony are rare. There is also much work to be done with early strings, both with the violin and the viola da gamba families. I hope that early music will continue to grow."

Moore describes how Brazil's economy initially slowed the growth of the early music field: "It was much more difficult, due to import duties and tariffs, to import musical instruments – particularly large instruments, like harpsichords – and printed music. And the size of the internal market meant that it was difficult for Brazilian instrument builders to survive selling only to Brazilians. Compare the success of American makers of period instruments from the 1950s

onwards."

Today, notes Moore, "It is much easier, thanks to the internet, to have access to scores and musicological information than it used to be, so Brazil will have an easier time keeping up with developments outside." As in many countries worldwide whose older media resources were less extensive, Brazilians have in some ways taken more creative advantage of the new technology than Americans. Augustin, Rónai, Vargas, and Grupo Anima can all be seen and heard on YouTube.

After Moore's first Brazilian concert, the foursome joined with Cléa Galhano for a fringe concert at the Boston Early Music Festival, and Moore invited Laura Rónai to play and record with his New Jersey ensemble *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*. Rónai had previously studied for six years in New York and maintains relationships with numerous American friends and colleagues – "and I have had two American boyfriends, so obviously I have a very close connection to the country."

Rónai earned a master's degree at Hunter College, following undergraduate work at SUNY Purchase, where she studied flute with Sandra Miller – "my idol, my mentor, my dear friend." She calls American higher education "a system that works, one that I am grateful to have been able to know from inside. Every time I visit an American institution, I am amazed at the level of teachers and students alike, at the wealth of the libraries, the sheer investment in the physical facilities, the access to culture in general."

But these days, Rónai is drawn to stay home. "I find it increasingly hard to fit in the American emotional surroundings, as well as to understand American political inclinations. Fear of terrorism, the rise in traveling costs, and the cuts in funds for the arts and culture have also made traveling to the U.S. to play concerts a complicated business, and so my visits are becoming fewer and fewer."

When I spoke with her, Rónai was in the last stretch of a 74-concert tour of Brazil, playing contemporary Brazilian music for Baroque instruments. In general, she plays "basically standard European Baroque music, my favorite being

the French composers for flute. Brazil's very rich repertoire of colonial music – what, in European terms, would be called Classical or late-Baroque – is essentially choral music, or works for orchestra plus choir and soloist. Chamber music is a field that had almost no presence in colonial Brazil."

Rónai teaches at the University of Rio. She searches enthusiastically for a metaphor to describe the growth of early music performance in her homeland. "It is exciting to see a plant grow. Culturally, Brazil is still an infant, and it is fun to be a cog in the machine." She isn't sure, though, how optimistically to view the future. "The president has little appreciation for culture or education. He has never had any formal training and is, unfortunately, unaware of the importance of investing in education. This is certainly not a good omen."

She draws sustenance from Brazil's cultural warmth. "Brazilians tend to be very informal and affectionate. Students or colleagues often hug a lot, are very demonstrative of how they feel, will drop by unexpectedly just to drink a cup of coffee, will be very present when one is sad or forlorn. There is none of the Anglo-Saxon formality that makes some clear barriers in the States; it is harder there to find students mixing socially with professors, for example. But it also has to do with a specific tradition. Brazilians in general are very connected to their hometown. If I walk in Rio," – a city with a metropolitan population of close to 12 million – "I will bump into people who were in kindergarten with me. If I go to a restaurant, I will see someone I know. We cherish old ties. Some of my closest friends are former students. They display their affection unashamedly, and I bask in affection like other people bask in the sun."

Expatriates

Since so many Brazilians are drawn to seek their careers in other countries, Brazil's contribution to early music can be measured worldwide. Two high-profile performers in the U.S. are Cléa Galhano and José Lemos.

Galhano studied in Holland in the early '80s. She was a "first-generation" student there of the Brazilian Ricardo



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Kanji, who had studied with Frans Brüggen and who was an obvious choice for Brazilian students going abroad. Returning to Brazil and teaching at the collegiate level, Galhano needed a performance master's degree and obtained a Fulbright to attend the New England Conservatory. "I played all kinds of music – I was always playing Brazilian music – so that was a perfect environment for me." She taught in Brazil for four years and then moved to Minnesota in 1992 so that her husband, a jazz musician she'd met at NEC, could start his doctorate in music education.

Galhano is fascinated by the Baroque presence that lingers in parts of her country. In what she calls the "Baroque state" of Minas Gerais, there is an important organ from the 17th century, and costumed Holy Week plays are presented opera-style, with small orchestras. "It's part of the culture," Galhano says of the Baroque aesthetic. In state conservatories, Brazilians can study for free, "and recorder is just one more instrument there, a real instrument. I was invited a few years ago to a recorder festival in Minas, and there were 200 players. I could not believe it."

Source material

Primary musical source material from the colonial era is still being discovered.

Once when Galhano was touring the southern part of Brazil, she met someone whose cellist sister had found a "weird cello" on someone's farm, bought it for a song, and took it to England, where she learned that it was a centuries-old bass violin. Galhano points out that a Dutch recorder on display at the National Music Museum in South Dakota is actually from Brazil, a relic of the Dutch colonial presence in the North.

Galhano also tells the story of a lute player from Paris who came to give a lecture on Medieval and Renaissance music, only to have someone from the audience tell him that he could find relevant original documents in the local library. Likewise, harpsichordist Edmundo Hora went to Amsterdam to study with Jacques Ogg and became interested in historical temperament. Upon Hora's return to Bahia, the parish priest offered

to let him look in the church's closet, where he found a Baroque-era temperament treatise. Hora now has an orchestra, *Armonico Tributo*, that records Brazilian Baroque music in historic temperament.

"It's unbelievable, the movement of early music in Brazil – even with the economic problems. These people have guts; they just go for it." Galhano sent six of her own students to study with Kanji, "and now they're professionals all over the world." One of her former students teaches at the university in São Paulo, where the students present an annual Baroque opera.

Farther from Brazil's large cities and universities, however, it may still be harder to get wind of historical performance opportunities. José Lemos started voice lessons at 14 with a Uruguayan teacher who came to a border town three hours from Lemos's small Brazilian hometown of Bagé. Lemos studied as a tenor, but at home, the teenager was singing along with recordings of Joan Sutherland and Maria Callas. "It felt very natural for me to imitate their sound," he explains. When, at 17, he was preparing for a student recital, "My voice was cracking and sounding tired, as it usually did in those days in that register. My coach asked me to sing softly, so I just started singing with my home voice. He turned around and asked, 'What are you doing?' That was the beginning." Later, Lemos found recordings of Alfred Deller and James Bowman.

Lemos supported himself for a year of conservatory in Montevideo, Uruguay, and then he met Steve Rosenberg, who was in the city to give a concert. Rosenberg is the director of Charleston Pro Musica and music department chair at the College of Charleston. "I asked Steve if there was maybe a possible scholarship for me to study there, and he asked me if I would be interested in being part of his early music group. A few months after he left, I received an invitation from the College of Charleston to apply for the music school. Between him and the Uruguayan pianist Enrique Graf, who teaches there, I was able to attend on a full scholarship." Lemos went on to earn a

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