Panel Title: ‘The Brazilian Song of Oswaldo de Souza: Musical landscaping of Brazilian folk traditions’

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Abstracts

Panel abstract: Oswaldo de Souza (Natal, April 1st 1904 – February 25th 1995) is a genuine representative of Brazil’s national composition school. He is praised for his 85 concert songs for voice and piano, which can be considered a collection of “musical postcards” of the characteristic traditions of two geographic regions of Brazil: the Northeast (his homeland) and the Southeast (where he lived during several years of his mature life).

This output reflects the three social themes that Mário de Andrade\(^1\) recognizes in the historical development of Brazilian Music: God, love and nationality. The religious aspect can be found in the two mainstreams of Brazilian religiosity: Afro-Brazilian mysticism and Catholic devotion. The aspect of love reflects the kind of innocent and platonic love found in the repertoire of work and leisure tunes from sailors, rowers, herdsmen and peasants. The national characteristics are present in the mixture of two mainstreams: themes derived from the rural folk traditions (dramatic dances, the Afro-Brazilian mystical “batuque”, catholic feasts, etc.) and a musical style reminiscent of the early 20th century urban genders of the sentimental, salon modinha and the street seresta. Quotations of folk materials (lyrics, melodies and rhythmic patterns) are always present in this repertoire, functioning as a “watermark”. The consistent aesthetic homogeneity found in his songs is thus justified by the constancy of inspiring sources.

However, along with engrained national models, the influences of European styles taught in Brazilian conservatories at the time had an effect on the composer's style, so that Oswaldo de Souza’s music is a musically hybrid product in which Brazilian cultural models are mixed with those imported from the Old World.

With the intention of commemorating Oswaldo de Souza’s birth centennial, we propose to present three individual papers which deal with the aspects of: 1) the contact between European and Brazilian pre-compositional models; 2) De Souza’s narrative musical discourse, observed from the perspective of its functional aspect: poetry communication; 3) the musical “communication” of the Brazilian song, examining the reflection of regional idioms and ways of speaking, which should be maintained in performance.

The panel’s exemplification features samples of songs from the four distinct categories through which we may understand Oswaldo de Souza’s output, according to the origin of the inspiring folk source (textual or musical): Canções praieiras

\(^1\) Mário de Andrade (1893 – 1945): author and poet, prime representative of the Modernist Movement in Brazil, also a critic, journalist and musicologist, was among the first who sought to systematize musicological studies in Brazil.
(songs from the Northeastern coast), Canções interioranas (inland songs), Toadas de remeiros (songs on themes from the San Francisco River), and Afro-Brazilian songs.