

## Popular Styles in Brazilian Chamber Music: Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Quinteto Em Forma de Choros* and Oscar Lorenzo Fernández's *Invenções Seresteiras*

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The twentieth-century music of Brazil includes a wealth of chamber music for the bassoon. Brazilian composers often refer to popular styles in their harmonic and melodic structures, dance rhythms, and interpretive terminology. An understanding of these elements helps the performer determine the type of articulations, phrasing and stylistic approach to use in performance of the music. This article discusses popular music influences in Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Quinteto Em Forma de Choros* and Oscar Lorenzo Fernández's *Invenções Seresteiras* (Inventions-Serenades.)

Musical nationalism, characterized by a strong emphasis on the national elements inherent in the music of a region, showed its presence in Brazil in the late nineteenth century. It reached maturation during the years of the 1920s to the 1940s, when the dictatorship of Getulio Vargas (1930-1945) encouraged and supported artistic manifestations of patriotism and the Brazilian identity. **Heitor Villa-Lobos** (1887 - 1959), one of Brazil's most influential and prolific composers, had already established international recognition during Vargas' regime. He became the strongest supporter of musical nationalism in Brazil, with a highly individual style that synthesized diverse Brazilian musical influences with the European art-music tradition, creating a complex musical language of his own.

**Oscar Lorenzo Fernández** (1897 - 1948) was an extremely prolific composer, and like Villa-Lobos, was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro. Aspects of Brazilian folklore and popular music were ever-present in his works. His chamber works for bassoon include a woodwind quintet *Suite* and two *Invenções Seresteiras*, the *Duo* for clarinet and bassoon, and the *Woodwind Trio for flute, clarinet and bassoon*.

Art-music composers responded to the dynamic and varied popular music culture that swept Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century by incorporating these musical trends in their works. Both Villa-Lobos and Lorenzo Fernández were influenced by Ernesto Júlio de Nazareth<sup>1</sup> (1863 – 1934), who wrote highly popular piano music. Nazareth (pronounced “Naz-a-ray”) is considered one of the most important figures of the first generation of nationalist composers in Brazil.<sup>2</sup> The French composer Milhaud was fascinated with Nazareth's playing, and in his memoirs wrote, “There was an imperceptible suspension in his syncopations, a languid breath, a subtle rhythmic shift that was difficult to grasp.”<sup>3</sup> Ernesto Nazareth had a significant impact on the popularization of Brazilian musical styles, and greatly influenced Villa-Lobos. To Villa-Lobos, Nazareth was “the true incarnation of the Brazilian soul”.<sup>4</sup>

The *Choro* is an urban genre of instrumental music that was popularized in Brazil as early as the 1870's. In the 1920's and 30's the originality of the choro reached new heights in the performers' virtuoso improvisation of instrumental variations and imaginative counterpoint. Villa-Lobos played in choro groups in the nightlife of Rio de Janeiro between 1899 and 1919, meaning that he was twelve when he began this work!<sup>5</sup> Affiliating himself with a group of musicians from wholly different social classes meant not only a kind of liberation from the supervision of a strict father, but also the opening of an entirely new musical world.

The word *choro* (pronounced “shore-roo”) literally means “weeping” and the players of choro, the *chorões* or serenaders, are “weepers”. In Portuguese, the verb “to cry” is *chorar*. This applies to the slow sentimental versions, or *choro canções*, but many are fast and highly syncopated, more like a samba than a serenade. Some sources contend that the origin of the word stems from a form of song and dance performance from Africa called *xolo* (pronounced “show-loo”). Later this term began to be written as *choro*.

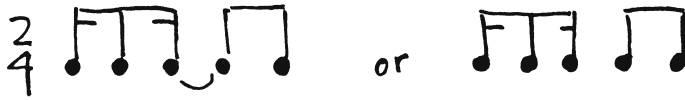
A traditional Choro ensemble can include solo wind instruments such as the flute, clarinet or saxophone, accompanied by guitar and other string instruments like the mandolin and cavaquinho (a ukulele-like instrument), and the pandeiro (a circular frame drum with jingles, like a tambourine with a skin). It also refers to the repertoire of music performed by these ensembles, dances and serenades of European origin that were performed at popular festivities. In a choro, the bass line is improvised as a counterpoint to the melody, which is varied upon repeats. Typically improvisation takes the form of melodic variations and the creation of counterpoint by instruments in the ensemble, not on the harmonic structure as in jazz.

The form of a typical choro is a simple rondo structure consisting of three sixteen-bar sections in different but related keys. This harmonic structure is similar to that of the *modinha's*, an early Portuguese song form popular in Brazil since colonial times. Bassoonists familiar with Francisco Mignone's<sup>6</sup> *16 Waltzes for Solo Bassoon* know the sentimental, haunting melodies he wrote based on elements of the waltz, *modinha* and choro. Like Mignone, both Villa-Lobos and Lorenzo Fernández captured the essence of the choro, without adhering to the traditional form.

In the twentieth century the choro became a composed, popular music style and dance closely connected with typi-

cal urban dances, such as the *maxixe* and samba. An early form of the samba, the *maxixe* (pronounced mah-sheé-shee), was wildly popular as a dance and song form in the late nineteenth century. Named by a way of dancing the polka with a dragging of the feet and rippling movement of the hips, it was a strenuous dance in 2/4 time that incorporated African, Hispano-American and European elements.

Ex. #1 Maxixe



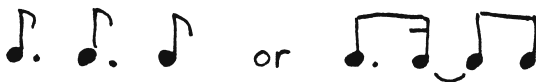
The rhythms being discussed are variations of the *habanera*, characterized by the superimposition of the dotted figure on a regular pulsation of four sixteenths.<sup>7</sup> The *habanera*, or *polka*, is a rhythm in 2/4 consisting of a pattern of a dotted eighth and sixteenth note followed by two eighth notes. The *maxixe* was a variant of the *habanera*, tango and the polka. These dances utilized the same rhythmic patterns - syncopated binary figures in duple meter - but were distinguished by tempo.

Ex. #2 Habanera



One of the most characteristic elements in the rhythmic formations of Brazilian urban popular music is the organization of eighth-note patterns within the duple meter into variations of three-plus-three-plus-two units.<sup>8</sup> A rhythm of Cuban origin, the *tresillo*<sup>9</sup>, also uses this pattern.

Ex. #3 Tresillo



The syncopation is given its unique quality by the tension between the basic duple meter and the disturbance of the pulse that results from the three-plus-three-plus-two organization. An example of the pattern of three sixteenths, three sixteenths, plus two sixteenths is used by Villa-Lobos in a rhythmic ostinato in the bassoon part of the *Quinteto em Forma de Choros*. (see Table 1, Ex. #3, Villa-Lobos bassoon ostinato)

As in jazz and popular music, the presence of the “swing”, or “groove”, is paramount to the performance of Brazilian music. This stems from the practice of subtly placing the divisions of the beat in a way that relates to dance movements and lyrics, similar to that of the jazz and ragtime of North America, where standard western notation is unable to fully capture the characteristic feel of the rhythm. The reason for this is that the sound of the rhythm has been transmitted by aural tradition via popular dance and song forms. While Brazilian music was influenced by North American jazz, which was heard worldwide via radio in the early twentieth century, it evolved into its own unique synthesis of African and European traditions. Excellent recordings of the music of Nazareth and choros are available,<sup>10</sup> so the performer who wants to learn more about the style of this music can further their knowledge through listening to authentic performances.

Melodic tendencies in traditional and popular songs of the early nineteenth century can be observed in the works of many Brazilian composers in the twentieth century. As in folk music worldwide, children’s songs, rural dances and other popular tunes are part of an oral tradition that permeates a culture. The author/critic/musicologist Mário de Andrade (1893 - 1945)<sup>11</sup> identified and systematized what he considered to be authentic Brazilian folk music elements, and encouraged composers to be true to their culture by honoring these traditions in their music. The second *Duo Invention* by Lorenzo Fernández is dedicated to Andrade. He and Villa-Lobos were both strong supporters of

Andrade's nationalistic philosophies.

Villa-Lobos's *Quinteto em Forma de Choros* for woodwind quintet (1928), like his sixteen choros written for different instrumental combinations, is an excellent example of his fascination with the choro genre he knew so well. Although Villa-Lobos claimed that his choros represented a new form of musical composition, many believe that he adopted the term to appear to the European musical world as original and genuinely Brazilian a composer as possible. The *Quinteto* was originally titled simply "Quinteto para Flauta, Oboe, Cor 'Inglez, Clarinete e Fagote". Scored for English horn, the complete work comes with a part for English horn and one for French horn, indicated "to replace English horn".

The short quintet - one movement subdivided into small sections - can be broken down into the following sequences: an *Introduction* of short motifs without any clearly defined key; a markedly *rhythmic* section with sforzato syncopations in changing meters; a singing sentimental, *melodic* section similar the *modinha* or *valsa-choro* styles; *virtuoso solos* for different instruments used as transitions between various sections; a *coda* based on a rhythmic-melodic ostinato that gradually accelerates and intensifies in volume, bringing the work to a climax.

The improvisatory nature of its melodic invention is clearly related to the choro. Villa-Lobos used elements of choro and folk music, recombining them in a nontraditional way, often juxtaposing unlikely combinations of rhythms and melodies and displaying them in short spurts, much like a glimpse of color or passing thought. The free rhythmic organization consists of numerous changes of meter while utilizing familiar syncopated patterns in the main thematic ideas. The deliberate tonal freedom lends an aura of spontaneity, so characteristic of Villa-Lobos's music of this period.<sup>12</sup> In a typical choro ensemble the flute, or other high-pitched instrument, plays the lead, as is often the case in the *Quinteto*. Virtuoso cadenzas abound in this work, and in performance it is important to allow the instrument with the cadenza total freedom of expression. The contrapuntal treatment of some passages (such as the *Tres lent* section - see Table 1, ex. 21) is also associated with the popular choro performance practices. Keeping this in mind, the attempt to synchronize the disparate parts in performance shouldn't outweigh the overall mood of the seemingly chaotic yet brilliant improvisations.

Some of the melodic material attributed to Brazilian folk music is Villa-Lobos's use of repeated tones, usually marked staccato, and descending melodies. He also borrowed bluesy melodies from jazz, as in the bassoon solo at measure 31. (See Table 2, ex. 9)

*Tres Invenções Seresteiras for Clarinet and Bassoon*<sup>13</sup> by Oscar Lorenzo Fernández was composed in 1944.<sup>14</sup> It is in the choro style throughout, as the term *Seresteiras* (another name for choro players, or 'serenadors') implies. Expressive indications such as "singing with choro expression", "singing with saudade" (a Portuguese term for "longing"), and "dolente" (Portuguese term for "sorrowfully painful") indicate the appropriate mood to invoke. The indication *longínquo* is a literary term meaning "from far away", and in the last "A Tempo" of the first movement it means to play as if from a distance. Lorenzo Fernández dedicated each movement in both sets of *Invenções Seresteiras* to important figures in Brazilian music, including Villa-Lobos, Andrade, and music scholar Carleton Sprague Smith.

There are direct borrowings of musical material from Nazareth by both Lorenzo Fernández and Villa-Lobos, such as the descending melodies and repeated sixteenth notes in the *Quinteto* of *Odeon (Tango Brasileiro)*<sup>15</sup> (See ex. 5, Table 1, and ex. 8, Table 2.) The bassoon part in the middle section of the first movement is similar to the bass line in *Brejeiro*.<sup>16</sup>

Ex. #4 *Odeon*

The image shows a musical score for a bassoon part. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 80 beats per minute, followed by a measure rest for 4 measures. The music then starts with a forte (f) dynamic. The melody is characterized by repeated sixteenth notes, often grouped with slurs. The second staff begins at measure 8 and continues the melodic line with similar rhythmic patterns and slurs.

Ex. 5 *Brejeiro*Bassoon bass line from *Allegretto, Tres Invenções Seresteiras a 2 Vozes*

In the first movement, *Allegretto*, the clarinet plays a rhapsodic, sentimental melody, marked with the indication “singing”. Two cadenzas are played over sustained low notes in the bassoon. Most of the time the bassoon accompanies contrapuntally with articulated sixteenth notes, and should be interpreted exactly as in Mignone’s waltzes, where it is indicated to “play in the style of a guitar.” The appropriate articulation can be achieved through a soft tonguing of each note, imitating the plucked sound of the bass strings of an acoustic guitar.

The free improvisatory nature of the clarinet part is very much in the choro style, and the bassoon part plays a contrapuntal accompaniment or bass line. Fernández clearly indicated the appropriate articulations, such as staccato, slurs, accents and slurs over notes with dots. Where there is no written articulation it is appropriate for the bassoon to slightly separate the notes with a light tonguing, in contrast to the more legato, rhapsodic clarinet part. When slurs over notes with dots occur, it is usually where the two instruments join in rhythmic unison, so the notes should be slightly separated and lifted in accentuation. This type of momentary “coming together” is typical of a choro, where certain sections are marked by rhythmic unisons accentuated by a percussion instrument. When the two instruments share equally in the melodic material, a matching of articulations works best.

Ex. #6 *Allegretto, Tres Invenções Seresteiras a 2 Vozes*

The second movement, *Lentamente*, is slow and legato. Both the bassoon and clarinet play melodies characterized by the juxtaposition of different rhythmic patterns. For instance, the clarinet plays a quintuplet over the bassoon’s sixteenth notes, and the bassoon plays an eighth note followed by a sixteenth note triplet pattern under four sixteenths or a quintuplet in the clarinet part. As in Villa-Lobos’s *Quinteto*, this counterpoint creates an ambiguous rhythm that ebbs and flows. Both instruments have short *ad libitum* sections at the end of the movement.

Ex. #7 *Lentamente*

Musical score for Ex. #7, *Lentamente*. The score is for Clarinet (in C) and Bassoon. The Clarinet part is in the upper staff, and the Bassoon part is in the lower staff. The music is in 2/4 time. The Clarinet part begins with a dynamic marking of *f* and a tempo marking of *Rit. a tempo*. The Bassoon part features a triplet of eighth notes. Both parts include various rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth-note runs and syncopations. The Clarinet part has a five-measure rest and a triplet of eighth notes. The Bassoon part has a triplet of eighth notes and a five-measure rest.

The third movement, *Allegretto Scherzoso*, is fast and choro-like in its use of sixteenth-note runs with syncopations of eighth notes tied over the beat. The main theme is composed in running counterpoint between the two instruments, in contrast to the second section, marked “cantando” (singing) in the bassoon part. In the second section the bassoon plays an accompaniment role. The occasional presence of measures in 3/4 break the symmetry of the typical 2/4, giving the effect of rubato at the ends of phrases. The thirty-second note pick-ups in the bassoon line sound very much like the way a bass line would be played in a choro, continually pausing and catching up with the melody. After a return to the initial theme the work ends like many traditional choros (and the *Quinteto*) in an *accelerando* and *crescendo*.

Ex. #8 *Allegretto Scherzoso*

Musical score for Ex. #8, *Allegretto Scherzoso*. The score is for Clarinet and Bassoon. The Clarinet part is in the upper staff, and the Bassoon part is in the lower staff. The music is in 2/4 time. The Clarinet part features a series of sixteenth-note runs. The Bassoon part features a series of sixteenth-note runs. Both parts include various rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth-note runs and syncopations. The Clarinet part has a *cresc.* marking. The Bassoon part has a *cresc.* marking and a triplet of eighth notes.

Lorenzo Fernández’s *Duas Invenções Seresteiras for Woodwind Trio*<sup>17</sup> is also in the choro style, in 2/4 time throughout. It features a virtuosic flute part filled with grace notes, a cadenza, and large intervallic leaps in the high register. The bassoon and clarinet play an accompaniment role in most of the movement. A hemiola affect in the beginning of the first movement is present in the alternation of triplet patterns with duple groupings. Lorenzo Fernández wrote an eighth beamed to a sixteenth and another eighth, without a dot. Rhythmically this is inaccurate, but interpretively it means to play the figure with a laid-back feel, less markedly dotted as the pattern of dotted eighth-sixteenth-eighth that usually makes up a triplet unit in 6/8.

The second movement is marked by chromatic sixteenth-note passages that alternate between a soloistic legato phrase marked “cantando”, with staccato sections, in which the clarinet and bassoon take turns accompanying each other. In the middle section the flute briefly takes a background role. Interestingly, the bassoon part is marked “sempre uguale” (Italian for *always of equal value*), indicating an unvaried rhythm, or even eighths, in the accompaniment. Eighth notes are never “swung” in choro, but rubato phrasing is characteristic of the melody and bass lines.

Ex. #9 Lorenzo Fernández's *Duas Invenções Seresteiras* for Woodwind Trio

## BASSOON

**Allegro moderato** (♩=66)

**Un poco più lento**

TABLE 1

Figures Related to Popular Brazilian Music in Villa-Lobos's *Quinteto*

Rhythm: Habanera variations

1. #17 - at the 9/8 bar, rhythmic unison in clarinet, English horn and bassoon, (figure repeated once)

2. 3 bars after #15 - bassoon

3. # 23 bassoon ostinato

4. #25 - bassoon ostinato augmented and further augmented in next measure.



5. #34 - climactic section, rhythmic unison in clarinet, English horn and bassoon.

TABLE 2

### Figures Related to Popular Brazilian Music in Villa-Lobos's *Quinteto*

#### Melodic Elements

6. Repeated tones: #4/Anime to #6/Plus Vite: accompaniment.

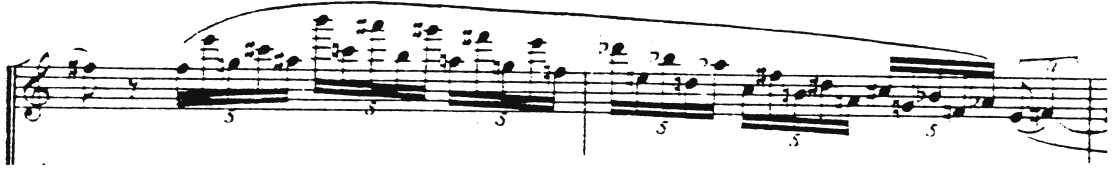
7. #11/*Tres Anime* to #17: different combinations of instruments play repeated-tone accompaniment while other instruments play melody with habanera rhythms.<sup>18</sup>

8. Six m. before #27 to the end: melody of repeated staccato notes that descend by a major or minor second.

9. Jazz stylization: #31 to #33 improvisatory solo lines flatted 5th and 7ths. The background is a samba rhythm with dissonant harmonies based on 7th chords.



10. Choro: #5, leading into #16 and #24, five after #28 - Soloistic, virtuosi flute parts with rapid arpeggiated 16th-note runs.



11. 3 bars after #25 - Serenade style.



12. #21: *Tres lent*: contrapuntal choro style.

21 *Tres lent* 5/4 = 60



## Endnotes

1. A good way to familiarize oneself with Nazareth's music is to play the songs in *Nazareth Para Todos*, a collection of arrangements for solo instrument (oboe or bassoon editions) and piano by Francisca Aquino, published by AssuntoGrave Edições Musicais Ltda., [www.AssuntoGrave.com](http://www.AssuntoGrave.com).
2. Appleby, David P, *The Music of Brazil*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.
3. Nazareth, Ernesto. *Nazareth Para Todos*. Preface by Vincent Salles. Brasilia: AssuntoGrave Edições Musicais Ltda, 2003.
4. Béhague, Gerard. *Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul*, University of Texas at Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1994.
5. Tarasti, Eero. *Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Life and Works, 1887-1959*, McFarland & Company, 1995: 38.
6. Francisco Mignone (1897 - 1986) was born the same year as Oscar Lorenzo Fernández, and was also a *Carioca*, a resident of Rio de Janeiro. The *16 Waltzes for Solo Bassoon* were composed in 1979-81, a full generation after Villa-Lobos and Lorenzo Fernández.
7. Nettle, Bruno and Gerard Béhague, *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents*, 185 - 255. *New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990: 206*.
8. *The Music of Brazil*, 80.
9. Béhague, Gerard. *Music in Latin America: an Introduction*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979: 260.
10. *Paulo Moura & Os Batutas* (Choro). Notes by Paulo Moura. Blue Jackel Entertainment BJ 5019-2, 1998, and *Sempre Nazareth*. Maria Teresa Madeira, piano and Pedro Amorim, bandolim. Kuarup Discos, KCD-095.
11. Béhague, Gerard, *Beginnings of Nationalism in Brazil*, Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1971: 9.
12. *Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul: 104*.
13. Fernández, Oscar Lorenzo. *Tres Invenções Seresteiras for Clarinet and Bassoon*. New York: Peermusic. [www.peermusic.com/classical](http://www.peermusic.com/classical).
14. *Tres Invenções Seresteiras a 2 Vozes* was originally published in the Spanish language in the *Boletín Latinoamericano de Musica* and *The Editorial Cooperativa Interamericana de Compositores*.
15. Nazareth, Ernesto. "Odeon: Tango Brasileiro" in *O Melhor da Música Popular Brasileira, Vol. 2*, ed. Mario Mascarenhas, 135 - 137, Sao Paulo: Irmaos Vitale, 1982: 135.
16. See bassoon and piano music for "Brejeiro" in the Nazareth collection by Assunto Grave.
17. Fernández, Oscar Lorenzo. *Duas Invenções Seresteiras for Woodwind Trio*. New York: Peermusic, 1964. [www.peermusic.com/classical](http://www.peermusic.com/classical).

**Janet Grice** is at home in classical, contemporary, improvisational and Brazilian music. A graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music with a bachelor's degree in bassoon performance, she has a master's degree in jazz composition from New York University. She was a recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship in Brazil and several grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2004 she will complete doctoral studies in bassoon performance at Rutgers University, where she teaches Fundamentals of Musicianship. She is also a teaching artist for the Lincoln Center Institute, and teaches bassoon.

Janet's three CDs of original and Brazilian music feature the bassoon with a rhythm section. *Jazziz* magazine called her first CD "a gutsy, original idea ... her classically grounded bassoon carries the session." *Boston Globe*

wrote, “Janet demonstrated that the bassoon is equally adaptable to jazz or symphonic music.” Her group performs often in the NYC area.

She performed jazz internationally with her own groups and those of Karl Berger, Butch Morris and Anthony Davis, as has appeared on numerous CDs. She has recorded for *Music Minus One*, National Public Radio, TV and film. Contemporary music performances included the Villa-Lobos Society, Festival of Microtonal Music, Musician’s Accord, Crosstown Ensemble, and the STX Ensemble, with whom she performed the music of Xenakis at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal and Radio France in Paris. Her jazz groups appeared at IDRS conferences in Buenos Aires, Tallahassee and Chicago.

