

BRINGING UP THE HIDDEN BRAZILIANESS OF HENRIQUE OSWALD: BLAME IT ON THE NOTATION OF “SERRANA”!

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Abstract: This case study departs from the elaboration of an arrangement to challenge a consolidated and biased musicological perspective about Henrique Oswald (1852-1931), one of the most important Brazilian composers of all times. It involves three interconnecting issues: (1) the dilemma between Brazilian versus European music after the 1922 “*Semana de Arte Moderna*” (Week of Modern Art); (2), the limitations to notate *choro* performance practices in music scores, and (3) the adaptation of Henrique Oswald’s “*Serrana*” from a trio (violin, cello and piano) to a duet (double bass and piano) instrumentation. Despite the historical belief that Oswald refused to embrace the emerging Nationalism in his music, I argue that there is a Brazilian essence not only in the programmatic title of “*Serrana*”, but also in the 5 cyclic motifs, especially the syncopated rhythms that he uses to organize the quasi-*choro* rhapsodic A-B-C-Coda form. Documental and analytical data suggest that “*Batuque*” [“Drumming”], an early *choro* by Ernesto Nazareth dedicated to Oswald, inspired “*Serrana*”, his most Brazilian work; “*Serrana*”, in turn, possibly inspired Villa-Lobos’ “*Trenzinho do Caipira*” [“The Little Train of the Countryside Man”]. The main results indicate that (1) Oswald’s thick contrapuntal textures, (2) his predominant *legato* and *detaché* articulation, (3) the absence of a clear *choro* groove, (4) the challenges in notating popular music performance practices in music scores, and (5) the tradition of playing and recording the work at slow tempos may have contributed to the work’s poor reception and ostracism. I hope this arrangement of “*Serrana*” provides not only an opportunity to develop Brazilian chamber music and the idiomatic writing for the double bass, but also to discuss the need to better notate performance practices of popular music and change the musicological perspective about Henrique Oswald’s alleged lack of Brazilianess.

Keywords: Piano trio “*Serrana*” by Henrique Oswald; Nationalism in Brazilian music; Choro performance practices; Arrangement of Brazilian music; Idiomatic writing for double bass and piano.

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RESGATANDO A BRASILIDADE OCULTA DE HENRIQUE OSWALD: A CULPA É DA NOTAÇÃO DE “SERRANA”!

Resumo: Este estudo de caso parte da elaboração de um arranjo para desafiar uma perspectiva musicológica consolidada e tendenciosa sobre Henrique Oswald (1852-1931), um dos mais importantes compositores brasileiros de todos os tempos. Três questões interligadas estão envolvidas: (1) o dilema entre a música brasileira e a europeia após a “Semana de Arte Moderna” de 1922; (2) as limitações da notação das práticas de performance do choro em partituras musicais; e (3) a adaptação de “Serrana” de Henrique Oswald a partir de uma instrumentação para trio (violino, violoncelo e piano) para um dueto (contrabaixo e piano). Apesar da crença histórica de que Oswald se recusou a abraçar o nacionalismo emergente em sua música, argumento que há brasilidade não apenas no título programático de “Serrana”, mas também nos cinco motivos cíclicos, principalmente os ritmos sincopados que ele usa para organizar a forma rapsódica quase-choro *A-B-C-Coda*. Dados documentais e analíticos sugerem que “Batuque”, um choro de Ernesto Nazareth dedicado a Oswald, inspirou “Serrana”, sua obra mais brasileira; “Serrana”, por sua vez, possivelmente inspirou “O Trenzinho do Caipira”, de H. Villa-Lobos. Os principais resultados mostram que (1) as texturas contrapontísticas densas de Oswald, (2) sua articulação predominante em *legato* e *detaché*, (3) a ausência de uma levada clara de choro, (4) as dificuldades de representar as práticas de performance da música popular em partituras, e (5) a tradição de se tocar e gravar a obra em andamentos lentos podem ter contribuído para a má recepção e ostracismo da obra. Espero que este arranjo de “Serrana” proporcione não apenas uma oportunidade para desenvolver a música de câmara brasileira e a escrita idiomática para contrabaixo, mas também uma discussão sobre a necessidade de aprimorar as práticas de notação da música popular e modificar a perspectiva musicológica sobre a suposta falta de brasilidade de Henrique Oswald.

Palavras-chave: Trio com piano “Serrana” de Henrique Oswald; Nacionalismo na música brasileira; Práticas de performance do choro; Arranjo de música brasileira; Escrita idiomática para contrabaixo e piano.

RECUPERANDO LA BRASILIDAD OCULTA DE HENRIQUE OSWALD: ¡LA CULPA ES DE LA NOTACIÓN DE “SERRANA”!

Resumen: Este estudio de caso parte de la elaboración de un arreglo para cuestionar una perspectiva musicológica consolidada y sesgada sobre Henrique Oswald (1852-1931), uno de los compositores brasileños más importantes de todos los tiempos. Abarca tres cuestiones interconectadas: (1) el dilema entre la música brasileña y la europea después de la “Semana de Arte Moderna” de 1922; (2) las limitaciones para la notación de las prácticas de interpretación del *choro* en partituras musicales; y (3) la adaptación de “Serrana” de Henrique Oswald de una instrumentación de trío (violín, violonchelo y piano) a una de dúo (contrabajo y piano). A pesar de la creencia histórica de que Oswald se negó a abrazar el nacionalismo emergente en su música, argumento que hay brasilidad no solo en el título programático de “Serrana”, pero también en los cinco motivos cíclicos, especialmente los ritmos sincopados que utiliza para organizar la forma rapsódica casi-*choro* *A-B-C-Coda*. Los datos documentales y analíticos sugieren que “Batuque”, un *choro* de Ernesto Nazareth dedicado a Oswald, inspiró “Serrana”, su obra más brasileña; “Serrana”, a su vez, posiblemente inspiró a “O Trenzinho do Caipira” [“El Pequeño Ferrocarril del Campesino”], de H. Villa-Lobos. Los principales resultados muestran que (1) las densas texturas contrapontísticas de Oswald, (2) su articulación predominante en *legato* y *detaché*, (3) la falta de un groove de *choro* claro, (4) las dificultades para representar las prácticas interpretativas de la música popular en la partitura, y (5) la tradición de tocar y grabar la obra a *tempi* lentos pueden haber contribuido a la mala recepción y ostracismo de la obra. Espero que este arreglo de “Serrana” brinde no solo una oportunidad para desarrollar la música de cámara brasileña y la escritura idiomática para contrabajo, sino también para

debatir la necesidad de mejorar la notación de las prácticas de interpretación de la música popular y cambiar la perspectiva musicológica sesgada sobre la supuesta falta de brasilidad de Henrique Oswald.

Palabras clave: Trío con piano “Serrana” de Henrique Oswald; Nacionalismo en la música brasileña; Prácticas interpretativas del choro; Arreglo de música brasileña; Escritura idiomática para contrabajo y piano.

"What music he makes! I myself would be incapable of interpreting it with that mastery, that prodigy of rhythm. And here I am, lost in this indifference..."
(Henrique Oswald after listening to Ernesto Nazareth playing "*Batuque*" at Cine Odeon; Penalva, 1901) ²

"...nationalist theories in art... was that art fascist?"
(Carlos Oswald on the ideological persecution of his father's music, 1945) ³

1. “Serrana”, nationalism, Nazareth, and “Batuque”

This is a case study about the piano trio “Serrana”, by Brazilian composer, pianist, and pedagogue Henrique Oswald (1852-1931). It involves several interconnecting issues: (1) the European versus Brazilian music dilemma and the destructive decolonialism facet after the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Week of Modern Art) in Brazil; (2), limitations to notate performance practices in music scores, especially from popular music genres such as *choro* (3), the development of Brazilian chamber music repertoire for the double bass, and (4) strategies to create music arrangements.

The 13 primary sources for this study are: (a) 2 music scores of the piano trio “Serrana”, namely the original manuscript (Oswald, 1925) and the Ricordi edition (Oswald, 1927); (b) a music program with program notes of a chamber music concert (Barrozo, Milano, and Padua, 1925); (c) the music score of “Batuque” published by Casa Arthur Napoleão (Nazareth, 1913); (d) the practical outcome of this study, that is the music score of my arrangement of “Serrana” for double bass and piano (Borém and Oswald, 2023) (e) the 6 available recordings of “Serrana”, namely one audio recording (Vinecka, Guerra Vicente, Gushikem, and Oswald, 2001) and 5 videos recorded between 2018 and 2023 (Amado, Santoro, Augusto, and Oswald, 2015; Kanji, Pittenger, Miranda, and Oswald, 2018; Menezes, Orru, Evsina, and Oswald, 2023; Borém, Megaro, and Oswald, 2023a; Borém, Marzan, and Oswald, 2023b); and (f) 2 published musicological viewpoints to which I am frankly opposed (Andrade, 1934; Kiefer, 1976).

The multiple and interweaving nature of these 13 primary sources are better explained in the light of intertextuality theories. In the chapter “The poetics of the open work” (from “Open Work”), Umberto Eco (1979, p.1-2) approaches the “openness” of musical works, especially in the twentieth century, in terms of the

² Original quotation in Portuguese: “*Que música ele faz! Eu mesmo seria incapaz de interpretá-la com aquela mestria, aquele prodígio de ritmo. E [eu] aqui, perdido nesta indiferença...*”.

³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “*... as teorias nacionalistas em arte [...] Será que aquela arte era fascista?*”

performer being able to choose, in various ways: dynamics and sequences of events (“*Klavierstück XI*”, by Karlheinz Stockhausen), rhythms (Luciano Berio’s “Sequence for Solo Flute”), and aleatory choice of formal sections (Pierre Boulez’s “Third Piano Sonata” and Henri Pousseur’s “*Scambi*”). In this study, I would like to expand Eco’s idea of “works in motion” to include a very common “move” performers do when reading either traditional and non-traditional music scores, that is, changing articulation and dynamics signs to articulate better the musical discourse as far as form and acoustical issues. He also argues about the role of the reader:

...the cooperative role of the addressee [e.g., the reader, in the present study, both the musician and the audience] in interpreting messages [...] The reader as an active principal of interpretation is a part of the picture of the generative process of the text [...] Finally, an ideological bias can lead a critical reader to make a given text say more than it apparently says, that is, to find out what in that text is ideologically presupposed, untold [...] even the most closed texts are surgically 'opened': fiction is transformed into document and the innocence of fancy is translated into the disturbing evidence of a philosophical statement. (Eco, 1984, p.vii, 4 and 22, underlines are mine).

This study departs from the dialogic, contrapuntal, and heteroglossic interplay of Bakhtin (1981; first published in the 1930s) in the triadic author-text-reader relationship, but one which meaning system focuses on the audience and the language (Pang, 2014, p.441 and 443). Thus, I consider the possible voices and discourses of Oswald in the same language of printed music with its signs and conventions, especially after our Romantic composer was exposed to the sounding experience of hearing Ernesto Nazareth playing “Brazilian tangos” (a prevalent terminology for “*choro*” at the time Oswald wrote “*Serrana*”) on the piano for silent movies in cinemas of Rio. I also resort to the theory of topics in Brazilian popular music (Piedade, 2013), not only observing music scores, but also observing performance practices in sound spectrograms to recognize hidden traces of Nationalism in Oswald’s original score for piano trio and highlighted in an arrangement for double bass and piano.

In my argument in favor of Henrique Oswald’s hidden nationalism, I resort to Genette’s transtextuality and its 5 concepts (1997a, 1997b, and 1992), linking obvious and concealed elements from the 13 primary sources presented above. Genette’s describes five categories of text relationships, which may suggest connections amongst our primary sources: (1) intertextuality (a text inside another, such as my arrangement of “*Serrana*” searching for the hidden Brazilianess in Oswald’s manuscript due to articulation and dynamics issues), (2) paratextuality (historical texts siding each other, such as the manuscript, then the music program with notes of its premiere and, finally, the published edition of “*Serrana*”), (3) metatextuality (a critical text about another, such as the detrimental comments in books by two influential Brazilian musicologists), (4) hipertextuality (a previous text to another, such as “*Serrana*” as a prototype to Heitor Villa-Lobos’ “*Trenzinho do Caipira*” [“The Little Train of the Brazilian Countryman”]), and (5) arquitextuality (an abstract connection between genres of text, such as the languages of music scores and the visual representations of sound spectrograms of the recordings of “*Serrana*”).

Within these connections, of special interest are (1) the motivation that prompted Oswald to write “*Serrana*”, revealed by the 1925 program notes, (2) the dedication of the *choro* “Batuque” to Oswald by Ernesto Nazareth, (3) and the two nationalistic musicological viewpoints which have negatively influenced performers and audiences of “*Serrana*” since the 1922 Week of Modern Art in Brazil.

My method, of musicological and analytical nature, involves understanding the context around this work, the harmonic and formal structures of “*Serrana*”, and retelling its story within the programmatic background of a steam locomotive journey in the mountainous geography near Rio de Janeiro. Adding to this scenario is the context of enormous pressure on the composer to adhere to the nationalist movement in Brazil, as engendered and epitomized by Mário de Andrade. I used *mAVAm* (Method for the Analysis of Audio and Videos of Music; Borém, 2024) with its tools *MaPA* (Map of Audiovisual Performance) and *EdiP* (Edition of Performance) to construct color-coded musical examples.

The “*serrana*” adjective, which means “hilly” in the Portuguese language, has had a long-standing affectionate memory for the Oswald family in the State of Rio de Janeiro. The habit of frequently transiting between the sea-level busy Rio and their bucolic mountainous grounds in Petrópolis using the *Serrana* Railway Line (Pastori, 2009, pp.197-198, 201),⁴ may have inspired the composer while writing “*serrana*” music. But as a proper title, this adjective appears only in the quite short “*Serrana*”, which is more of a character piano-trio piece than his massive triptych formed by the piano trios Op.9 (Oswald, 1884), Op.28 (Oswald, 1897), and Op.45 (Oswald, 1916).

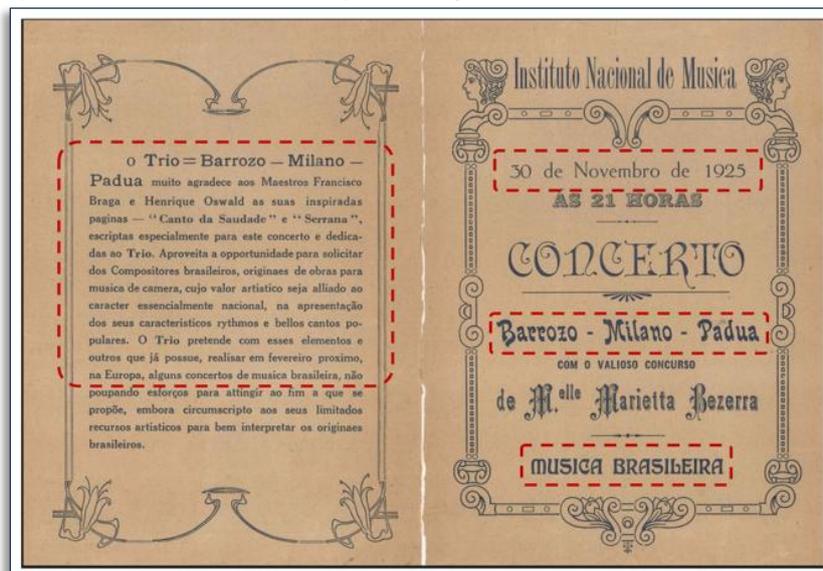
Premiered two years before its publication, “*Serrana*” was commissioned from Oswald by the Barrozo-Milano-Padua Trio, comprised of his friends Newton Padua (violinist and composer), Humberto Milano (violoncello), and Barroso Netto (pianist and composer). The program notes for the premiere of “*Serrana*” on the 30th of November, 1925 (Figure 1; Barrozo, Milano, and Padua, 1925) reveals the impetus of the trio urging composers to write a repertoire inspired by values cherished during the groundbreaking *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Week of Modern Art; at Teatro Municipal de São Paulo between 11 and 18 of February 1922 in São Paulo), to proudly present an all-Brazilian music concert in Europe. It reads:

The Barrozo-Milano-Padua Trio is very grateful to Maestros Francisco Braga and Henrique Oswald for their inspired pages – “*Canto da Saudade*” and “*Serrana*”-, especially written for this concert and dedicated to the Trio. We take this opportunity to ask Brazilian composers for originals of chamber music works, whose artistic values are aligned with the essentially nationalistic character, presenting its characteristic rhythms and beautiful popular songs. With these new additions and others that we already have,

⁴ Before 1854, the journey from Rio de Janeiro to Petrópolis involved a 3-stage transportation by horse-drawn carriage (or just with horses), then by steamboat, and then again by resorting to horses, taking approximately 5 and a half hours. Under the administration of Emperor Dom Pedro II, with the gradual construction of the Petrópolis's *Serra* Train Line, also known as the *Serrana* Railway Line, in 1883 it became possible to climb the nearly 900 meters in altitude above sea level by steam locomotive in just 1 and a half hours. This revolutionary milestone was a part of Oswald's entire life.

the Trio intends to play some concerts in Europe next February. (my translation and underlines)⁵

Figure 1 – Program and program notes of a nationalist recital by Trio Barrozo-Milano-Padua, revealing the commission and premiere of “Serrana”, by Oswald, at INM (*Instituto Nacional de Música*), nowadays, the School of Music of UFRJ.



Source: Barrozo, Milano, and Padua (1925)

The affirmative action of this ensemble (Barrozo, Milano, and Padua, 1925) also reinforces the idea, in the wake of the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, that composers, singers, instrumentalists, and conductors should produce and present music aligned with Brazilian cultural values. Accordingly, this quite long chamber music program featured new 18 pieces (mainly for voice, piano, violin and violoncello) at INM (*Instituto Nacional de Música*). Along with Oswald's “Serrana”, there was a team of nationalist composers and their works: “*Trio Brasileiro*” and “*Canção Brasileira*” by Lorenzo Fernandez, “*Toada*” [“Cattle Call”; a Brazilian countryside music genre] and “*Tango Caprichoso*” [“Capricious Tango”; “tango” being another term for the emerging Brazilian popular genre *choro*] by Francisco Braga, “*Dansa Brasileira*” by Luciano Gallet, and “*O Canto do Cisne Negro*” [“The Black Swan's Chant”] by Heitor Villa-Lobos.

Henrique Oswald was unjustly and reducibly labelled as very conservative for not adhering to the nationalistic wave of the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, a movement that revealed a new generation of artists engaged in Brazilianess. Siding with Heitor Villa-Lobos in music, among others, there were painter Anita Malfatti, writer Oswald de Andrade, sculptor Victor Brecheret, poet Manuel Bandeira, architect John Graz, and the very active Mario de Andrade, writer, melomaniac, and the leading mentor

⁵ Original quotation in modern Portuguese: *O Trio Barrozo-Milano-Pádua muito agradece aos Maestros Francisco Braga e Henrique Oswald as suas inspiradas páginas – “Canto da Saudade” e “Serrana”, escritas especialmente para este concerto e dedicadas ao Trio. Aproveitamos a oportunidade para solicitar dos Compositores brasileiros originais de obras de música de câmara, cujo valor artístico seja aliado ao caráter essencialmente nacional, na apresentação de seus característicos ritmos e belos cantos populares. O Trio pretende com esses elementos e outros que já possui, realizar em fevereiro próximo, na Europa, alguns concertos de música brasileira.*

of the movement. In Andrade's authoritarian ambiguity, we find, side by side, hyper compliments and an anger for not being able to coopt Oswald:

... two most prominent psychological characteristics...sensuality and humor. H. Oswald's sensuality is sweet, full of tenderness, a little passive, quite feminine... refined harmonies without the slightest roughness... a melodic sensitivity far removed from Italian voluptuousness and German masculinity... with a lightness that is half ironic, half sarcastic, and above all through a childlike and inventive joy... I confess that I cannot find in universal music scherzos with more character, with more playful truth than those of the Brazilian Master... It was he who, in art, until now, opened the most delicious and pure smile that has ever graced a Brazilian mouth. (Andrade, 1934, pp. 214-215; from a 1929 text, my translation and underlines).⁶

Henrique Oswald was perhaps the most countryless Brazilian, the most dysfunctional of all the artists who emerged in the second half of the 19th century [...]. That's why I considered him theoretically an enemy. I say more: an enemy I theoretically held a grudge against [...] I perceived the formidable ally we had lost, all of us who worked for the identity of a national music [...] the delight of "Serrana" and the second of the Three Studies [for piano] clearly demonstrate the importance of the collaboration he could give us, without, however, abandoning any of his individual qualities.⁷ (Andrade, 1934, pp. 216-217; from a 1931 text after Oswald's death, my translation and underlines).

Both the inclusion of Oswald' "Serrana" in that 1925 program of Brazilian nationalists three years after the 1922 Week of Modern Art, and the virulent attack of Andrade on Oswald's musical style concur to the perception that the "the most mourned and admirable composer of our Land"⁸ in the words of Villa-Lobos (1932) did try to take part in the nationalist movement. More than a decade ago, Monteiro (2011, pp.12) observed that "Oswald continues to be approached with the same Mário de Andrade's gaze, being insistently remembered for the themes to which he did not dedicate himself or for what he did not represent".⁹ A reenactment of Andrade's fascist comments, a perception of Henrique Oswald's son Carlos Oswald (1945) and mine as well, in the second half of the 20th century, is illustrated by the resentful statement of musicologist and composer Bruno Kiefer (1976, pp.130):

⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: "... dois caracteres psicológicos mais salientes ... sensualidade e comicidade. A sensualidade de H. Oswald é brandiosa [meiga], cheia de dengue, um pouco passiva, bastante feminina... harmonias refinadas e sem a mínima rudeza... uma sensibilidade melódica afastadíssima da volúpia italiana e da masculinidade alemã... duma leveza meia irônica, meia sarcástica, e principalmente por meio duma alegria infantil e inventadeira... Eu confesso que não encontro da música universal Esquerzos de mais caracter, de mais verdade brincalhona que os do Mestre brasileiro... Foi ele que em arte, até agora, abriu o mais delicioso e puro sorriso que jamais pairou em boca brasileira."

⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Henrique Oswald foi talvez o mais despaisado [sem país], o mais defuncional de quantos artistas vieram desta segunda metade do sec. XIX [...] Eis porque eu o considerava teoricamente um inimigo. Digo mais: um inimigo de que eu tinha, teoricamente, rancor [. . .] eu percebia o formidável aliado que perdíamos, todos quanto trabalhávamos pela especificação da música nacional [. . .] a delícia da Serrana e do segundo dos Três Estudos, mostram bem a importância da colaboração que ele poderia nos dar sem, no entanto, abandonar coisa nenhuma das suas qualidades individuais."

⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: ". . . o mais pranteado e admirável compositor de nossa Terra."

⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Oswald continua sendo abordado com o mesmo olhar andradeano, sendo insistentemente lembrado pelos temas aos quais não se dedicou ou por aquilo que não representou."

Why then is his work usually included in the history of our music, practically without the author's knowledge? Just because he was born in Brazil? ... His music is seductive, but at the same time, rootless. It lacks the strength of the land... Just one more question: what does Oswald's work mean in the context of European culture? ... Our point of view is further supported by some considerations [by the anthropologist] Darcy Ribeiro [in his book *Teoria do Brasil*, 1972, pp.107, improperly quoted here in my understanding], regarding the stance of the Brazilian ruling class: '... a social and erudite stratum... an alienated local representation of another society, whose culture he sought to mimic'. Oswald belonged emotionally, not economically, to the European class. Nepomuceno and others represent a reaction to this state of affairs... He wasn't successful in dramatic music... We believe that Oswald wasn't a creative personality, strictly speaking... he needed certain aesthetic premises, created by others. In a sense, Oswald is the antipode of Villa-Lobos. (my translation and underlines) ¹⁰

Although shy and discreet, Oswald had contact and friendship with eminent nationalists, such as Alberto Nepomuceno, Villa-Lobos, Francisco Braga, and Frenchman Darius Milhaud and his students, who were to be future nationalists, among them Lorenzo Fernandez, Luciano Gallet, and Fructuoso Viana. Five works by Oswald have been associated with his attempt to write music with a Brazilian accent (Andrade, 1934; Martins, 1988; Monteiro, 2011 and 2004; Santos, 2018; Marum, 2019): the piano trio “*Serrana*”, the “*Scherzo*” from “*Symphony Op.43*”, and three pieces for solo piano. Arguing for a possible symbiosis of styles and crossover traces in the composer's output, Marum (2019, pp.4-6) observed the exoticism “*In Hamac*” [“*In the Hammock*”] perceived by a chronicler of the French journal *Le Figaro* in 1903 (“...inspired by a popular theme. We know Oswald is a Brazilian...”, quoted after Martins, 1994), and an approximation with the *choro* genre in the 2/4 meter of his “*Impromptu Op.19*”, with the “whirlwind” of uninterrupted 16th notes and the 16th-note anacrusis preparing a new phrase. As for the “*Étude N.2*” (from “*Trois Études*”), the discovery of the 1910 manuscript (Martins, 1994) strongly suggested a “Brazilianization” in the music score published by Bevilacqua, also in 1910. Accordingly, all triplets were systematically substituted by “*garfinhos*” (“little forks”), apparently to attract more music score buyers in the new cultural nationalist trend. “*Garfinhos*”, also called the Brazilian syncopation,¹¹ are the 16th-8th-16th-note rhythmic pattern, especially in sequences.

But there is stronger evidence of our composer's interest in the music of the New World. He “... regularly went to the Cine Odeon to enjoy the talent of Ernesto

¹⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “... *Porque então se costuma então incluir a sua obra na história da nossa música, praticamente à revelia do autor? Só porque nasceu no Brasil? [. . .] Sua música é sedutora, mas ao mesmo tempo, desenraizada. Falta-lhe a força da terra. [. . .] Só uma pergunta ainda: o que significa a obra de Oswald no contexto da cultura europeia? [. . .] Vem ainda em apoio ao nosso ponto de vista algumas considerações [do antropólogo] Darcy Ribeiro [em seu livro *Teoria do Brasil*, 1972, pp. 107, citado impropriamente aqui, no nosso entendimento], relativas à postura da classe dominante brasileira: ‘ . . . um extrato social e erudito . . . uma representação local alienada, de outra sociedade, cuja cultura procurava mimetizar. Oswald pertencia emocionalmente, não economicamente, a esta classe. Nepomuceno e outros representam uma reação a este estado de coisas... Na música dramática não foi feliz... Somos da opinião de que Oswald não foi uma personalidade criadora, ao rigor da palavra... [ele] necessita de determinadas premissas estéticas, criadas por outros. Em certo sentido, Oswald é um antípoda de Villa-Lobos... ”*

¹¹ The “*garfinho*” (Melo and Fiaminghi, 2024, pp. 9, footnote 2) or “the Brazilian syncopation” was first called “the characteristic syncopation” in circa 1929 by Andrade (1989).

Nazareth” (Perpétuo, 2015, pp. 35-45)¹² and chronicist Gastão Penalva gives a vivid account of Oswald interacting in the popular music scene of Rio de Janeiro. His lines about an encounter between the mature composer and the young *pianeiro*¹³ Ernesto Nazareth at the very beginning of the 20th century are revealing:

It was at the old Odeon Cinema. Nazareth was playing in the vast waiting room [...] One day, when I arrived, I saw an elderly gentleman standing by the piano, enraptured in contemplation of the artist. [...] The pianist [Nazareth] interrupted the performance and introduced me to the old man. It was Henrique Oswald, the fine composer of “Il neige”. He had already been there for an hour, delighting in the magic of [Nazareth’s] “Batuque”. We left together. Ernesto [Nazareth] had just given the Master [Oswald] his masterpiece as a gift. And Oswald said to me in his soft voice [...] “That young man is admirable. What music he makes! I myself would be incapable of interpreting it with that mastery, that prodigy of rhythm. And here I am, lost in my indifference...”¹⁴ (Penalva, c.1901, my translation and underlines).

Whether in manuscript form (c.1901) or the 1913 version published by Casa Arthur Napoleão, Nazareth’s gift to Oswald at *Cinema Odeon*, became one of the most popular of the early *choros*, reaching 49 sound recordings by 2017 (Dias, 2025). At home, he probably had time to explore his assumed “indifference” (which I read as lack of Brazilian swing) and “incapability of interpreting” that “prodigy of rhythm” by comparing Nazareth’s sounds of the “*Batuque*” [“Drumming”] he heard at Cinema Odeon with Nazareth’s notation in the music score. He probably was unaware of two performance practices¹⁵ of *choro*: the “*fator atrasado*” (“delay factor”) and the role of the *pandeiro* (the *choro* and *samba* tambourine) with its rich array of articulations in *choro* performance practices.¹⁶ A term coined by David P. Appleby, the “delay factor” refers to the natural irregularity and instability swing due to the choreography of certain Afro-Brazilian dances such as *choro* and *samba* (Cançado, 2000, pp. 6-7). A North American son of missionaries, born in Belo Horizonte, and a three-time Fulbright Fellow in Brazil, he gave an important clue

¹² Original quotation in Portuguese: “... [Henrique Oswald] *acorrria com regularidade ao Cine Odeon para se deleitar com o talento de Ernesto Nazareth.*”

¹³ *Pianeiros* were pianists of the emerging popular music scene in Brazil, especially in the genres *modinha*, *lundu*, *tango brasileiro* and *choro* (Rosa, 2014; Borém, 2015, pp. 439-443).

¹⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “... *Foi no antigo Cinema Odeon. Nazareth tocava na vasta sala de espera [...] Um dia, quando cheguei, avistei um senhor de idade, de pé junto ao piano, embevecido na contemplação do artista. [...] O pianista interrompeu a audição. Apresentou-me. Era Henrique Oswald. O fino compositor do “Il neige”. Já lá estava há uma hora a deleitar-se com o mágico do “Batuque”. Saímos juntos. Ernesto havia acabado de oferecer ao mestre a sua obra-prima. E Oswald a dizer-me com sua fala macia [...] “É admirável esse moço. Que música ele faz! Eu mesmo seria incapaz de interpretá-la com aquela mestria, aquele prodígio de ritmo. E eu aqui, perdido nesta [minha] indiferença...”*”

¹⁵ Performance practices are considered here ways to realize music according to a time period, region, culture and instrumentation. Although that are not usually notated in the music scores, I consider them the core of topics in both popular and concert music.

¹⁶ Giancesella, (2012, pp.189) says: “... if a work of this nature [*choro*] is performed outside of Brazil, there is a great risk that the percussion part will be played exactly as written, that is, just the basic rhythmic figure without any articulation that even remotely resembles the rhythm intended by the composer... among musicians from abroad [as well as musicians trained only in the concert music tradition], few percussionists would have an understanding of the timbral variations inherent in the interpretation of this rhythm on the Brazilian tambourine...”

about the distance between a concert-trained pianist like Oswald and Ernesto Nazareth's pianism:

... Without knowledge of these factors, when attempting to perform the works of Nazareth (a composer of tango [*brasileiro*] /choro), a pianist is unable to capture the characteristic quality of the music, which has been transmitted through oral tradition and escapes definition in the score. (David Appleby, 1983, pp. 80),¹⁷

The central role of *pandeiro* in *choros* dates back to its use by Pixinguinha, leader of the iconic ensemble *Os Oito Batutas* [The Eight Whizzes] and known for "...the inclusion of percussion instruments [...] in its formation and the pioneering tour to Paris (Sève, 2016, pp. 223, footnote 5) in 1922.¹⁸ The rich variety of *pandeiro* sounds is summarized by Ganesella (2012, pp. 195-196), departing from 12-timber articulation variables annotated by experts Carlos Stasi and Luis d'Anunciação. Accordingly, playing techniques based on the Afro-Brazilian musical heritage include the thumb, fingertips, and palm base of the hand to perform open and muted hits, rim-shots, slaps, or rolls on the membrane skin, rim, or jingles using the wood, leather, and metal parts of the instrument.

Both the music score Nazareth gave Oswald and his performance of "*Batuque*" at Cine Odeon seem to have made an impact on Oswald's perception of Brazilian music and his motivation to write "*Serrana*". A composer with a mind trained to develop the recurrence of cyclic motifs, he might have noticed Nazareth's thematic anacrusis, especially those giving the sense of syncopation as in m.1 and mm.30-31 (Figure 2). These motivic fragments, which I call **M¹**, **M²**, and **M⁵**, became structural motifs in Oswald's "*Serrana*". Both **M¹** and **M²** are off-beat fragments taken from the typical habanera bass *levada*¹⁹, a very common accompaniment in the early *choro*.

Figure 2 – Syncopated motifs **M¹**, **M²** and **M⁵** in "*Batuque*" by pianero Ernesto Nazareth and to be found in Oswald's "*Serrana*".

The image shows a musical score for "Batuque" by Ernesto Nazareth. The score is in 2/4 time and marked "Moderato". It features a piano introduction (INTROD.) and a main section starting at measure 1 (m.1). The score is annotated with three syncopated motifs: M¹ (a 16th-note pickup), M² (an 8th-note pickup), and M⁵ (a running 18th-note figure). The score also includes a dedication to H. Oswald and a publisher's stamp from Casa Pietro Mascagni.

Source: Nazareth (1913) published by with graphic intervention by the author.

¹⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: "... Sem o conhecimento desses fatores, ao tentar executar as obras de Nazareth (compositor de Tango/choro), um pianista fica incapacitado de capturar a qualidade característica da música, que tem sido transmitida pela tradição oral e escapa das definições na partitura."

¹⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "... pela inserção de instrumentos de percussão como o pandeiro, o ganzá e o reco-reco em sua formação e por uma pioneira turnê a Paris (em 1922)."

¹⁹ *Levadas* are basic grooves in Afro-Brazilian music, usually involving syncopations.

Probably, the most definite documental proof of Oswald's interest in the Brazilianess, epitomized by the 1922 Week of Modern Art, is his handwritten "footnotes" in the manuscript of "*Serrana*". Oswald's two annotated rhythm patterns (on the left of Figure 3), suggest that he was experimenting with the "*garfinho*". The sequenced pattern of tied "*garfinhos*" that he wrote at the bottom part of the manuscript suggests he was exercising the avoidance of not only beats 1 and 2 of the binary metrics 2/4, but also the avoidance of the strong parts of the beat (the halves of beats 1 and 2). At the turn of 19th century, more than three decades before "*Serrana*", Mário de Andrade had already documented in his "*Dicionário Musical Brasileiro*", based on published music, an alternate notation of 4 notes against 3 (on the right side of Figure 3; Caçado, 2000, pp. 9; after Andrade, c.1929, published in 1989) which, instead of polyphony, meant the realization of the swing's metric irregularity (or delay factor) of the emerging "*garfinhos*" that were present in *lundús*, *modinhas* and early *choros*.

Figure 3 – Oswald's handwritten sequence of tied Brazilian syncopations on a "footnote" on the manuscript of "*Serrana*" and the early notation for the swing present in the realization of the Brazilian syncopation (or "*garfinhos*").



Source: Oswald (1925) with graphic intervention by the author.
Andrade (c.1929, published in 1989).

2. Five cyclic motifs and the quasi-choro form of "*Serrana*"

Cyclical writing in European music of the 18th- and 19th-century was a very common German compositional technique that became popular in concert music primarily through the First Viennese School and their followers.²⁰ In a previous study about Oswald, I demonstrated how Oswald uses the economy of cyclic thematic materials in his "*Sonata Op. 21*" for cello and piano (Borém, 1996 and 1993). Thus, he imbues great unity not only to the sonata form of Movement 1, but also to the song form of Movement 2 and the sonata-rondo form of Movement 3. And he does it departing from only four basic motifs, which are presented in the first four measures of Movement 1. In "*Serrana*," we also observe cyclical writing,

²⁰ Henrique Oswald admired and met J. Brahms and F. Liszt, two Romantic German composers who excelled in cyclic motivic development (Borém, 1996).

but here Oswald is less adherent to the Viennese classicism model, as he progressively derives all the motifs from the work's first rhythmic germ: a simple 16th-note anacrusis linked to the following beat, creating syncopation. Furthermore, he distances himself from the formal model of Classicism by piling thematic material into a cumulative profusion of sounds to reach the two climaxes of the work (the *ff* in m.34 and m.66). The form can be described as rhapsodic, as it does not formally recapitulate the presentation of any section or the order of the motifs. Thus, he reaches a *A-B-C-Coda*. If Oswald had written the repetition of *Section A* between *Sections B* and *C* and after *Section C*, he would have achieved the standard form of *choro*, i.e., a ternary rondo with a repeating refrain.

“*Serrana*” is organized around the 2 accented off-beat rhythmic fragments occupying the first measure (Figure 4). I consider these one-note fragments as motifs which, on their own right, generate 3 other motifs to complete the 5 basic motifs of the work: first **M¹**, **M²**, **M³**, shown in Figure 4, and then **M⁴** and **M⁵**, shown in Figure 6 further down. **M¹** is a 16th-note anacrusis tied onto the second beat, which we can associate with the typical and unexpected gear cranking sound that puts a steam locomotive into motion. **M²** (m.1) is also an anacrusis, but the fact that it is comprised of a slower rhythm (not a 16th note, but an 8th note), it is more predictable and could be associated with to the so-called *repique*, i.e. the typical turnaround in *samba* phrasing played by the low drum called “*surdo*”, usually using one, two or three 8th-note off-beats (see m.18 in Figure 5 further down). **M³** is derived from **M¹** by its mere repetition, forming a descending three-16th-note figure that appears either (1) in a syncopated manner after a 16th-note rest on the first beat or (2) on the second beat. The combination of **M¹** and **M³** into the rhythmic oddity ²¹ pattern (1+3+3+1) constitutes the swinging driving force of the locomotive and happens almost from beginning to end (Figure 4). While **M¹** pervades “*Serrana*” completely, from m.1 till the end, the recurrence of **M³** is sometimes discontinued, but only in harmonic key turns: from D minor to F major at the beginning of *Section B* (mm.33-35); in *Section C* where the tonal center shifts from F major to E major (mm.55-66), then from E major to D flat major (mm.66-69); and at the *Coda* in F major (mm.86-89).

²¹ Rhythmic oddity, a term translated in Brazil as “*imparidade rítmica*” by Sandroni (2001), is an asymmetric organization of pulses perceived in African music (Arom, 1984, p57; Roeder, 2025, pp.17), and it has been amply illustrated in *choro* by Sève (2016, pp.228, 231-245), generating discernible patterns in 8 pulses (such as 3+3+2 and 3+5) and 16 pulses (such as 7+9 and 9+7).

Figure 4 –Motifs M^1 , M^2 and M^3 , their recurrences and harmony progression in the beginning of “Serrana”, by Oswald.

M³ (tresillo cell)

M² (repique: samba's turnaround)

M¹ (habanera syncopation: locomotive gear cranking)

M¹ + M³ = displaced tresillo (1+3+3+1) = locomotive swing

(locomotive whistle)

VIOLINO

VIOLONCELLO

PIANOFORTE

D minor: V_2/vii V_3^4 i_7 ----- i_5^6 ----- i_7^9 -----
 G_7/F A_7/E Dm_7 -----

Source: Oswald (1927) with graphic intervention by the author.

Figure 4 above also shows how Oswald begins “Serrana” with two dominant seventh chords: the secondary dominant of the subtonic C in third inversion (V_2/vii : F-G-B-D) and the dominant of the tonic D in second inversion (V_3^4 : E-A-C#-G) before concluding on a D with a C natural on the piano left hand. The tonic chord, however, is ambiguous (D minor or F major?), and its two possibilities could be more easily understood if analyzed with popular music chord notation: (1) the more obvious perception is the key of D minor, with the tonic bearing a seventh (i_7 : D-F-A-C) or (2) in the key of its relative major, F major, with an added sixth degree (iii_6 : F-A-C-D). Although Oswald’s harmony may point also to an influence of French impressionism, the emphasis on Brazilian syncopations in “Serrana” may also refer to the early jazz rhythms Pixinguinha heard from US bands during his stay in Paris in 1922 and brought them back to Brazil (Borém and Moreira, 2011).

In his analysis of Oswald’s “Trois Études” (1910) for piano, Marun (2019, pp. 7) observes Oswald’s use of dissonant and non-functional harmonies:

... the harmonic progressions and chords used in “Trois Études” are bold, following the trend of the late 19th century. The composer explores successions of augmented and diminished chords, often without the expected traditional resolution, prioritizing expressive dissonances, especially in the measures preceding the climax”.²²

In “Serrana”, Oswald becomes harmonically more adventurous. He uses several major chords with an added major seventh ($F7+$ in m.25, D_b7+ in mm.34, 62 and 67-68, B_b7+ in m.43 and 69, and $D7+$ in m.69) and augmented chords in non-functional progressions ($C5+$ in m.34, and D_b5+ in m.34 and m.50). A good

²² Original quotation in Portuguese: “... os encadeamentos e acordes utilizados nos *Trois Études* são arrojados, seguindo a tendência do final do século XIX. O compositor explora sucessões de acordes aumentados e diminutos, muitas vezes sem a esperada resolução tradicional, priorizando dissonâncias expressivas, principalmente nos compassos anteriores ao clímax.”

example of such dissonant progressions happens in m.30-36 (Figure 5). Again, Oswald could be flirting with harmonic advances of early 20th-century styles, such as polytonality, but this passage is much easier to understand if we use the rationale of popular music: with the bass line A–G–C, he gets back to the tonic of F major, but adding colors in the way. Instead of the traditional ii–V–I (G minor - C major - F major) progression, he employs the II degree (G major) with an added 6th (m.32) to which he adds a 7th (m.33). Then, the dominant degree C is extended as a pedal in the bass line (m.34-35). Over it, he uses two augmented chords in the row (m.34). In m.35, he uses a G half-diminished seventh chord, a Bb major chord, and to avoid the traditional dominant chord before resolving on the tonic, he uses a minor chord (Am7). Another trait that approximates Oswald of *choro* is the use of chord inversions generating *baixarias*, that is, bass lines in stepwise and chromatic motion (G-F#-F-E in mm.20-22, C-Db-D-Db-C-B in mm.49-54, and B-C-Db-C in mm.60-64), normally played by the Brazilian 7-string guitar in *choro* ensembles.

Figure 5 – Non-functional progression with augmented chords and a half-diminished chord over a C pedal in the transition between Section A and Section B of “Serrana”, by Oswald (mm.30-36).

m.30-31	m.32	m.33	m.34	m.35	m.36
A	G ₆	G ₆ ⁷	Am C ₅₊ ⁷ Db ₅₊	Gm [♭] Bb Am ₇	F
C					

Source: Musical example by the author.

M⁴ is a set of *cantabile* triplets derived from the 3-note set of 16th notes of M³. Oswald places it against squared figures to exploit 3-by-4 polyrhythms, which could be translated into irregular swing in its realization (m.18 and m.22 of Figure 6), which I perceive as an instability element akin to the unexpected rhythms of a steam locomotive. M⁵ is a combination of M¹ and M² into a “*garfinho*” (m.22 of Figure 6), arguably the most notable rhythmic figure in *samba* and *choro*. A very common recurrence of the Brazilian syncopation happens with sequences of this rhythmic figure tied with each other, as in Oswald’s handwritten footnote (see Figure 3 above) or those in the violin and piano parts in mm.54-58.

Figure 6 - Motifs **M⁴** and **M⁵** followed by some recurrences and transformations of the 5 motifs of "Serrana", by Oswald.

Source: Oswald (1927) with elaboration by the author.

The timeline with 89 measures in Figure 7 summarizes the rhapsodic A-B-C-Coda form of "Serrana", showing the main tonal centers (D minor, F major, E major, Db major, F major, and D minor), harmonic structures, dynamics, and recurrences plus continuity of the five cyclic motifs. In varying degrees, all motifs appear in all three main sections, which contributes to a sense of "chaotic" development. The anacrusic 16th note of **M¹** pervades the whole work. The anacrusic 8th note of **M²** (derived from **M¹**) recurs more punctually, but in m.55 of Section B, it is largely developed. The *tresillo* cell of **M³** pervades the whole Section A and half of Section B. There is an increasing use of the *cantabile* triplets of **M⁴** throughout Sections A, B, and C. The same happens with **M⁵**. The Coda is constructed with only **M¹** and **M⁵**. Figure 7 also shows that there is an intensification in the interaction among the motifs at the beginning of Section B, and in the intersection between Section B and Section C, which becomes more prominent with the highest increases in dynamics (the *ff* in m.34 and m.66). The few tempo changes also mark the beginning of formal structures: *allar. a Tempo* in Section A (mm.34-36) and a *rall. Lento* before the Coda (mm.83-86).

Figure 7 – The A-B-C-Coda rhapsodic form of "Serrana", by Oswald, with the recurrences of its 5 motifs (**M¹**, **M²**, **M³**, **M⁴**, and **M⁵**) along with main tempo changes, dynamics and tonal centers.

Section	Measures	Tempo	Dynamics	Tonal Centers
A	m.1-33	Molto moderato	f, fp	Dm: i7 (m.2)
B	m.34-69	allar. a Tº	ff, fp	F: I (m.36)
C	m.70-85	rall. Lento	f, ff, mf dim. p, p, pp	E: V7 (m.54), Db: I6 (m.66), F: I (m.74), Dm: i7 (m.77)
Coda	m.86-89			

Source: Musical example by the author.

3. Oswald's Brazilianess exposed in an arrangement of "Serrana" for double bass and piano

The musicological and analytical data presented above make *choro* the closest musical genre to which "Serrana" could be associated. However, the only available recordings of the work in the original trio instrumentation and an arrangement for trio of clarinet, cello and piano are very distant from this genre. The reasons for that are related to (1) performances at very slow tempos, (2) violin (or clarinet) and cello long phrases with only *legato* and *detaché* bowings (3), throughout use of sustain piano pedal in all of these recordings. I believe these performance practices helped placing "Serrana" in an unfair ostracism.

On YouTube, there are only 6 recordings of the work (5 videos and 1 audio) recorded between 2001 and 2023. Of these, 3 have the original violin-cello-piano instrumentation and 3 are arrangements: one for clarinet, cello and piano, and 2 recordings of my arrangement for duet for double bass and piano with pianists from Brazil and the USA.²³

Knowing that Oswald notated little tempo changes in the music score (only a *poco rit.* in m.24, a *molto allarg.* during mm.34-35, and a *rall.* in m.83), we could calculate the average tempo (Kolin, 2020, pp.152) of each of the 6 recordings available. To do that, we first found the liquid performance times in seconds (Figure 8). For example, [3:35] means 3 minutes and 35 seconds and equals 215 seconds. We then multiplied these values by 60 seconds (the reference for bpm, that is, 1 minute) and then divided the results by 178 (the number of beats in the 89 measures of "Serrana" 's 2/4 metrics). Considering that most sources list *Moderato* tempos within the 81-90 bpm range, the *Molto Moderato* that Oswald suggests would be somewhere within the metronomic marks of the *Andante*, that is, from 68 to 80 bpm. Thus, the interpretive approach within the concert-music viewpoint (recordings 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Figure 8) favored preferred slower tempos, within the *Largo* or *Larghetto* metronomic marks (from 40 to 50 bpm). This could be related to technical challenges of the piano part if faster tempos were used, especially in Lisztian passages with 4-, 5-, or 6-layer textures just in the piano (see Figure 10 further down). With the genre *choro* in mind, I decided to use *Andante* tempos: 67 bpm in recording 5 and 74 bpm in recording 6 of Figure 8. These faster tempos, associated with changes of articulation, well-established grooves, and syncopated melodic syncopations, bring "Serrana" closer to *choro* and its lively atmosphere.

²³ There are some discrepancies of notes in the recordings of "Serrana", probably due to harmony interpretation on the part of the performers. In m.24 of the violin part, Oswald wrote two B naturals. However, both Vinecka and Kanji play both as two B flats in [0:57-0:58] of the 2001 recording and [0:56-0:57] of the 2018 recording, respectively, and Amato plays first the correct B natural, but then plays a B flat in [1:04-1:05] of the 2015 video recording.

Figure 8 – Performance times of available recordings of “Serrana”, by Oswald, with tempos varying from quartet note = 46 to quartet note = 74.

Recordings *	Year of recording	Liquid time of performance	m.m. (metronomic marks)	
1-Vinecka, Guerra Vicente and Gushikem	2001	[5:51] = 215 sec	46	Largo or Larghetto
2- Kanji, Pittenger and Miranda	2018	[3:41] = 231sec	48	
3- Menezes, Orru and Evsina	2023	[3:40] = 221sec	49	
4 - Amado, Santoro and Augusto	2015	[3:35] = 220 sec	50	
5 - Borém and Megaro	2023	[2:39] = 159 sec	67	Andante
6 – Borém and Marzan	2023	[2:24] = 144 sec	74	

Source: Table by the author.

(* Please see complete references and links of recordings at the end of the article).

Monteiro (2011, pp. 332) observes that “... the superposition of the different rhythms in the three instruments [in “Serrana”] is sometimes a little busy, and requires great attention on the part of its performers to preserve clarity.”²⁴ This perception becomes more dramatic when we see the rhapsodic manner with which Oswald piles all 5 motifs (Figure 9) without recapitulating their order, transformations, or combinations in the fashion of traditional musical forms Oswald was used to, such as in sonata, sonata-rondo, variations, ABA, fugue etc. Compositionally speaking, this accumulation of motivic textures prepares the two *ff* climaxes that coincide with m.34 and m.66 (see Figure 7 above). On the arrangement for double bass and piano, the basic groove (the rhythmic oddity 1+3+3+1) is sometimes varied in the piano left hand, such as the traditional *tresillo* (3+3+2) in m.10, a variation (4+3+1) of it in m.15, the exquisite (15+1) in the 16 pulsations of mm.7-8, or in a combination that suggests a mixture of the *tresillo* cell with the Brazilian syncopation (1+4+2+1) in m.77. This great rhythmic variety contributes here and there in “Serrana” for a sense of variety or chaos that is typical in the improvised nature of *choro*.

²⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “... a superposição dos diversos ritmos nos três instrumentos [em “Serrana”] é por vezes um pouco carregada, e requer uma grande atenção por parte de seus executantes a fim de que se preserve a clareza.”

Figure 9 – Articulation changes in the arrangement of “Serrana” to approximate Oswald’s writing style to the performance practices of *choro*.

Source: Musical example by the author.

Not only the superposition of motifs, but also the simultaneity of voices, sometimes 4, 5, or 6, such as in mm.54-56 (Figure 10), makes it difficult for performers to resolve it acoustically, and for the public to clearly navigate their listening in the perception of the work. If this can be a compositional problem in a trio formation, let alone in a duet scenario such as this arrangement. Thus, the instrumentation reduction to a duet preserved central elements of the discourse using only 3 layers. It involved the exclusion of doubling notes with no melodic content, articulation changes to avoid the *legato* textural thickening, and octave displacement of voices to avoid register clashes due to the transposing nature of the double bass.

Figure 10 – Reduction of texture (4, 5, and 6 voices) from the original instrumentation of the piano trio “Serrana”, by Oswald, to the arrangement for double bass and piano (3 voices).

Source: Musical example by the author.

Figure 11 shows compositional procedures to provide some relief to the 5- and 6-layer textures of continuous *legato* or *marcato* articulations in the arrangement. In m.33, the violin and cello *habanera* rhythm is kept in the arrangement, but their solid articulation is altered. In the downbeat, a dotted 8th note is substituted by a *staccato* 16th note in *pizzicato* on the double bass, followed by a 16th-note rest. Then, to emphasize the syncopation, a *marcato* C#-D appoggiatura is played in Bartok *pizz.* In order to add variety, the final note of m.33 received a *staccato* accent. The series of 6 *marcato*s in all 3 instruments of the original in m.34-35, which accumulates the sound like a symphonic *tutti*, is changed to provide a synchronized alternation between *marcato* and *staccato* in both double bass and piano. Finally, in m.36, a similar procedure to m.33 is employed: *legato* becomes *staccato* in the piano, and a *marcato* on the A³ note in the piano arpeggiation receives a *marcato* to interpolate its 8 pulses into a 1+7 rhythmic oddity. Although it may defy Sandroni's stable "Paradigm of Estácio", Ferraz (2025) has taken it a step further by historically showing examples of more unpredictability in early samba, and thus more variety, of rhythmic oddities in Brazilian music: "This arsenal of formulas is maintained by its circulation, which occurs through such informal practices (in backyards, stalls, etc.) and institutionalized ones (samba schools) ...".²⁵

Figure 11 – Change of articulations, including *staccato* in the only-*legato* or only-*marcato* notation in the original of "Serrana" to provide the arrangement with the (3+3+2) and (1+7) rhythmic oddities.

The musical score for Figure 11 illustrates the changes in articulation and rhythm for the Double Bass (Db.) and Piano (Pno.) parts across three measures: m. 33, m. 34, and m. 36. The score is annotated with various articulation markings and rhythmic oddities.

- Measure 33:** The Double Bass part features a *hammer on*, *pizz. regular*, and *pizz. Bartok* marking. The Piano part features *arco*, *gliss.*, and *pp* markings. The rhythmic oddity (3 + 3 + 2) is indicated below the measure.
- Measure 34:** The Double Bass part features *arco*, *gliss.*, and *pp* markings. The Piano part features *arco*, *gliss.*, and *pp* markings. The rhythmic oddity (3 + 3 + 2) is indicated below the measure.
- Measure 36:** The Double Bass part features *arco*, *gliss.*, and *pp* markings. The Piano part features *arco*, *gliss.*, and *pp* markings. The rhythmic oddity (1 + 7) is indicated below the measure.

Source: Musical example by the author.

²⁵ Original text in Portuguese by Ferraz (2025): "Esse arsenal de fórmulas é mantido por sua circulação, o que ocorre por meio de tais práticas informais (nos quintais, tendinhas etc.) e institucionalizadas (escolas de samba) ...".

Figure 12 shows a passage in the arrangement (mm.66-68) with the insistent repetition of M^5 (the “*garfinho*”) and M^2 (the “*samba repique*”) in which the changes in articulation, namely the substitution of continuous *legato* and continuous *marcato* provides a dialogue between the double bass and the piano, alternating *staccato* (in green) and *marcato* (in red) accents.

Figure 12 - Substitution of continuous *marcato* and *legato* in the arrangement of “*Serrana*”, by H. Oswald to include the *staccato* articulation and create a rhythmic dialogue between the double bass and the piano.

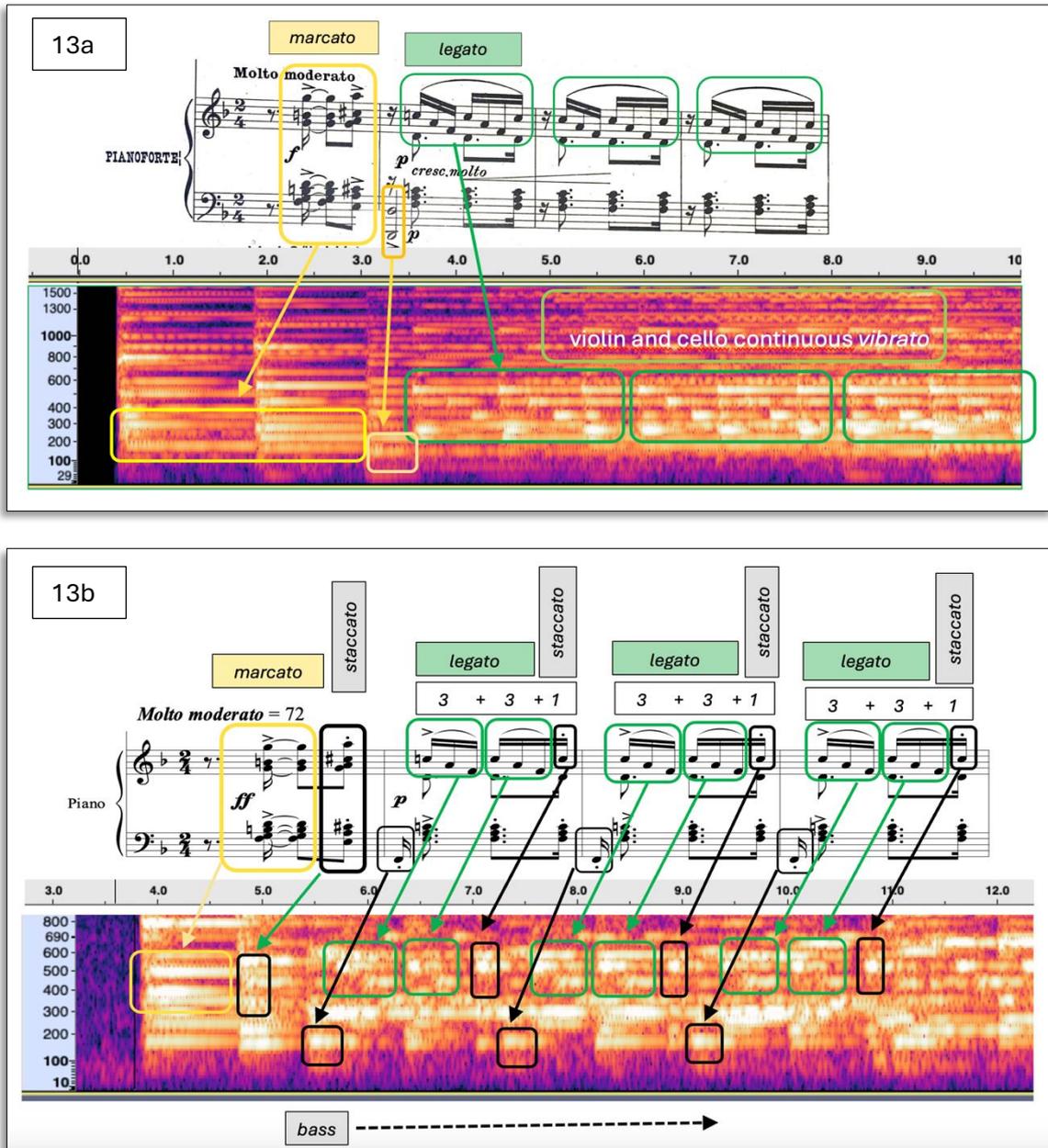
Source: Musical example by the author.

4. A spectrographic view of Oswald’s hidden “Brazilianess”

The hidden “Brazilianess” of Oswald in “*Serrana*” can be appreciated in the following comparative study of 3 sound spectrograms between 2 recordings: (1) the original violin-cello-piano instrumentation, a very Romantic approach which bears the slowest tempo (Vinecka, Guerra Vicente, Gushikem, and Oswald, 2001) and (2) the double bass-piano arrangement, which has *choro*-like articulations and the fastest tempo (Borém, Marzan, and Oswald, 2023b).

In Figure 13a, we see no spaces between the sound envelopes of all notes in mm.1-4 of the 2001 recording due to the *marcato* with no separation between sounds (m.1), throughout *legato* articulation (m.2-4), and use of the Romantic sustain pedal in the piano. It also shows the performance practice of the traditional continuous *vibrato* within a typical *crescendo* of concert music in the violin and cello. Figure 13b, in contrast, shows *choro*-like articulations in the arrangement, allowing for dark small areas of sound relief. The *marcato* followed by a *staccato* in the initial piano chords and the short *legato* phrasing of 3 notes plus 2 *staccatos* generating the (1+3+3+1) rhythmic oddity also adds the rhythmic variety and unpredictability typical of *choro*.

Figure 13a and 13b – Sound spectrograms of mm.1-4 from the 2001 and 2023b recordings of “Serrana”, by Oswald, reflecting concert music (*marcato + legato*) versus popular music (*marcato + legato + staccato*) performance practices.

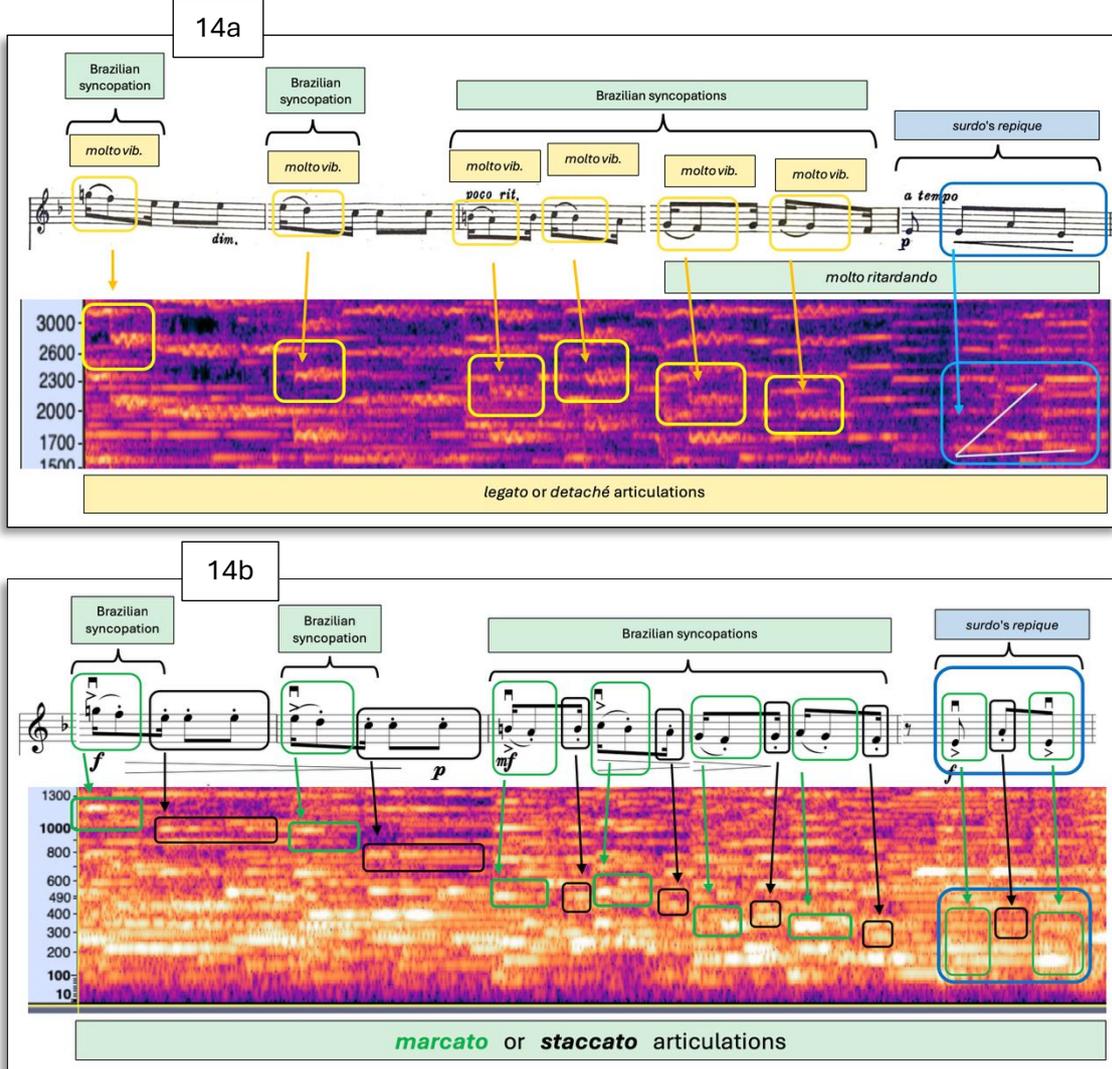


Source: Musical example by the author.

Figure 14 shows two instances of hidden Brazilianess in Oswald’s writing, namely a sequence of 5 Brazilian syncopations (16th note + 8th note + 16th note) in a descending phrase (mm.22-25) to reach the *surdo’s repique* (m.26), which are played very differently in the 2001 and 2023b recordings. Figure 14a shows the realization of these popular music topics within a very Romantic style in the violin: *legato* phrases throughout with *detaché* bowings, intense *vibratos* in the central notes (the 8th notes) of the Brazilian syncopations, and a *crescendo* in the *surdo’s repique* motif. Conversely, Figure 14b shows the double bass alternating the tied

beginning of the Brazilian syncopations (16th + 8th notes in *marcato*, all marked with down bows) with all the other notes with *staccatos*. Also, in accord with the *choro* genre, the *surdo's repique* has down-bow *marcato* accents in the off-beat 8th notes and *staccato* on the second beat of the measure.

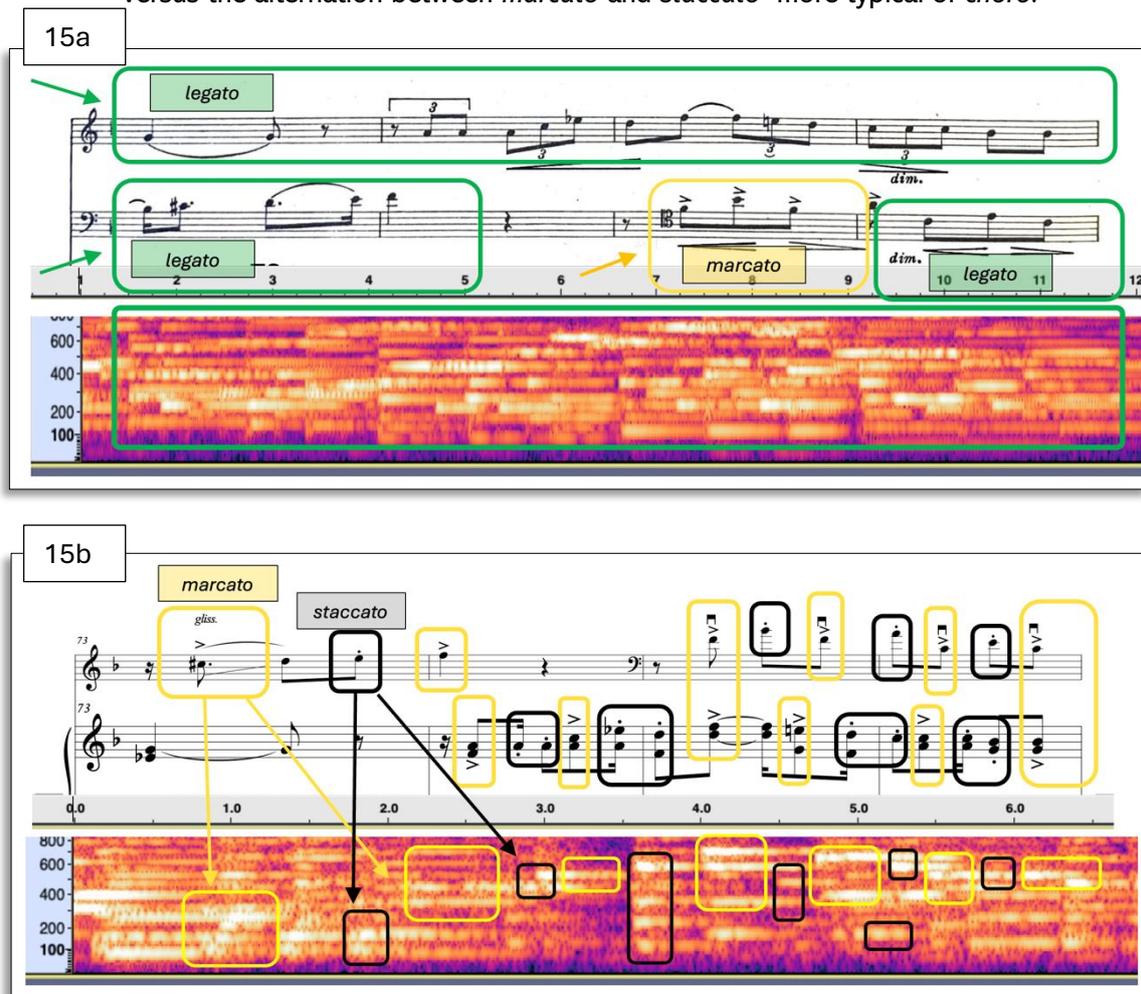
Figure 14a and 14b – Sound spectrograms of Brazilian syncopations and *surdo's repique* (mm.22-26) from the 2001 and 2023b recordings of “Serrana”, by Oswald, reflecting concert music (*molto vibrato* + *legato* or *detaché*) versus popular music (down-bow *marcato* + *staccato*).



Source: Musical example by the author.

In Figure 15a, the mostly *legato* articulation in both violin and cello (and piano, not shown in the music score) of the 2001 recording prevents their polyphony to acoustically come across. In the other hand, the alternation between *staccato* and *marcato* followed by little spaces in the double bass and piano in the 2023b recording helps the listener to grasp more out of the thick texture of Oswald’s original (Figure 15b).

Figure 15a and 15b – Sound spectrograms of Oswald’s thick polyphony (mm.73-76) from the 2001 and 2023b recordings of “Serrana”, showing the Romantic realization (mainly *legato*) versus the alternation between *marcato* and *staccato* more typical of *choro*.



Source: Musical example by the author.

5. “Serrana” as a possible prototype to “O Trenzinho do Caipira”

Villa-Lobos wrote “Trenzinho do Caipira” (“The Little Train of the Brazilian Countryman”), also named *Toccata*, as the Fourth Movement of his “*Bachianas Brasileiras N.2*”, five years after Oswald wrote “Serrana”. Villa-Lobos’ connection with trains can be traced back to the affectionate nickname “*Tuhu*” he received as a young child, possibly for “... his manner of imitating the sound made by a steam locomotive whistle...” (Salles and Arcanjo, 2022, pp. 19)²⁶ Both Villa-Lobos and Oswald were probably present to hear the premiere of their works by the *Trio Barrozo-Milano-Pádua* on the night of the 30th of November, 1925 (see Figure 1 above and respective text). Thus, echoes of “Serrana” ringing in Villa-Lobos’ ears five years later is not a far-fetched idea. At the beginning of the work, he exploits many programmatic aspects of his “little train”, such as the gradual acceleration and

²⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “... sua mania [de Villa-Lobos] de imitar o som produzido pelo apito de um trem.”

crescendo sounds of a steam locomotive, complete with a variety of “chaotic” rhythms and “noises”²⁷.

Towards the end, like Oswald, he resorts to a gradual deceleration and *diminuendo* up to a *pp*. However, he finishes it differently. In the Coda (mm.86-89), Oswald brings “Serrana” to a tranquil close by slowing the tempo (from *Molto moderato* to *Lento*) and diminishing the intensity (from *p* to *pp*). Compositionally, he makes it very compact by focusing only on the motif of the Brazilian syncopation (**M⁵**), which is framed by two short notes of **M¹**. In “Trenzinho do Caipira”, Villa-Lobos (1930, pp. 53-86) does a similar ending, except that the *pp* atmosphere of the locomotive slowly arriving at the train station is suddenly interrupted by a sudden *ff* chord, depicting the blast of the final mechanical clank of the brakes (see last excerpt in Figure 13 above). Motivically, however, there is a striking resemblance between the two works as motifs **M¹**, **M²**, **M³**, **M⁴**, and **M⁵** can be found in both works (Figure 16).

Figure 16 – Motifs **M¹**, **M²**, **M³**, **M⁴**, and **M⁵** in Villa-Lobos’ “Trenzinho do Caipira” [“Little Train of the Countryside Man”] (used previously by Oswald in “Serrana”) and contrasting ending in *ff*.

Source: Musical example by the author.

In my arrangement, I resorted to Villa-Lobos’ idea of an uplifting ending and a more idiomatic string writing. Figure 17 shows a tempo change - from *Lento* (*ma a tempo*) to *Vivo* after a fermata, and a *crescendo* that leads to *ff* double-stop chords at the end. Timbral and articulation effects were added to the medium and high registers of the double bass (two percussive downbows, *col legno*, *glissando*, and *ordinario*). In the piano part, **M¹** is repeated two times, and **M⁵** (with its 1+2+1 rhythmic oddity) is fragmented with the addition of *staccato*-versus-*marcato* accents, thus staying away from the continuous *legato* articulation, which is not typical of *choro*.

²⁷ Sales and Arcanjo (2022, pp. 67) describe it as “... the sound of a train cutting through the mountains of Minas Gerais and other inland areas of Brazil [...] the sound of the train with the characteristic “noises” of the playing mechanism of baroque keyboard instruments exploited in the Toccata genre.” Original quotation in Portuguese: “... a sonoridade de um trem de ferro cortando as montanhas de Minas e de outros interiores do Brasil [...] a sonoridade do trem com os “ruidos” característicos do mecanismo de execução dos instrumentos de tecla barroco explorados no gênero Toccata.”

Figure 17 – Change of mood in the Coda of the arrangement of “Serrana” for double bass and piano: *pp* to *ff*, alternation between *marcato* and *staccato*, and idiomatic effects on the double bass.

Source: Musical example by the author.

Final Remarks

With this study about “Serrana” (1925), I hope to challenge the one-century-old musicological consensus about Henrique Oswald’s refusal to write any true Brazilian piece of music, a viewpoint largely constructed after Mário de Andrade’s very harsh words in 1934 (perceived by Oswald’s son Carlos as a fascist ideological patrol) and their reverberation more than four decades later in Bruno Kiefer’s accusations in his cyclopedic book of 1976. I argue that the already septuagenarian Oswald did try to take a step beyond his established compositional style, especially after his brief relationship with Ernesto Nazareth, and the chamber-music commission with an explicit nationalist inclination by the Barrozo-Milano-Padua Trio. I also argue that Oswald probably “failed” to communicate his Brazilianess in “Serrana” due to excessive contrapuntal textures, the composer’s limitations in notating music performance practices derived from Brazilian popular genres, especially the articulation of syncopated rhythms from *choro*, and the lack of variety provided by the alternation between *marcato*, legato and, specially, *staccato*.

In the section “Uma Frustração” [“A frustration”] from the documentary about Brazilian pianist Nelson Freire (Salles, 2003, [1:11:39 - 1:12:45]), a touching scene

may explain Oswald's dilemma with the fierce nationalists of the 1922 Week of Modern Art. Looking at a TV set showing a jazz concert, Freire says:

"Look, I'm so jealous of people who can play jazz, it's incredible... You know what I'd love? Suddenly, to show up like this and... improvise and play... I'm fascinated by Erroll Garner... I've never seen anyone play with such pleasure, you know... Such pleasure... joy, joy of playing!"²⁸

Shy, humble, or impotent, Oswald recognized that "... I myself would be incapable of interpreting it [those rhythms] with that mastery ... here I am, lost in this indifference ...". If Oswald resisted the cooptation tried by Andrade and his followers, he quietly went to Cine Odeon to hear Ernesto Nazareth. There, Oswald admired the young but already famous *pianeiro* play "*Batuque*", the music score of which he received of as a gift with a dedication. Later published in 1913, it became not only a model for Oswald but also one of Nazareth's most recognized *choros*. With no better sources of Brazilian popular music, the flame sparked by Nazareth seemed to be decisive for Oswald to try syncopated rhythms on his own. The commission for a Brazilian chamber piece bearing "characteristic rhythms and beautiful popular songs" by the Barrozo-Milano-Padua Trio prompted Oswald to resort to his German-inspired skills to compose with real Brazilian cyclic motifs: two rhythmic fragments of *choro* derived from the habanera groove ($M_1 + M_2$), the basic *tresillo* cell (M_3), the so-called "*garfinhos*" (M_5 , also called Brazilian syncopation) and, maybe, triplets in friction with groups of 16th notes (M_4), an allusion to the early notation of the "*fator atrasado*" (the "delay factor") that equates to the Brazilian swing in *choro*.

I raised possible reasons for the relative ostracism that the "*Serrana*" has been experiencing for almost a century: (1) the difficulty of performers to understand Oswald's hybrid compositional style, heavily combining elements of both *choro* and German counterpoint/motivic development, (2) several rhythmic oddities played in *legato* fashion, (3) several kinds of syncopation played with no swing, (4) the confusing quasi-rondo *choro* A-B-C form, (5) the rhapsodic and cyclic accumulation of motifs (which some may perceive as improvisational or even "chaotic"), (6) "*baixarias*" with no variety in articulation generated by inversion of chords and chromaticism typical of the 7-string guitar, (7) inadequate notation to express popular music's variety of articulations, and (8) the historical tendency in the 21st century of performers to choose slow tempos that make its realization more Romantic and less energetic and swinging.

Still a speculative point, there may be a connection between Oswald's work and another programmatic piece of music portraying the Brazilian culture of steam locomotives, written 5 years after "*Serrana*": "*Trenzinho do Caipira*", by Villa-Lobos. Villa-Lobos probably met Oswald in the nationalist recital on the night of the 30th

²⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "*Olha, eu tenho uma inveja de quem sabe tocar jazz, incrível... Sabe uma coisa que eu adoraria? De repente, chegar assim e... improvisar e tocar... eu tenho fascinação pelo Erroll Garner... Eu nunca vi ninguém tocar com tanto prazer, sabe... Um prazer assim... alegria, alegria de tocar!*"

of November 1925 and heard the premiere of “*Serrana*”, played before his “*O Canto do Cisne Negro*” [“The Black Swan’s Chant”] (1917). Moreover, I showed that all four syncopated motifs used by both Oswald and Nazareth (**M₁**, **M₂**, **M₃**, and **M₅**), plus *cantabile* triplets (**M₄**) of Oswald, were also used by Villa-Lobos in “*Trenzinho do Caipira*”.

In the process of arranging “*Serrana*” for double bass and piano, I considered the articulation variety of *choro* as a central procedure. Thus, I proposed changing Oswald’s pervasive homogeneity of long *legato* phrasings to include the alternation and balance among three basic articulations: *legato*, *marcato*, and *staccato*. Moreover, the attention to double bass performance practices, such as firm jazz *pizzicato*, *slap* (Bartók *pizzicato*), *col legno*, *glissando*, and left-hand mute, allowed enlarging the variety of tone colors and articulations. Reducing the instrumentation from three to only two instruments also helped in the process of alleviating the thick textures through the omission of repeated notes in the harmony. I hope this arrangement of “*Serrana*” contributes to the perception of Oswald’s hidden Brazilianess and helps bring the work to center stage.

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