

The singing guitar, yo

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V*iola caipira, viola sertaneja, viola de dez cordas, viola cabocla, viola de arame, viola nordestina, viola de repente, viola brasileira* are some of the names we find to describe this instrument that has gradually become one of the voices of Brazil's backlands.

Despite all these very typical attributes that reinforce its 'Brazianness' character, the viola is in fact an instrument of Portuguese origin, and so old that its sounds are lost in time.

Looking at the acoustic guitar, an instrument of the same family and ancestry as the plucked string instruments enables us to establish some parameters that will show us what this viola we are talking about actually is. The guitar has six strings, the viola usually has ten, often grouped into pairs,¹ but the number of strings can vary from five to fifteen in a single instrument. The guitar, as we know, dates back about 250 years; the ancestor of the viola, in turn, is close to eight hundred years old.

Although it refers to the rural world, the viola has an urban past, both in Portugal and in Brazil.

To better understand the environment in which the viola was gestated, it is important that we go back in time. Iberia has been, since ancient times, the stage of invasions and intertwining of the most different ethnicities. It was the home of Iberians, Celt-Iberians, Tartessus, Phoenicians, Romans, Goths, Visigoths, Suevis (in the northwest) and finally Arabs.

In the Middle Ages the Arabs experienced the most exuberant period of their culture. Enthusiasts of philosophy and related studies, they were responsible for the survival of works written in the period that preceded them, known to us as Classical Age, when many libraries were scattered in their domains.²

Also enthusiasts of poetry and the sounds of speech,³ the Arabs introduced the rhyme in the Western world, since Latin poetry had only the metrical structure.⁴ Luis Soler, a Catalan musician who has live in Brazil for over forty years, published the book *Origens árabes no folclore do sertão brasileiro*. In this book Soler (1995) states that the modalities of the northeastern improvisation music are modalities of the Arab song contest between two popular singers, namely, galloping hammer *T*, seaside gallop, six-line stanza, eight-line stanzas, ten-line stanzas. Assimilated in Portugal through the close interaction between Christians and Moors over centuries, they reached us through Portuguese settlers.

Let us go back to the viola. When the Arabs arrived in the Iberian Peninsula in the year 722, the plucked string instruments existing in the Peninsula

were the Celtic harps and the Greek-Roman cithara.⁵ The oud, also known as the Arabic lute, was the first plucked string instrument with a neck in which the tunes could be changed, to reach Europe.

Curiously, the viola keeps as a basic characteristic of its old ancestor the five orders of strings. The Arabic lute has five unison pairs, and sometimes a bass-string is placed below the highest strings to facilitate the responses between low and high notes in the melody.⁶ Often this bass string is used as a pedal.⁷ Usually this solo bass string has the same note as that of the double bass strings. The viola, in turn, regardless of the number of strings, which range between five and fifteen, always maintains the idea of the five courses, which can be single, double, triple or even mixed.

Many instruments came out of the cultural link between Moors, Christians and Sephardic Jews. The merger that took place during that period in the Iberian Peninsula was such that around the thirteenth century the Latin guitar was brought into the Iberian Peninsula. About this instrument, Veiga Oliveira (2000, p.146) says:

Geiringer [...] believes this Latin guitar to be of Arabic-Persian origin, having arrived in Europe after the lute, and introduced in Spain in the twelfth century; in addition, in its primitive form it would have a convex bottom, which only later would have been replaced by the flat bottom that is one of its fundamental features. In any case, in the thirteenth century the *Latin guitar* represented the essential form of Vihuela or sixteenth century guitar, which would understandably be its direct extension. And our current viola, which is essentially the same as the sixteenth century viola, would thus have as its prototype and distant ancestor the *Latin guitar* or the Archpriest of Hita, i.e., the old troubadour instrument of the *Cancioneiro da ajuda* (*Ajuda Songbook*).

The Latin guitar went through many changes before it became the viola. Our violas are descendants of the Portuguese hand violas. Their golden period coincides with the great discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Once again quoting Veiga Oliveira (2000, p.155):

In Portugal, back in the fifteenth century and especially from the sixteenth century onward, the instrument under the current name of *viola* is widespread by the people, at least in the western zones. Not to mention the troubadour violas, we refer to the petition submitted by the prosecutors of Ponte de Lima to the courts of Lisbon in 1459 to the king D. Afonso V, alluding to the evils spread “throughout the kingdom” because of the violas; and Gil Vicente refers to them often as an instrument of squires. Philippe de Caverel in his embassy’s report to Lisbon in 1582 mentions the ten thousand *guiterrres* - which seems to be undoubtedly to be violas - which apparently accompanied the Portuguese in their journey to Alcazarquivir, and that would have been

found in the spoils of D. Sebastian's fields: the number is certainly over-estimated, but it shows clearly that, as says the chronicler, "*les anglais sont très grands amateurs de leurs guitarres*"⁸ – i.e., violas.

The presence of the Arabs and their instruments in the Iberian Peninsula led the place to become one of the great cradles of plucked string instruments on the planet. The Arabic lute and the Latin guitar are the ancestors of the *vibuelas* in Spain and the hand violas in Portugal. In Spain, along with the *vibuelas* came the Moorish guitar and the baroque guitar, the treble⁹ and closer to us in time, the acoustic guitar.¹⁰ Across Europe, the Arabic lute changed into the lute, sometimes with simple strings and frets (small bars that break down the fret board into halftones). In Portugal there was also a proliferation of chordophones: the ukulele - known there as *machete* -, mandolins, *bandolas*, *bandocellos*, *bandobaixos*, *bandurras*, *violiras* and Portuguese guitars.

Each region created its own viola. Viola *braguesa* (from Braga) in the North; viola *amarantina* (from Amarante) or two-hearted viola in the Northeast; viola *beiroa* (from Beira) in the central region; down below, near Lisbon, viola *toeira*; and further down the South, in Alentejo, viola *campaniça*. They varied in size, shape and number of strings, but in most cases had a common feature: five courses of strings. The Hawaiian ukelele is a transfiguration of the ukulele, such as the *rajão* from Madeira Island.¹¹ Azores, Madeira and Cape Verde have their own violas.

It was in Brazil, however, that the viola expressed its musical and morphological ubiquity. Of the five Portuguese violas, only the *amarantina* and *campaniça* did not take root in Brazil. The violas from Beira, now almost extinct in Portugal, still retain their lineage in the *fandangos* of the south coast of São Paulo and northern Paraná. In Paraná they are called *fandango viola* and in São Paulo, in the region of Iguape, white viola, as I was told by the researcher Rogério Gulin. The model of the old violas from Queluz, today Conselheiro Lafaiete (state of Minas Gerais), with its marquetry inlays, is still found in northern Minas, sometimes with its original twelve strings (three double and two triple strings). The violas from Queluz enjoyed great popularity until the early decades of the twentieth century. The number of manufacturers in the city at that time was remarkable. With the large-scale production of violas by factories located in São Paulo, the production of violas from Queluz decreased, as attested by the collector Max Rosa in an interview to the musician Carlos Vergalim.¹² A quick look at the ancient violas found in Portugal in private and museum collections shows us that marquetry in violas and some of the motifs (drawings) used there were also found in the violas from Queluz as well as in the violas of the violist, songwriter, revelry master and luthier Zé Coco do Riachão, from Montes Claros (state of Minas Gerais). In the Northeast the poet-improvisers (*repentistas*) used the dynamic viola, a model created in Brazil that has natural amplifiers made with aluminum cones and, therefore, with a slightly modified pitch. These violas

usually have twelve strings divided into five courses - three pairs and two triples. In the interior of Brazil we can find violas made of bamboo, palms such as Buriti, tin cans and, finally, a neck attached to a sounding board. There is no excuse for the absence of music in rites celebrating life, whether profane or sacred.

When the viola was brought to Brazil at the beginning of the colonization period, it enjoyed huge popularity in Portugal. A significant share of the Portuguese Renaissance musical production was intended for the viola. It was also a popular instrument among ordinary people. Gil Vicente refers to the viola as an instrument of squires.

The viola in Brazil

Little is known about the use of the viola in sixteenth century Brazil. The musicologist José Ramos Tinhorão (1990) states that “the earliest express reference to verses sung by the character in a comedy staged in 1580 or 1581 in the mother church of Olinda during the feast of the Holy Sacrament appears in *Denúncias de Pernambuco*, from 1593, confirming, from the onset, the link of the viola with the urban song.” In the southeast it is present in inventories dating back to the early seventeenth century. In 1613 violas were cataloged in spoils found in the city of São Paulo.¹³

Father José de Anchieta, the most important name in the indigenous process of catechesis in the early period of Brazilian colonization by the Portuguese, based his entire project on the use of music and theater plays. He realized that the indigenous peoples with whom he made contact used music as a communication channel with the sacred world.¹⁴ General Couto de Magalhães (1940), a Brazilian wilderness explorer who lived in the nineteenth century, stated in his classic *O Selvagem* (The Savage) that Father Anchieta used *cururu* and *cateretê*, two dances of Tupi origin, to catechize the natives.¹⁵ Hence the liturgical texts embedded in the melodies and dances of these indigenous people. Anchieta learned Tupi-Guarani and brought it into a pattern of Latin grammatical structure by adding Spanish and Portuguese words to the missing words in the language. This language was named *nheeng'atu*. It would be plausible to suppose that the viola, a harmonic instrument,¹⁶ may have been used to accompany these dances, as to date we use it to accompany *cururu* or tap-dancing and hand-clapping in *cateretê*. Together with the violas, the Portuguese also played the flute, pennywhistle, drums and shepherd's pipe, to which they added the maraca, the trumpet and indigenous flutes.

The viola has since been part of the everyday life of the people that was being formed here. It was gradually assimilated by the *bandeirantes* (*pathfinders*) and *tropeiros* (muleteers in their expeditions, and in emerging cities such as Recife, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro it became largely used, as seen in Salvador in the seventeenth century, in the poems by Gregório de Matos Guerra, a.k.a. Boca do Inferno (Hell's Mouth).

Gregório was born to a wealthy family in Salvador on December 23rd,

1636.¹⁷ After having studied, married and worked in Portugal as a judge and prosecutor, Gregory returned a widower to Salvador in 1678. He served briefly as Judge of Appeal at the Ecclesiastical Relation in Bahia, in 1683. After that he chose to tread his own path as a lawyer and went on to produce a major part of his work, which incidentally is scarcely registered, where he uses his poems, sometimes feral and others licentious, to report political scandals and everyday events in Salvador. More than once he hid in the Recôncavo fleeing death threats because of his verses. The world “of sugar mills, friends, *lundum TN*, games and mulatto women is narrated using a gourd viola which, according to tradition, was made by him ... this gourd viola accompanied him in the hardest moments of his life, such as in prison, before his deportation, and during the mutiny in Angola” (Barros, 2007). Also about Gregório’s relationship with the viola, the researcher Rogério Budasz (2004) in his book *A Música no Tempo de Gregório de Matos*, reports that

The moralist Nuno Marques Pereira had no doubt that most of the evils afflicting the Portuguese colony in America in the early eighteenth century were due to the proliferation of profane songs played by the violists of that time¹⁸ [...] in an interesting link between Matos and Pereira, the moralist tells the story of a certain mulatto named João Furtado, a famous musician and violist, who would have been struck dead after singing the song *Para que nascestes, Rosa, se tão depressa acabastes.*” (Why were you born, Rose, if you died so soon).

Tinhorão (1990) mentions that “amongst more than the six hundred poems supposedly written by the poet in Portugal, Bahia and Angola, and finally in Pernambuco (where he died in 1695), only 207 are sonnets, which was the prevailing poetic genre at the time, and whose form was not suitable for music.”

Albeit conjecturally, Tinhorão points to an already emerging Brazilian music from Gregorio de Mattos, since only part of his literary production consisted of sonnets, a poetic genre not very suitable for music. A large part consisted of ballads and poems that were more appropriate to be sent into music.

We can hardly tell how much the viola was present people’s daily life, but its function as an accompanying instrument came from Portugal.

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century something that was already being gestated within Brazilian society was successfully taken by a priest to the Portuguese Court. Domingos Caldas Barbosa, with his singing accompanied by a guitar, charmed the Portuguese Court with *modinhas* (ditties) and *lundums*, some of them written by the priest himself. These two genera are said to be the very roots of Brazilian urban popular music: the *modinhas*, with the roots of Portuguese music merged with the Italian *bel canto* and the already Brazilian melodic richness; the *lundum*, deeply rooted in the African-Brazilian universe. It is curious to notice that the *modinhas*, of courtesan origin, were, at that time,

accompanied by the viola, a popular instrument, and the *lundum*, of popular origin, was played on the piano.

We notice here an interweaving of musical arrays revealing first the constant traffic of information flowing between social strata; and second, what would be a common feature of Brazilian popular music until the 1970s: the swallowing followed by the digestion and subsequent merger of all musical material that came close to the *modinha* tradition is still present in the interior of Brazil.

During the first two centuries of colonization, the viola was, par excellence, the main accompanist instrument, and only in the second half of the eighteenth century it gave way in the urban scene to the young acoustic guitar, which for its sound¹⁹ and simple rather than double strings proved to be more functional as an accompanying instrument. In Spain and later in Europe, the acoustic guitar gained ground and quickly became the most widely used plucked string instrument. On the other hand, the violas in Portugal gradually became restricted to the world of popular culture, where they still remain.²⁰

In academia, some musicologists defend the idea that the viola was used as continuo²¹ in the period we know as Brazilian Baroque. In the absence of the harpsichord as an accompanying instrument, the viola was used in the same way the *teorba*²² was used in Europe for the same purpose. Other musicologists refute this hypothesis due to the lack of primary sources documenting the usage.

The researcher Varoni Castro (2007, p.783) states that “the documented evidence and accounts of travelers point to the fact that the viola was the instrument chosen to accompany popular ballads and songs in colonial Brazil,” as told by Spix & Martius (1938):

The viola here, as in southern Europe, is the preferred instrument, while the piano is a very rare piece of furniture, which is only found in affluent households. Popular songs are accompanied by the viola, which has its origin both in Portugal and in the country itself.

Still in Varoni de Castro (2005), Luiz Heitor Correa de Azevedo, in the article “Cultura Política” (Political Culture) of 1943 analyzes the viola in the urban and rural contexts:

Clearly, our *viola sertaneja* remained in the hands of the people, as a true remnant of the old eighteenth-century Portuguese viola, the same that had accompanied the delightful *modinhas* by Domingos Caldas Barbosa; the authentic Lereño’s viola. It coexists with the urban guitar, but took refuge in the backlands; it is musically Arcadianism, like many other linguistic Arcadianisms, that the people maintain alive with the unconscious power of their ingrained traditionalism.

It is important to remember that many expressions that we believe to having been typically rural since their emergence had their origin in the urban centers of the colony, such as the São Gonçalo dance, the Twelfth Night Festivities and the Devine Holy Ghost feast. These have always been accompanied by the viola.

The identification of the viola with the first inhabitants of the São Paulo region increased over time. The fact that we find the viola in the region of Paulistânia²³ is an indication of the strong presence of the instrument first in the in the culture of the *bandeirantes* and then of the *tropeiros*, to the extent of establish itself as a cultural element in the areas explored and occupied by the *bandeirantes*.

Nineteenth-century travelers reported the musicality of the tropeiros who, in their leisure time improvised verses to the sound of the viola. Gradually the viola became the voice of this people from the backlands of Southeastern and Central-Western Brazil. In the city of São Paulo the viola was played in feasts and festivities linked to popular Catholicism up to the early twentieth century, according to the historian Vinci de Moraes (1997).

In the Northeast the viola established itself as an instrument of poet-improvisers, perpetuating the Arab tradition of the troubadours. It is often found with twelve strings, but always divided into five courses (three pairs and two triplets). Poets-improvisers often use the dynamic viola. As already mentioned, it is a model developed in Brazil by Del Vecchio, whose top has several holes covered by a screen that hides natural amplifiers made of aluminum cones, resulting in a metallic sound that vibrates well with the open sound of the Portuguese spoken in the Northeast. In Recife we still find the viola being played as it was played in the Renaissance, with a reed and in a way that is more melodic than harmonic, thus preserving the way it was used in the literate milieu, in a free style.²⁴

At this point, the text merits an explanation about the different ways the viola is played tin Northeast and Southeast Brazil: during the first two centuries that followed the discovery of Brazil, the Portuguese administrative bodies were more concerned with the Northeast because of profitable economic activities such as sugarcane. Thus, the presence of the Portuguese State in the Northeast led to some elitist ways of playing the instrument. In the Southeast, the viola in the hands of the *bandeirantes* and Mameluks lost its technical finesse, but gained a wider rhythmic approach. Proof of that is the number of rhythms found in what we know as country music. Currently, violists have put together these two ways of playing, combining the refinement of the free style brought from Portugal with the rude exuberance of the sounds and rhythms native to Brazil.

As the resolutions of some of the numerous Romanizations²⁵ were introduced in Brazil, many of the Catholic rites, which here were beginning to take

shape, were banned from the main churches, but resisted even away from the central religious authorities. This “popular Catholicism” pushed rites such as revelries, the Santa Cruz and São Gonçalo dances and the *congados* (pantomimic folk dances of African origin) out of the urban centers. In the nineteenth century not only these rites but also instruments such as violas, fiddles and later the *requintas* (violas with high-pitched strings) moved to the backwoods and rural areas. Subsequently, dances like the mazurka, polka and square dance, which were becoming out-fashioned in urban ballrooms, found a place in rural areas, where they are still in vogue. Gradually banned from the central regions of the cities, these forms of expression moved to the outskirts of those same cities, and as the power of local governments increased, they were taken to the rural areas, where they established themselves together with the instrument that had always accompanied them and which was also being gradually replaced by the acoustic guitar, i.e., the viola.²⁶

Of music and peasants

Many of us have noticed how present music is in the daily lives of rural communities in Brazil. It is feasible to believe that music has been a mediating element in the relations of these rural communities. In religious festivals, together with faith, music acts as the guiding thread of the entire ritual process. It is through them that local men and women come together and organize themselves to express the rites celebrating life and personal achievements.

A Twelfth Night celebration usually involves the entire community, especially when it ends its tour of the city and gathers in the local church. In the tour, players and devotees walk together - sometimes huge distances -, stopping at the houses bringing the blessing of the “Three Wise Men”. In the evenings they stop at a house to rest, which is usually the last house which they visit that day. There they have dinner and before retiring to bed they make a brief performance, in which their music switches from sacred to profane. Usually they sing about romances (viola ditties, fandangos), some contests in which participants challenge one another (improvisations, responsorial songs and singing and dancing), and often dances in which only the feast clown²⁷ performs, like the *jaca*, or larger ensembles like the *quatragem* (type of tap dancing), which involves other members of the group. Twelfth Night celebrations, São Gonçalo dance, Holy Ghost feast, São Sebastião feast, Santa Cruz dance, *congados*, *catopés*, Mozambique, villains, Kayapos, fandangos. Many are the rituals that use music as a guiding thread. Work songs are also common in harvests and or task forces. Usually people perform their tasks – harvesting or weeding – at the rhythm of music (a practice also common in European vintages). In task force songs, often doleful, men sing while working and usually talk among themselves through songs.²⁸ The *cantigas de roda* (folk songs) in turn convey concepts and values. Thus, the music plays several roles and sometimes is an element that appeases relationships and brings people together.

The violist

Gradually the viola became one of the main voices of the expressions of Brazilian peasants, at least in the areas already mentioned such as the Central-Southeast and part of the Northeast. Interestingly, in the Southeast it was such a success that its player became a very important person in the community where he lived.

The viola player, henceforth called violist, is always prompted to play in religious rites such as the Holy Ghost festivities, Twelfth Night celebrations, São Sebastião festivities, Santa Cruz and São Gonçalo dances, as well *functions*, which are celebrations in which people gather to cook, play and dance.

Interestingly, the violist attracts to himself an aura of distinction and mysticism, since skillfully playing the viola is always seen as something that catches the eye of people and arouses curiosity. And playing skills are often associated with the result of some pact. Thus, this violist maintains this transition from profane to sacred and vice versa, like no other person in the community. He plays at church festivities and although he makes a pact with the devil to improve his playing, he is not rejected by the community. In sixteenth-century Portugal, the violist was already associated with the occult, as seen in the text below:

D. Francisco Manuel de Melo describes the guitar (viola) as an attribute of buffoons, meddlers and friends of the devil [...] although recognizing that playing this instrument is a gift that distinguishes those who do it. (quoted Mário de Sampaio Ribeiro, *Música e Dança, Arte Popular em Portugal*, v.II, p.26-7, apud Oliveira, 2000, p.162)

Closeness with the supernatural world is a constant in his habits. The connection with poisonous snakes - over which he has control and from which he assimilates part the power - is such that the violist always carries in his viola a rattle made from a rattlesnake, which he believes to improve the sound. Another custom is trapping images of the devil inside small bottles and using some magical tricks to increase his power over the instrument.

We remember well a research trip in which we talked with a resident in the backlands of the Caparaó Mountains, on the border of the states of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. He told us that it was common in the region for violists to carry small images of the devil trapped in bottles. The higher the number of devils, the greater the power of the violist over his instrument.

Normally this violist believes that the art of playing the viola well and is a gift that should not be passed on to just anyone. So it has always been common for the violist to choose one or another pupil - and nobody else - to pass on his knowledge. This control over power eventually generated a climate of rivalry among the violists, who always refer to themselves as "the best in the world". It is interesting to note that in every town we visited we had the opportunity to meet another "best violist in the world".

Due to the control and refusal to share this knowledge, laymen eager to learn the secrets of the instrument started using magic tricks²⁹ to make up for the lack of a master to start them in the instrument. These magical tricks involve the use of poisonous snakes and take place in a cemetery on Good Friday, or pacts with that which is considered the greatest violist of all: the devil.³⁰

The most interesting is that there is always a redemptive escape to get rid of the evils called in when one tries to acquire some power through the occult. Still about our conversation with this man from the Caparaó Mountains, when we argued that it might not be worth selling one's soul to the devil to be able to play the viola better, he promptly interrupted me saying that there was no harm in a violist making a pact with the devil, because God, who is in heaven, loves the sound of the viola, and God, who is omniscient and omnipresent is aware of everything that happens here on earth. So, when a violist who had a pact with the devil dies and the creature from hell comes to take him to the depths, all the violist's soul needs to say is: "I am a violist!", for God to rescue him saying: "If you are a violist, come to heaven." And since God is more powerful than the devil,³¹ He rescues the soul of the violist, saving him from the misfortune of having to live in hell.

The violist is said to have power over venomous animals, especially snakes. Magic tricks involving rattlesnakes, vipers and other types of snakes are commonplace.

Zé Coco do Riachão, one of the icons of traditional viola, who was born and died in Montes Claros (Minas Gerais), used to say that whoever were afraid to hold a snake between the fingers should spread anaconda or python lard on the hands, and that alone would be sufficient to turn a beginner into a viola player. Snake lard is widely used in the treatment of muscular conditions like tendonitis, sprains, etc.

The viola inside

The viola comprises double strings grouped into five courses. They can also feature twelve strings, with three pairs and two triples strings, thus keeping the idea of the five courses. Like the acoustic guitar, it has a belly, a neck and a tuning peg. The neck is divided into spaces called frets. They break down the scale into semitones. The belly or body is generally made of two types of wood: a softer wood on the top (front) and a harder one on the sides and bottom of the instrument. Today we find various specimens of woods used in the manufacture of violas, although the most usual model is the one with pinewood top and rosewood sides and bottom.

Tunings

Unlike most plucked string instruments, the viola has several tunings.³² In addition to the nine possible tunings brought from Portugal³³ to Brazil, many other were developed here. It is estimated that there are approximately twenty ways of tuning the viola in Brazil. Often the peasant, the inhabitant of the back-

lands, whose hands are rough from working with plantations or cattle, tunes the strings in a way that will allow him to play part of his repertoire using two or even just one finger. This shows not only their strong musicianship, but also their creative ability to overcome adversities.

We can try to establish a relationship between tuning and location. The tunings have different names: *Paraguassu*, *Boiadeira*, *Meia-Guitarra*, *Natural*, *Cebolinha*, *Rio Acima*, *Rio Abaixo*, *Cebolão*, *Cana Verde* and *Paulistinha*. In the Paulistânia³⁴ area, the most common tuning is *Cebolão*. We believe that this tuning is originally from that rural region, since is not found in the list of tunings used in Portugal presented by Veiga Oliveira. *Cebolão* is tuned at various pitches. The most common are *Cebolão* in E, *Cebolão* in C and *Cebolão* in E flat.

In the north of Minas Gerais and in the state capital region, the most frequently used tuning is *Rio Abaixo*, of Portuguese origin, found in the region of Amarante, of the viola Amarantina or two-hearted viola, the region of the patron saint of viola players, São Gonçalo. Would that not be because Minas Gerais, more subjected to the scrutiny of the Portuguese administration because of the state's mineral wealth has kept deeper traces of Portuguese culture and customs than Paulistânia? The permanence of a tuning brought from Portugal may be an indication of that.

The strings are also named. From bottom to top or from the thinnest to the thickest strings: *primas* (1st pair), *requintas* (2nd pair), *turina* and *contraturina* (3rd pair), *toeira* and *contratoeira* (4th pair), and *canotilho* and *contracanutilho* (5th pair).

We believe that it is possible to establish trunks (families) of tunings in which, from a reference tuning one can change the pitch of one pair or the other, thereby obtaining a different tuning. The tuning family named natural (4th perfect, 4th perfect, 3rd major, 4th perfect), from low to high, similar to *Cana Verde* (4th perfect, 3rd major, 4th perfect, 4th perfect) or *Paraguassu* (4th perfect, 4th perfect, 3rd major, 3rd minor), in which the terms perfect, major and minor define the distance between the notes.³⁵ If we consider another family like *Cebolão* (4th perfect, 3rd major, 3rd minor, 4th perfect) we will see that it is similar to *Boiadeira* (5th perfect, 3rd major, 3rd minor, 4th perfect) or *Riachão* (4th perfect, 3rd major, 3rd minor, 4th perfect). In the *Rio Abaixo* trunk (5th perfect, 4th perfect, 3rd major, 3rd minor) we have the *Meia-Guitarra* (4th perfect, 4th perfect, 3rd major, 3rd minor) or the tuning used by Almir Sater in Corumbá (5th perfect, 4th perfect, 3rd major, 4th perfect). Notice that *Paraguassu* (4th perfect, 4th perfect, 3rd major, 3rd minor) also has a structure similar to that of *Rio Abaixo*. Finally, further research is necessary, since little has been studied about tunings, except their cataloguing.

The *viola de cocho*

In the sate of Mato Grosso, in the region of Cuiabá, we have the *viola de cocho*, so named because it is made of carved wood, in the shape of a caved tree trunk, forming a type of container. It has five strings, originally made of guts. To-

tion to the viola came from Tavinho Moura, who brought to the instrument all his talent as a songwriter, expanding its use with beauty and poetry.

The book *Violeiros do Brasil* by Myriam Taubkin Roizenblit and Sergio (2008) provides an inventory of hundreds of violists currently active in Brazil, plus a myriad of viola manufacturers. There are still many masters scattered in the interior of the country, such as Damasceno da Viola, Badia Medeiros, Manoel de Oliveira and Minervino, to name a few. The latter is also a luthier.



Photo Marcos Fernandes / Government Agency es / State Agency

José Dias Nunes (1934-1993), a.k.a. Tião Carreiro.

The lack of a systematic methodology for teaching the viola has led each violist to develop their own way of playing. Thus, the diversity of tunes that sound today across the country is immense. It is both singular and plural, as Alfredo Bosi (2006) refers to popular culture.

The viola on record

Throughout the process of legitimizing the viola as a Brazilian instrument, it has, one way or the other, been linked to the rural area, even when it was an urban instrument in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the legitimization of both the viola and the recordings of country music started in 1929.

This event was closely linked to broadcasting, which not only popularized the viola in regions it had not yet reached, but also gave full visibility to the reality and aspects of the history of these peasants from the Central-Southeast region of the country. This man from the backlands is perhaps the only peasant in Brazil whose history is known to many. Let me explain: our history is the his-

tory of winners, kings, presidents, the official history. Little or nothing is known about the history of the peasant population of the country, mostly deprived from enjoying the benefits of the progress and crops arising from technology. Who knows what happened to the men in the backwoods of Cariri in the early twentieth century? And to the mestizos of Pará at that time? In fact, our history is built from the short histories that each of us experiences, from our memories. After the moment experienced, these facts are taken to the popular memory through oral tradition and are often diluted over time, taking away from us the preciseness of who did what and when. Because country music has its base on the poetry founded on romance and is always telling a story that happened or that has a value that alludes to what actually happened or was imagined, when this music was taken to the radio it brought to listeners the history, the values and the reality of that peasant, keeping him rooted, albeit far from his roots.³⁸

As previously mentioned, the history of the viola with the rural man is a long one. From the catechizing of the Indians and the Mameluks in the sixteenth century to the *bandeirantes* and then the *tropeiros*, the viola established itself in that geographical space, in the customs of those people, and became the voice of their musicality. In sacred and profane rites, the viola has won its place within the peasant culture.

In the late nineteenth century São Paulo began to establish itself as a metropolis, and this affirmation also included the denial of its equal in the rural area.³⁹ Across the hinterlands, the rural elite, also eager to differentiate themselves from the peasants, denies them by saying that their customs are like those of the metropolis. The stigma then arises of the backward peasant, that does not evolve, and so the rural man introduces himself in the city as the expression of ridicule. That is how they were referred to in the plays and musicals staged São Paulo at the time. We can see from another angle that the “backward man” is in reality the one who resists, who will not give up his culture and values for others which in his view are ephemeral and in no way adaptable to his reality.

In 1910, a peasant from Tietê named Cornélio Pires organized at the Mackenzie School in São Paulo, a cultural weekend in which he presented musical expressions of the peasant culture. The recognition was patent. Thereafter Cornélio established himself as a storyteller who crowded theaters and cinemas with people who paid to hear him tell the story of a peasant who was all but a fool; on the contrary. This different view of the peasant was gradually becoming popular.

In 1929 Cornélio, through his nephew Ariowaldo Pires, later Captain Furtado, proposed to the director of Columbia the recording of a series of country music albums. His proposal was vehemently rejected, leading him to bear the costs of the producing the albums himself. A month later Cornelius had recorded six⁴⁰ different albums, totaling thirty thousand copies. He traveled through the interior of São Paulo advertising and selling his records, and to ev-

everyone's surprise sold everything very quickly.⁴¹ That was the beginning of one of the most successful musical niches in the history of recording in Brazil. The viola, which once had filled the streets of the colony with its melodious sound, was back in the urban scene as country music became an increasing success on the radio in the 1930s and 1940s.

The peasant culture that had been banned at the time of modernization experienced by São Paulo in the late nineteenth century, came back through recordings and the intense exodus of that time.

In a first stage, part of the duets was not formed exactly by peasants, and the search for new artists led urban musicians like Raul Torres to focus their production on country music. During that period, which lasted until the early 1940s, we find recordings only with guitar and viola and also with other instrumental formations: the instrumental base of the then already pulsating Brazilian popular music, i.e., the *choro*, which had also been the instrumental mainstay of the samba since the 1920s. Raul Torres's recordings, besides the guitar and the viola, feature violins, flutes, the tuba, the Hawaiian ukulele and even the triangle, the latter an instrument used in the *emboladas* (poems accompanied by music in rapid intervals) once sung by Raul Torres.

Broadcasting began in Brazil in 1922. Almirante, a musician and producer from Rio de Janeiro, had said that the radio at that time was the main promoter of Brazilian music because of its non-discriminatory use. Whatever came in was played. Thus, young people in rural areas who heard those songs at home began to reproduce them, but with a sound closer to the country environment; the sound of folk festivals, follies, *cateretês*, syncretized in two instruments – the viola and the guitar. The duets that emerged in the 1940s, of which Tonico and Tinoco, Sulino and Marrueiro and Zé Carreiro and Carreirinho, are the greatest expressions, as they imprinted on country music the marks that remained: the duet, the viola and the guitar.

Another change takes place: from that stage, the voices of the duets become marked. Brothers singing together became something more common. As a result, the singing became more harmonious, more cohesive. An icon of that time is the violist, the great player, whose greatest expression was Tião Carreiro.

Interestingly, we will see a change in the narrated theme that is closer to reality and the introduction of the human element in the western interior of the country. The songs gradually switch to a more pastoral theme such as *Laço Justiceiro* and *Rei do Gado*, which is consistent with this march westward, added to the advancement of cattle raising (Pimentel, 1997).⁴²

About Tião Carreiro it is worth mentioning that in addition to being a unique violist (he snatched the laurels of “being a violist”), he brought the use of the Mixolydian mode to country music from his *pagode* introductions. Tião Carreiro was born in Montes Claros, north of Minas Gerais. There, unlike in the entire Paulistânia,⁴³ the current diatonic scale is not the major scale (Ionian

mode), but rather the Mixolydian, which is similar to the major scale except for the lowered seventh.⁴⁴ This scale is often used in northeastern music. Thus, Tião Carreiro, for his childhood musical heritage brought to country music sound elements that alluded to an unusual sound in that milieu. This element has certainly helped craft the violist that he became.

Between the years 1940 and 1960, this musical genre grew in the recording market, as also did the number of singing duets. From the second half of the 1960's, the advent of *Jovem Guarda*, a Brazilian version of rock'n'roll combined with large layers of peasants who had long been living in the cities, gave way to the emergence of a style that merged country music with the emerging rock, adopting urban themes in the lyrics and embodying a new figure that had become part of the popular types - the playboy. Léo Canhoto and Robertinho were the protagonists and the first duet in the genre to be successful. Coupled with the new look and the new poetry, there was also a strong change in relation to the sound of these duets. The viola was replaced by the instrumental apparatus of pop bands and Brazilian popular music.

This style held in the recording market the selling space of authentic country music, also under the name of Country Music. Actually, this musical genre is closer to romantic music, as it has none of the elements of its predecessor, namely the typicality of the instruments, the use of romance as the poetical basis, the constant use of two voices at intervals of thirds or sixths, and the use of the rhythmic framework found in country music. Today we have the overuse of a vibrato that arose from the transformation of a singing typical of Mexico introduced in Brazil in the 1950s from the *rancheras* and *corridos*, in the voice of Miguel Aceves Mejia.

Most country duets that insisted on using the viola eventually failed or even disappeared.

New times

The 1990s were the most fruitful years for the instrument. The configuration of the music industry had changed since the beginning of the 1980s with the advent of Brazilian rock. The artist then became part of a scheme in which the producer and great marketing pitches were worth more than the actual weight of his work. With the arrival of neoliberalism, artwork became increasingly a product of significant sales and devoid of all its artistic value. Communications channels were transformed into outdoors, where all musical exposure should now be paid in advance. This happened on TV and major radio stations. This attempt at cultural uniformity of the peoples called globalization ended up generating a side effect that resulted in an appreciation of local cultures. Coupled with this side effect, the idea of preserving the environment and cultural diversities and the disillusionment with the "dream of the big city" led people to look at the rural area in a less dichotomous way of rural vs. urban. Missing values in the big city as solidarity, probity, a greater concern with *being* rather than with

having and a serene and less greedy way of looking at the world, brought these peasant cultures Brazilian back to the surface. Also indisputable was the presence of Almir Sater in soap operas. His exposure to the general public conveyed a different picture of the viola player, which was no longer that stereotypical image left by the urban media. Since then, it has become increasingly more common to see young urban people playing the viola.



Musician from the Viola Caipira Orchestra of São Paulo, Tom Jobim Free Music University

Some meetings of violists have helped, each in their region, to coalesce attention around the viola. In 1996 a meeting held in Campinas (state of São Paulo) called “*No Encontro das Cordas*” (In the Meeting of Strings), conceived by Ivan Vilela, brought together five violists and proved that the viola was an instrument with a considerable audience in the city. In 1997 the producer Myriam Taubkin organized at the SESC Pompeia Theater, in São Paulo, the event “*Violistas do Brasil*” (Violists of Brazil), with the participation of fourteen violists. It was a huge success. Recorded by TV Cultura station, the event showcased the strength and still immanent presence of the viola in the imaginary of the people, and paved the way towards a larger audience - the urban public. In 2004 and 2005, the Direção Cultura production company, from Campinas, under the curatorship of Ivan Vilela created the Syngenta Viola Instrumental Music Award, with phases in various capitals. In 2004 the first phase was held in Belo Horizonte, Brasília, Cuiabá, Curitiba, São Paulo, and Piracicaba. In 2005, in Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Goiânia, Recife, Ribeirão Preto, and São Paulo. Both finals were held in São Paulo. This award showed the resistance and revitalization of the viola in various parts of the country. In 2008, producer Myriam Taubkin, filmmaker Sérgio Roizenblit and photographer Angélica Del Nery released a DVD and a book about the violists who had performed in the 1997 event. Some meetings of violists were held in Ribeirão Preto at the initiative of the Landless Movement (*Movimento Sem Terra* - MST). The National Association of Violists, an entity created in 2003, organized the First Viola Seminar in the city of Belo Horizonte, in 2008.

We have witnessed the growth of an appreciation for Brazilian popular culture by Brazilians. Since 2005 the University of São Paulo has offered an undergraduate course in Brazilian viola. The same course is now being offered at Cantareira University, in São Paulo.

Throughout the Southeast Region there has been a proliferation of viola orchestras. These ensembles usually bring together people from different age groups, different social strata and different educational levels. All gathered around the viola and the culture that surrounds it. The first of these ensembles was established in Osasco in 1967, on the initiative of the conductor Marino Cafundó. That was but the starting point of several other orchestras. Currently there are more than fifty viola orchestras, some of them grouped around associations, institutes and NGOs.

Notes

- 1 The viola can have single, double or even triple strings.
- 2 “The splendor of Cordoba surpasses its rival Baghdad. The Library of Al-Hakam II (961-976) houses more than 400,000 volumes” (Jerphagnon, 2005).
- 3 In arabesque, Adalberto Alves (n.d.) tells us about music in Islam: “The two main

cultural seeds of the Arab soul, its precious jewelry - poetry and music - were about to be thrown into the fertile soil of Islamic civilization and bloom into the most beautiful graces.”

- 4 “The Latin poetry was metric and strophic, but did not use rhyme. The Arabs did not divide the stanzas, but had rhyme, a feature very consistent with the structure of Arabic words” (Soler, 1995, p.49).
- 5 See *Instrumentos musicais populares portugueses*, by Ernesto Veiga Oliveira (2000).
- 6 Explanation provided by the lute player and singer Mouna Amari, from Tunisia, and observations about the work by the lute player Mounir Bachir.
- 7 Note that is repeated, giving support to a melody that emerges.
- 8 “*Os portugueses amam muito suas violas.*” (The Portuguese love their violas very much).
- 9 See <<http://www.tamborileros.com/tradiberia/nombres.htm>>.
- 10 Wagner Campos (2005), in the book *A História do Violão* says that “the guitar is not a descendent of the lute, an instrument characterized by its half-pear shape and convex bottom. It is said today that the guitar stands as an intermediary between the cither and the violin, the first being of Roman origin and brought to Spain around 400 AD. This theory, then, is opposed to that more popular one that relates the lute to the guitar, brought to Spain by the Moors after its invasion in the eighth century.” This statement contradicts the trajectory indicated by all researchers hitherto, showing us through the iconography of the time how plucked string instruments originating from the lute began to lose their convex bottom and gain waist over the years. It is important to remember that the violin, as far as we know, descends from the *rabel*, *rebabe*, an instrument also brought by the Arabs. Finally, it is worth comparing all the information, because the study of the organology of these instruments still rests on shaky foundations and needs to be considerably furthered.
- 11 Domingos Morais (1986) in his book *Os instrumentos musicais e as viagens dos portugueses* shows precisely the dates and trajectories followed by some of the instruments of Portuguese origin. He identifies the Madeiran who took the *cavaquinho* to Hawaii and how it became the ukelele.
- 12 “The Violas from Queluz stopped being produced for two reasons. First because the descendants (more specifically the grandchildren) of the major manufacturers were no longer interested in pursuing the trade of handcrafting the instruments. The second reason was the arrival of industries like Del Vecchio and Tranquillo Giannini, which unfairly competed with the violas from Queluz, as they were mass produced.” Interview with the collector Max Rose and to the violist and researcher Carlos Vergalim. Available at: <<http://www.violeirovergalim.blogspot.com>>. Access: 21 November 2008.
- 13 See Bruno (2001, v.5, p.104).
- 14 Hypothesis defended by Professor Robin Whright, from the graduate school in anthropology at Unicamp.
- 15 “*Os jesuítas não colligiram a literatura dos aborígenes, mas serviram-se de suas musicas e de suas dansas religiosas para attrabils ao christianismo. entre essas dansas havia duas, o Caatereté e o Cururú...*” (Magalhães, 1940, p.323). (The Jesuits did not collect the

- literature of Aborigines, but used their religious songs and dances to attract them to Christianity. Among these dances there were two - *Catereté* and *Cururu*).
- 16 A harmonic instrument is that which is capable of producing chords to accompany melodies played in or sung by the human voice. The flute is a melodic instrument, as it plays one tune at a time; the harmonic instrument, in turn, can play multiple tunes at the same time.
 - 17 Pedro Calmon (1983 apud Budasz, 2004) registers December 20 in *A vida espantosa de Gregório de Matos*.
 - 18 See *Compêndio narrativo do peregrino da América* (Brazilian Academy of Letters, 1998 apud Budasz, 2004).
 - 19 The guitar with its tuning predominantly at intervals of fourths enabled greater openness and ease in producing chords than the viola with its tunings, in which intervals of thirds prevailed.
 - 20 In Portugal, recently, groups of young musicians rescued the guitar and other instruments that had been relegated to limited use in popular festivities.
 - 21 Accompanying instrument.
 - 22 Plucked string instrument derived from the lute.
 - 23 Paulistânia designates the entire region populated by expeditions of *bandeirantes*. This region coincides with the areas of accommodation of what we call country culture, i.e., São Paulo, southern Minas Gerais and Triângulo Mineiro (Minas Triangle), Goiás, Mato Grosso do Sul, part of Mato Grosso, part of Tocantins and northern Paraná.
 - 24 Each space between two frets is called case or barrette, and fret is each bar into which the neck of the instrument is divided.
 - 25 Romanization is the name of the deliberations agreed in the Vatican councils in which, many cases, there was an attempt to rescue the pure forms of Catholicism that were being increasingly lost in the new world. It worked like an ethnic cleansing in *pagan* rites, which gradually mingled with Catholic rituals and were eventually banned. This occurred because in Brazil the Church, in most cases, was led by lay communities and religious brotherhoods, as explained by Martha Abreu (1999, p.22): “The nineteenth century inherited what became known as ‘colonial religiosity’ or ‘baroque Catholicism’ [...] in general, within this religious practice the action of the secular clergy was limited to the celebration of some sacraments (baptisms, masses, communions, weddings and last rites) on specific dates. Their evangelization work had always been of little significance, due to the limited funds provided by the Crown, poor religious training and the large dependence on the laity. Religious orders, in turn, although better prepared to disseminate Catholicism within religious orthodoxy, were unable to reach all the followers. Thus, the laity became the major agents of baroque Catholicism, full of pagan survivals, with its disguised polytheism, superstitions and spells that attracted many blacks, facilitating their accession and parallel transformation.”
 - 26 The researcher Varoni Renato de Castro (2007) points out many plucked string instruments present in the city of Rio de Janeiro between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as cithers, bandores, psalteries, violas and guitars. In his research, carried out in part through studies on literary production in Rio de Janeiro in the

nineteenth century, shows how the viola gradually became an instrument used by the lower classes.

- 27 Also known as Marungo or Bastião, this masked character is an important part in a celebration. Besides being the “joy of the children,” he is primarily responsible for the material success of the feast. While revelers sing in praise of a home, a site or a resting place, it is he who speaks with the dwellers asking for gifts or money.
- 28 *Brão* is a type of singing riddle in which groups of working peasants question one another by singing the questions and answers. Thus, the work gets a playful connotation and the workers can always find one another in the fields where they work.
- 29 Superstitious action (which included following some ritual, using certain objects, etc.) for the purpose of getting something one wanted.
- 30 This relationship of the player with the devil is present in other cultures and musical segments. It is found in the *blues* and classical music (see Pagannini).
- 31 *Tisnado, tisne, peba, pemba, cramulhão*, devil, whose name is not spoken, also dog, the one, horned, goat feet, tailed, Lucifer, *capiroto*, bad-thing, *manfarro* are names given to the evil entity personified by the devil.
- 32 Tuning is the way we arrange (stretch) the various strings of the instrument. We measure the distances (height) between the sounds through a unit called tone. The distance between two distinct sounds is called interval. Tuning is the arrangement of the strings at specific intervals. By changing the height of the intervals we consequently change the tuning and the method of playing the instrument.
- 33 See Veiga Oliveira (2000).
- 34 See note 23.
- 35 The interval between the notes do-mi (A-C) involves three notes (C, D and E), then we call it a third. The intervals of fourth, fifth and eighth are called perfect. Seconds, thirds, sixths and sevenths can be major or minor. If we sing *do re mi fa sol la si do* (A, B, C, D, E, F, G), we are singing a major scale. The distance between each note is measured in a sound called tone. From *do* to *re* (A to B), from *re* to *mi* (B to C), from *fa* to *sol* (D to E), from *sol* to *la* (E to F), and from *la* to *si* (F to G) we have a tone, and from *mi* to *fa* (C to D) and from *si* to *do* (G to A) we have a half-tone. These distances are what make the melody we sing to be what they are. In the major scale the intervals relating to the first note are perfect (4th, 5th, and 8th) or major (2nd, 3rd, 6th, and 7th). If we remove half a tone from the major interval it becomes a minor interval.
- 36 Available at: <http://www.atlasofpluckedinstruments.com/central_america.htm#panama>.
- 37 “*Panama fue descubierta por Rodrigo de Bastidas en 1503. la conquista española trajo consigo una gran influencia cultural de la pujante Corona española. la incorporación de una cultura externa, promovio el arte local y tambien desarrollo las bases para una futura independendencia. la mejoranera, instrumento cuerdofono familia de las bordonuas, es de fabricacion panameña y se afirma fue creada tratando de imitar a la guitarra española.*” Available at: <<http://www.geocities.com/pipepipex/historia2.html>>.
- 38 This theme has been the core of our doctoral research under the guidance of Professor Ecléa Bosi.
- 39 The ideologies that supported the process of urbanization and modernization in Brazil were unable to reach the rural areas.

- 40 Some authors claim that there were five different albums totaling 25,000 copies. The argument of the six albums is based on the numbering of the copies – from 20,000 to -20,005.
- 41 Ferrete (1985) describes in detail the conversation between Cornélio and Byington Jr., the representative of the Columbia Records in Brazil, in his book *Capitão Furta-do: viola caipira ou sertaneja?*.
- 42 The anthropologist Sidney Valadares Pimentel (1997) develops this theme in his book *O chão é o limite*. The author shows how the march westward idealized by Getúlio Vargas, which was inspired by the eponymous march occurred in the United States, moved towards the establishment of a nationality with the introduction of the human element and cattle in the backlands of the country.
- 43 See note 23.
- 44 If we sing *do re mi fa sol la si do* (A, B, C, D, E, F, G), we are singing a major scale. The distance between each note is measured in a sound unit called tone. From *do* to *re* (A to B), from *re* to *mi* (B to C), from *fa* to *sol* (D to E), from *sol* to *la* (E to F), from *la* to *si* (F to GH) we have a tone; from *mi* to *fa* (C to D) and from *si* to *do* (G to A) we have a half-tone. These distances make the melody we sing to be what they it is. In the north of Minas Gerais and in northeastern Brazil people would normally sing *do re mi fa sol la flat si do* (A, B, C, D, E, F, G), in which the half-tones would be in *mi* to *fa* (C to D) and and *from la* to *si flat* (G to G flat). The melody will be slightly different and to our ears make a slight allusion to northeastern music.

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ABSTRACT – *Viola* (Brazilian five-course guitar) is an instrument that was brought to Brazil by the first people, pioneers and Jesuits. It was used as a tool for the catechesis. This instrument was transformed correspondently with the new land's development at the hands of *bandeirantes* (pathfinders), *tropeiros* (responsible for the transport of goods on donkeys) and popular singers. Along with the configuration of the popular culture in Brazil, viola became the speaker of the people of some regions, such as the south-east. This article deals a little with its origin and its relations with the Brazilian people throughout the years.

KEYWORDS: Brazilian five-course guitar, Brazilian music, Popular culture, Brazil's history.

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