Panel: The Brazilian Song of Oswaldo de Souza: musical landscaping of Brazilian folk traditions

Individual paper “The Performance of Oswaldo de Souza’s Songs: A Model for Interpretation”

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Abstract

Many Brazilian composers active at the same time as Oswaldo de Souza wrote piano arrangements of folk songs, in keeping with the spirit of the times. However, there were two types of compositions being produced: musicologist Mario de Andrade insisted that the folk song was to be invested with a good piano accompaniment without dominating the melody; some composers sought to not just harmonize the song, but to create an atmosphere appropriate to the song’s purpose.

However, there was much discussion about HOW the Brazilian song should be performed. If there existed pre-established compositional models imported from Europe, performance models were even more solidly entrenched. Oswaldo de Souza's songs, whether arrangements of folk melodies or original compositions, maintain the folklore-like nature of Brazilian melody but were also influenced by the popular urban models of the time, possibly in an effort to avoid strong European influence. The texts frequently reflect regional idioms and ways of speaking, which should be maintained in performance.

Today, Oswaldo de Souza's songs are little-known and rarely performed. We examine several recordings from between the 1930s and 60s in an effort to understand how the composer's songs were performed then in order to have an accurate model for their current-day presentation.