

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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THE HARPSICHORD IN BRAZIL

By Calimerio Soares

The present article traces the historical background of the harpsichord in Brazil, focusing on its presence in the country after the second half of the twentieth century, by the pioneering spirit of harpsichordist Roberto de Regina. Some Brazilian harpsichord makers and harpsichordists and general aspects on the Brazilian music repertoire for the instrument are also introduced.

There is evidence of the existence of spinets and harpsichords in Brazil since the country was colonised by the Portuguese in the beginning of the sixteenth century. Recent bibliographical sources point out the usage of harpsichords in colonial times, mainly in the cities of the State of Minas Gerais, during the "Gold Rush" period, as well as in the most important cities of the Brazilian coast, such as Recife, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, these instruments have not resisted the damaging action of termites and other insects of the tropics. A Portuguese spinet built in Portugal by Mathias Bostem in 1785 and brought to Brazil is perhaps an unique historic example of this instrument in the country. This instrument is found today at the Imperial Museum in Petrópolis.¹

The Pioneer

At the start of the harpsichord revival in the beginning of the twentieth century (due to the strong efforts made by Wanda Landowska), there was nobody in Brazil really interested in harpsichord playing or in the instrument's construction. Roberto de Regina² (born 1927) was the pioneer. During the 1960's he could be found working at Frank Hubbard's workshop in the United States, where he acquired the necessary know-how for building harpsichords. On his return to Brazil in 1966, he began his activities as harpsichord maker. Besides being an excellent harpsichordist, Roberto de Regina is considered the first Brazilian harpsichord maker.

Artisans of the harpsichord

In the 1970's one could find the artisans José Masano in São Paulo and Hidetoshi Arakawa, in the city of Campinas. Despite not having prior experience in harpsichord building, the Italian Jose Masano (1907-1984) made instruments with a great deal of craftsmanship. This is proved by his excellent choice of wood, and by his skill in using them for the few instruments he built; some of his harpsichords, when restored, present quite good sonority. His instruments were based on Neupert factory harpsichord models.

The Japanese instrument maker Hidetoshi Arakawa (born 1935) is an accomplished master in physical acoustics. Combining his profound scientific knowledge with his ability in wood-working he built his first instrument from a kit imported from the United States by the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). His instruments combine an excellent degree of perfection and exactitude in all measures. The sound quality of his harpsichords is wonderful. In 1995 he published a book in Portuguese titled *Afinação e Temperamento: Teoria e prática* (Tuning and Temperament: Theory and Practice)³, he is also the author of an important work titled "The Acoustical Effect of a Metal Rose in a Harpsichord".⁴

In 1980, we find Abel Santos Vargas beginning his career as a harpsichord maker in the city of São Paulo. Since then, Vargas has built impressive harpsichords and spinets for many Brazilian musicians of our time. By the last decade of the twentieth

century, William Takahashi from Japan had appeared on the Brazilian harpsichord scene, building at first some instruments from imported kits. Now he builds his own instruments with a high level of knowledge and craftsmanship according to historic models. Arakawa, Vargas and Takahashi's instruments are based on French harpsichord types, mainly those by Pascal Taskin.

Some Brazilian harpsichordists

Although Roberto de Regina was acknowledged as the first Brazilian harpsichord maker and harpsichordist, we can also cite several instrumentalists, who were also dedicated harpsichord players, including Alda Hollnagel (1917-1970). I can remember two opportunities I had in 1968 to listen to her playing on harpsichord and on organ during some performances she held monthly at her magnificent estate around Descalvado city, in the State of São Paulo. Her daughter Helena Jank (former harpsichord student of Karl Richter and continuo player for the Munich Bach Orchestra), is developing a career as a soloist and is currently teaching at the Art Institute of the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP).

Current Brazilian harpsichord players include Felipe Silvestre, Regina Schlochauer (also an excellent pianist); Rosana Lanzelotte; Edmundo Hora (also an organist and *fortepianist*); Ilton Wjuniski (presently living in France); Marcelo Fagerlande; Pedro Persone (also a *fortepianist*); Maria Lucia Nogueira and Maria de Lourdes Cutolo (presently living in Argentina), Mayra Pereira⁵, Rose Carvalho⁶ and Wilke Lahmann (presently living in Germany). Harpsichordists Roberto de Regina, Rosana Lanzelotte⁷; Edmundo Hora and Pedro Persone are perhaps the artists who have been recorded most regularly.

Brazilian Harpsichord Music Repertoire

Since the eighteenth century, Brazilian liturgical music was written by many outstanding composers who lived in the

historic cities in the state of Minas Gerais and in fact, organ and harpsichord are treated here as instruments of accompaniment. José Joaquim Emérico Lôbo de Mesquita (1746-1805), Inácio Parreira Neves (1752-94), Marcos Coelho Neto (1740-1806), João de Deus de Castro Lobo (1794-1832), Manoel Dias de Oliveira (1734-1813), were among these outstanding composers. They wrote Masses, Litanies, and Antiphons for soloists, choir and orchestra with *continuo* accompaniment, etc.

An interesting *Sonata 2 in Eb Major* in three movements, written by an anonymous composer at the end of the eighteenth century, was found in the historic city of Sabará. It is known as *Sonata Sabará*. In Rio de Janeiro, the priest José Maurício Nunes Garcia (1767-1830) was the most impressive composer of his time. He was organist and *maestro di cappella* at the Royal Chapel for many years. Amongst his many compositions, he wrote sacred and orchestral music, and an interesting *Método de Pianoforte* ("Method for the Fortepiano" - Rio, 1821), but no specific music for solo organ or harpsichord. Thus, there is still very little Brazilian music written originally for the harpsichord.

These days, there seems to be a prejudice among some harpsichordists to new music written for the harpsichord; one seldom finds new repertoire in concert programmes. This is probably not a situation unique to Brazil. Composers such as Almeida Prado (born 1943), Raul do Vale (born 1936), Ernst Widmer (1927-1990) and Ronaldo Miranda (born 1948) have written chamber music including the harpsichord. Composers such as Lourival Silvestre (born 1949) and Willy Correia de Oliveira (born 1938) wrote original works for the harpsichord, titled *Monemas I e II* (1974) and *Claviharpiscravocembalochochord* (also dated 1974), dedicated to the harpsichordist Felipe Silvestre. The composer Osvaldo Lacerda (born 1927) has written and published a *sonata* for the harpsichord (or piano).

Calimerio Soares (the present author, born 1944) wrote two pieces for harpsichord

solo: *Cravocembalada* (dated 1980) and *Toccata de Roça* ('Peasant's Toccata', dated 1982). Both works were published long ago and are now out of print. There is also another chamber piece entitled *Instâncias* ('Instances', dated 1989).

The Argentinean harpsichordists Lídia Guerberof Hahn played both pieces some time ago in Mexico City and Mercedes Pomilio recently performed them in Buenos Aires.

Composers Ernani Aguiar (born 1950), Caio Senna (born 1959), Antonio Guerreiro (born 1949) also wrote important solo works for the harpsichord, such as *Peças de Ocasião* (dated 1994), *Convulções Delicadas* (dated 1997) and *Suite* (dated 1998) respectively dedicated to the harpsichordist Rosana Lanzelotte. Composer Dimitri Cervo (born 1968) wrote *Pequena Suite Brasileira*, op. 15 (for solo harpsichord) in 1999 and *Duas Cenas Brasileiras*, op. 24 (for baroque oboe and harpsichord), in 2006.

Conclusion

From the point of view of musical creation, the increasing interest in the study of the harpsichord in Brazil has contributed to many Brazilian composers exploring and developing a new musical field. It is true that, when writing for the harpsichord, it is necessary for the composer to be acquainted with the language and aesthetic of the instrument in order to create idiomatic new works compatible with the instrument's nature. As for the instrument itself, it is also important to highlight the relevant contribution of the harpsichord makers, as well as the harpsichordists responsible for the spread of this instrument in Brazil, through lessons, master classes, lectures, concerts and recordings.

The website www.filomusica.com/filo20/tito.html contains some images concerning people mentioned in this article

- 1 Direitos de Imagem - Museu Imperial 2005 ©, Museu Imperial. [Online] Available www.museuimperial.gov.br/, Feburary 20, 2007.
- 2 Kristina Augustin, *Um olhar sobre a Música Antiga: 50 anos de História no Brasil*. (Rio de Janeiro: K. Augustin, 1999). ISBN 85-900954-1-X
- 3 Hidetoshi Arakawa, *Afinação e Temperamento: Teoria e prática*. (Campinas: Author's Edition, 1995). (Plus supplement, 2004) ISBN 85-7121-052-7
- 4 Hidetoshi Arakawa, "The Acoustical Effect of a Metal Rose in a Harpsichord," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Musical Acoustics, March 31st to April 3rd 2004*, (Nara, Japan: ISMA 2004).
- 5 Mayra Pereira, "Do Cravo ao Pianoforte no Rio de Janeiro: Um estudo documental e organológico" ("From the Harpsichord to the Fortepiano: A document and Organological Study") (Master's diss., Escola de Musica, UFRJ, Rio de Janerio, 2005).
- 6 Rose Carvalho. "Repertório Cravístico de Compositores Brasileiros a partir da Década de 80," ("Harpsichord Repertoire by Brazilian Composers from the 1980 decade onwards"), (paper given at State University of Maringá, Maringá 1999).
- 7 Clássicos Editorial Ltda., Loja Classicos [Online] Available www.lojaclassicoss.com.br, February 20, 2007.