

Chiquinha Gonzaga

and the popular music in Rio de Janeiro at the end of the 19th century

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At the end of the 19th century, the theater attractions section of the newspapers of Rio de Janeiro used to offer Cariocas (natives of Rio) a large variety of options. In April of 1888, for example, residents of the capital could choose between the preview of “zarzuela” (comic opera) *La Gran Via*, Chueca and Valverde, in theater Lucinda; the revue (parody), entitled *O Boulevard da Imprensa* (Press Boulevard), by Oscar Pederneiras, in theater *Recreio Dramático*; translation of comedy *Tricoche and Cacolet*, of Meihac and Halevy, in theater Santana; magazine *Notas Recolhidas*, by A. Cardoso de Menezes, in theatre Sant’anna; or an orchestra concert organized by Arthur Napoleão, at Cassino Fluminense. In July of the same year, Cariocas who liked concert music could listen to Mendelssohn, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in a concert directed by Cavalier Darbilly, in theater São Pedro de Alcântara. In August, an Italian campaign opened the season in theatre D.Pedro II presenting many operas by Verdi and other masters of the Italian “bel canto” (song)¹.

Such proliferation of theater and musical attractions showed the strictly cosmopolitan character of Rio de Janeiro in the last decades of the past century. A great quantity of genres and musical styles from different parts of the world arrived in the city, especially those in vogue in Paris. Brazilian composers of that period of time, who are nowadays called “popular”, got out of that urban tradition which was mainly cosmopolitan; their works reflected the taste of an emerging middle class and looked for a balance between the opera tradition, the European concert and the music of the streets of the capital, particularly that derived from the Afro-Brazilian tradition. By the end of the century, the dividing line between popular music, traditional music and erudite music was not clearly designed; non-erudite music was that which circulated in large quantity and through inexpensive publications. They were simplified and designed to reach a large number of consumers. But such distinction did not apply to the genre or musical style: a tango, a waltz, or an opera song in Italian equally pleased the Carioca audience.

The dances that were in vogue on the stages of Rio de Janeiro during that period of time were the same successful dances of the theaters of Paris, like polka, tango and “habanera” – the last two arrived in the Brazilian capital through the route Spain-Paris-Rio³. Therefore, the popularity of tango in that period of time did not necessarily reflect a tendency towards a nationalization of popular music. It reflected the taste of the Carioca bourgeoisie, which widely attacked the musical fashion that came from Paris. Outside the theatre, those dances entered the living rooms of the bourgeoisie through piano. Their status would be improved as being a music that was worth admiration and respect.

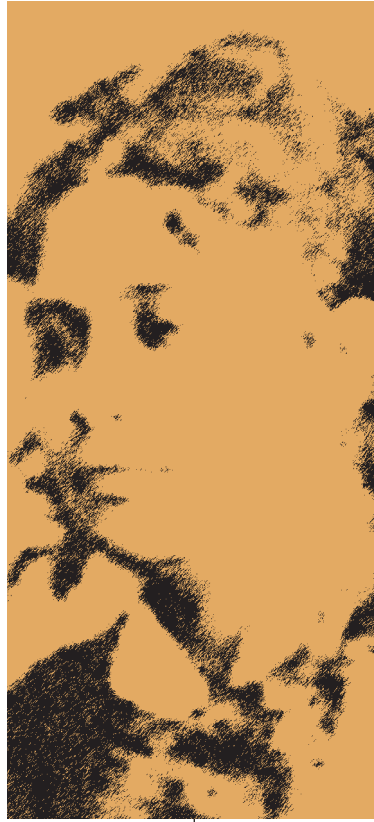
On the stages of Rio de Janeiro, European music and dance blended with the local styles of the black music that was in the streets. It is important to say that the black element of this emerging popular music did not come from the authentic Afro-Brazilian drum circles and of “capoeira” (typical dance). It came from the adaptation of such music to the stage. They were made to please a bourgeoisie that was predominantly white and that had a musical taste often influenced by Parisians. In reality, the inclusion of dances of Afro-Brazilian origin into the theaters of Rio reflected

the political moment of the country – the eminent slavery abolition, and a special interest of the artists and intellectuals who started to look at an Afro-Brazilian culture with a curiosity that was almost scientific. As they appeared on the stages of Rio de Janeiro and became a hit, remix dances like “fandangos”, “fados”, “batuques” and “jongos” were, most of the time, presented at intermissions, or at the end of theater pieces, as a comic element. Thus, contrasting with pieces of operas and lyric songs of European origin, the black element was characterized as exotic and deviated from the “civilized” European culture.

Popular music that emerged at the end of the 19th century, therefore, reflected the synthesis of that music presented in the theaters of the capital, as a result of the artistic, intellectual and political desires of a new Brazilian bourgeoisie. The beginning of the musical career of Chiquinha Gonzaga (1847-1935) is an example. She was one of the most important personalities of the Brazilian music at the end of the 19th century. Chiquinha was a student of Professor Arthur Napoleão, from Portugal, a good piano player and composer of ballroom pieces. Napoleão, who resided in Rio de Janeiro since 1868, also acted in publication and music sales. He was also an organizer of classic music concerts in the Brazilian capital. His presence in the musical and artistic corners of Rio de Janeiro was recognized by the high society, as well as by the Emperor, who granted him with the *Ordem da Rosa* (an important award). Chiquinha started her career by following the steps of her teacher; she acted as a piano player in ballrooms and wrote many compositions for piano with a European style. They were played in social and family gatherings of the upper and middle classes of Rio. Napoleão was in charge of the publication and distribution of the first compositions of Chiquinha, like two waltzes for piano: *Plangente* and *Desalento*. They appeared in a collection of dances for piano, *Alegria dos Salões*, along with pieces by Strauss, Italian Luigi Arditi, and two French pieces, by Henri Hertz and Joseph Ascher. At the same time when Chiquinha Gonzaga was publishing waltzes, she was also writing pieces for the theater, like tangos and “habaneras”, with a style of those dances brought to Rio de Janeiro by Spanish companies of “zarzuela”

(a big hit in Paris). Her tangos *Seducitor* and *Sospiro* that were published by Arthur Napoleão in the 1880's, appeared in collections for piano along with pieces extracted from opera *Carmem*, and a version of "zamacueca" (Indian folksong and dance) from Chile, written by Cuban guitarist José White.

In 1885, Chiquinha Gonzaga wrote a song for the opera *A Corte na Roça*, with text written by Palhares Ribeiro. The piece took place in theater *Príncipe Imperial* as an operetta, in the first act of the Brazilian customs. The action of the operetta took place on a farm – "fazenda das Cebolas" (Onion Farm), in Queimados, and had the participation of "roceiras" and "roceiros" (people from the farmland). "In the operetta, Chiquinha wrote some compositions that had a Brazilian style", wrote the critic of a newspaper, *Jornal do Comercio*³. But, her "lundu" and final "catereté" were spicy, as the newspaper described, and pointed out the "roceiro" – person who lives outside the urban area – not the cosmopolitans of Rio de Janeiro. For those, they sang during the intermission some pieces of Italian operas and French songs, very urban and cosmopolitan. A year later, Chiquinha Gonzaga reached her biggest hit of all times when she composed some pieces for magazine *A Mulher-Homem*, written by Valentim de Magalhães and Filinto de Almeida. It was put on stage with big luxury in January of 1885, in theater Sant'anna⁴. The magazine was based in a scandal that took place in 1885, when a man that was dressed as a woman tried to get a job as a housekeeper. Regarding such an event, *A Mulher-Homem* also talked and made fun of recent political events, mainly the Senior's Law that freed the slaves who were older than 60 years of age. However, the magazine had a text that was totally "carioca". Its 32 pieces of music included a cocktail of pieces and opera overtures, such as *La Gioconda*, by A. Ponchielli and opera *Le Prophète* de Meyerbeer⁵. A comedy piece appeared at the end of it: a "jongo" written by Henrique Magalhães,



called "Jongo dos pretos sexagenários". Cariocas had a habit to listen to these spicy pieces as closing ones that pleased a bourgeoisie audience. The Afro-Brazilian element was far from the reality, and it was seen as interesting and exotic. Two months after the opening of *A Mulher-Homem*, a new final number was added to the magazine, called "Um maxixe na Cidade-Nova." For such a final scene, Chiquinha Gonzaga and Henrique de Magalhães wrote some songs that described the poor side of town, mainly a place called New City, where "maxixe" was a dancing event for the lower

class, with the participation of black people, mulattos and Portuguese immigrants. In the revue, "maxixe" included dances like "fados" and "jongsos". A local critic described the new pieces as being "compositions with a special touch, that can be seen through rhythmic swings." The critic ended by saying that "maybe there is a sensual element within those dances, but one cannot deny the charm and gracefulness that constitute a natural component of our character and of our people". Although "maxixe" had been presented to the public with the specific goal of making the population laugh and have fun, an initial acceptance from the local critic said that an Afro-Brazilian element described "something about Brazil" within popular music, which European songs did not.

NOTES

¹All of those attractions were announced in the newspaper *Jornal do Comercio*, from April to August of 1888.

²Paulo Roberto Peloso Augusto, "Os Tangos Urbanos no Rio de Janeiro: 1870-1920, Uma Análise Histórica e Musical," *Revista Música* 8/1-2 (May/Nov, 1997): 106.

³*Jornal do Comercio*, January 23, 1885.

⁴*Jornal do Comercio*, February 16, 1886.

⁵The names of the songs appeared in the newspaper *Jornal do Comercio*, of January 13, 1886.

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