

A black and white photograph of a man with glasses playing a piano. A cat is sitting on the piano in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background is a wall with a grid pattern.

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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# An Interview with Marlos Nobre

TOM MOORE

December 28, 2002, Laranjeiras, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Marlos Nobre is probably the most well-known of living Brazilian composers, with an extensive oeuvre that is performed and recorded world-wide. We spoke at his residence in Rio de Janeiro in December of 2002.

MOORE: Could you tell us about your years in Recife -- the musical culture there, the musical environment in your family?

NOBRE: I always say that I was very lucky to have been born in Recife at that time. I was born in 1939, on R. S. Joao, in the center of Recife. On the left side of the street was the gasometro. It was a dead-end street that opened out to a plaza where you found all the various carnival groups -- they had to pass by in order to be reviewed -- a sort of "sambodromo," except of course that it wasn't samba -- you had frevo, maracatu, the caboclinhos -- the various clubs. And when I was a child of four or five this made a very strong impression -- I didn't just listen, but I was there in the crowd, dancing frevo, maracatu -- I was drenched with the rhythm. It wasn't like Bartok or Villa-Lobos had to do, who had to travel to collect and record, and then pass the material through an intellectual process of re-shaping and elaboration to form his style. In my case this music was not folklore -- they were simply popular phenomena which I absorbed. I always had a great inclination toward music -- my mother was a pianist, my female cousins, all of them, were piano teachers, the best in Recife, my father was a guitarist -- not a professional, but amateur. I began to study piano at four years old with my cousin, and started at the Conservatory of Pernambuco at seven, eight years old -- a training which was very traditional -- the great classics, Bach, Beethoven -- a complete course of piano and music theory. Now what is interesting here is that at the conservatory and at home I used to improvise a lot. No one ever told me to improvise, but I would improvise for hours and hours, and often I would improvise based on what I was hearing in the street. It happened that I played one of the frevos that I wrote, and the director of the conservatory, who had been educated in the traditional manner, Manoel Augusto dos Santos, came by -- he was mestiço, but considered himself a European -- and had me sent to his office, and said "I heard you playing street music. This is forbidden here in the conservatory". It was a big shock -- how could it be forbidden to play music that I had heard here, in my city. This was something that I could only resolve when I got to know the music of Villa-Lobos. And then later I said

to him "And what about Villa-Lobos?" He was at a loss for words. But at the time I was too young to have anything to say -- it was only later that I could rebel against the way music was taught in Brazil at the time. This was in 1942, when it was a major crime to play street music. There was a great cultural ferment in Recife. I came into contact with Ariano Suassuna, sociologist, writer, who uses the traditions of the Northeast in his plays -- what is called "armorial" -- and with the great traditions of literature -- José Lins do Rego, Mario de Andrade and his essay on Brazilian music. At that time my great concern was "universal music, or national music"? I read something very lyrical by Garcia Marques saying that the writer only becomes universal when he describes his own backyard, his own garden. So I thought "it's not interesting to imitate music from outside when there is this great musical force right here." I discovered early on that I wouldn't be able to follow an academic path, and for a long time in Recife I met with a group of young people at the house of a violist from the orchestra, Inácio Cabral de Lima, who was simply crazy about modern music. Every Thursday afternoon we met -- myself, the son of a German, named Werner, who only liked modern music, and at Inácio's house we listened to music from Stravinsky on up. Inácio detested classical and romantic music -- it made him ill, even when he was playing in orchestras. We listened to Hindemith, Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev, Bartok. At the time he was corresponding with Stockhausen, with Messiaen -- we heard the *Gesang der Jünglinge* one or two years after he wrote it -- he sent the recording to Inácio on tape, and we listened, it knocked me out -- an entirely new world. I began to feel that there was nothing that I could do with the tradition -- it had been important for learning technique, I had worked hard on counterpoint with Padre Jaime Diniz, a great teacher, a priest who had done his musical study in Rome, and gave me a very strong grounding in counterpoint, with fugues in five, six, seven voices.

MOORE: This was at the Conservatory?

NOBRE: Yes, at the Conservatory, and in private lessons, since there was not enough time at the conservatory. I would go to his house, and he taught me for free, since he thought that I had talent. He had me write masses, in the style of Palestrina, for practice, and he had a chorus at the church in Casa Forte [a neighborhood in Recife], which sang my masses, and invited me to come listen -- I was there down below, and the chorus up above -- wonderful!

I had these two kinds of training -- the traditional education, and an exposure to the most modern music imaginable. When I came to Rio, I met Hans-Joachim Koellreutter in Teresopolis. He first gave me a test, and was surprised to find that I was aware of things which he was not. He said "What planet are you from?" and I said "I'm from Recife. You don't know the *Gesang der Jünglinge*? If you like I have a tape I can give you." I knew the most recent things by Messiaen, because Messiaen had sent a tape to Inácio. We had already been working on twelve-tone technique in Recife. This was in 1960. Recife had been a sort of traveling university -- the sort of experience I could have had nowhere else in Brazil. In Rio, when I came in 1961 I was in contact with Paulo Silva to study harmony, and he had me write some things. He said "there is no way you are going to the Escola de Musica, because if you do, you will atrophy. You know things that none of the professors there do." At the time I wrote a trio for piano, violin and violoncello, which won first prize at Radio MEC. It was a scandal, because I won first prize, and the person who won second prize was a very well-known composer, Guerra-Peixe. The jury was Camargo Guarnieri, Radamés Gnattali, Francisco Mignone. I was twenty years old, and as you know the piano trio is not a difficult form to master. Even today this is a work which is frequently played and recorded. The trio had two things which I had already worked on: it begins with a twelve-tone serial theme, and then it begins to mix in very characteristically Brazilian rhythms, but not that clichéd Brazil, those clichés which I detested -- [sings a *baião* rhythm]...

MOORE: *Baião*.

NOBRE: Yes. That was Brazilian. My rhythm was something which you couldn't classify, but it was very Brazilian, coming from my connection with the music in the street -- *maracatu*, polyphony, polyrhythm. Of course, I was crazy about *Rite of Spring*, *Petrushka*, when I was 12. I used to listen to them religiously, every day. So when I was 20, I knew that all by heart. That is what surprised Koellreutter. But I had been studying them for eight years. That is the training which gave me something that many composers at the time did not have. I tell my students "you want to go directly to new music without working on this fundamental basis. You can't fall into the academic trap, but seek out the things which are vital." This is what I got from Recife.

MOORE: How did scores and recordings of new music get to Recife? It seems like it still is difficult to get scores from outside Brazil. There was a well-established music publishing industry in Recife, but were there imported scores available?

NOBRE: This is a good question. Recife had a department of cultural matters at the city level -- named DAC [departamento de assuntos culturais]. The mayor at the time was a leftist with a very high level of culture. He allotted a special fund for importing records. The record collection of the public library in Recife had everything that was available for you to listen to. You registered, and they had six booths. You chose your record, and they played it for you at the booth. The mayor would go to Europe, and arrange for the imports. They had everything by Stravinsky which had been recorded at the time. They had Hindemith, Roussel, Debussy, Ravel -- the concertos, including the one for the left hand. I was amazed listening to these recordings, which were brand-new. This was in 1949, 1950, 1951. This was complemented by the things that Inácio Cabral managed to get. He went religiously to Europe once a year, and all he brought back in his luggage was records. That was it. Just records of modern music. And he also got things by mail from the composers with whom he corresponded. Scores were more difficult. Even so, at the city library there were some things. The conservatory had the normal repertory. It was Inácio Cabral, for example, who bought *Petrushka*. He had the score at his house, and I would go there to study it. He wouldn't let you borrow it. Hindemith sent a lot of things to him, *Ludus Tonalis*, for example, which he inscribed personally "For Mr. Cabral, cordially, Hindemith." There was no such thing as Xerox at the time. I went there to study the score, and would copy it out. Intuitively I learned through copying. I copied part of the score for *Rite of Spring*, for example. There were scores for almost all of the classics at the school of music, but it was Inácio who had scores for Ravel, Debussy, Prokofiev. But by and large, what there were recordings, so my training was predominantly mental -- I would imagine the scores in my mind.

MOORE: I am intrigued by these cousins who were all piano teachers. In Rio at the beginning of the 20th century, the vast majority of piano teachers were women. Was this the case in Recife in the forties? Where did they study?

NOBRE: My cousins were Nisia and Hilda Nobre. I have a very large family -- my uncle Cesáreo had 13 children, among them two girls, Hilda and Nisia, who had a lot of talent for the piano. Hilda studied, came to Rio, studied with Thomaz Teran, who was a very important teacher at the time, and she went to Europe, to study in the Conservatory in Paris. When she came back to Recife, I was already studying with her sister, Nisia, who was a more limited teacher, someone for beginning students.



My family had 11 children, a family of the middle-to-upper bourgeoisie, and so we had a piano, guitar, my father would go to concerts, my mother played piano... families like this in Recife, from the middle or upper classes, had a piano present in the living room. My sister was started on the piano, and not me, because men didn't study piano. My sister was one year older than I, she was six, I was five, but I was fascinated by the piano. My sister didn't like it, and quit, and my aunt Nisia said to my mother, "Look, Marlos is very interested in the piano," and my mother said "Well, then, give him lessons," so suddenly I was studying piano. When Hilda arrived from Europe, I started studying with her. At six years old I was already writing pieces -- I played recitals -- little easy pieces, and I was writing Granny's Waltz, Papa's Waltz, Mama's Waltz, a mazurka. I had quite a collection of pieces that I had written at six, seven years old. I wrote them all down.

MOORE: Do you still have them?

NOBRE: No, I got rid of them. My mother had them, she kept them -- she passed away, but she had them there in Recife. I didn't want to think about that stuff... I wrote the Rio Capibaribe, describing the river -- all sorts of pieces like that. I played them, mazurkas, imitating Chopin -- it was all that kind of thing that I was writing at the time. Lots of variations on popular themes. All these things I wrote before I was 19 I was going to throw out, rip them up, but my mother kept them all, wrapped them up, stored them. They are still there in Recife. Much too simple...

MOORE: Is your father still alive?

NOBRE: No, my mother died, my father died, and this material is still there, in a chest. My siblings still live there. I was going to rip them up, to burn them, because they are things that have no value, that belong to my apprenticeship. God knows how I was writing at the time. There's no point in looking at them.

MOORE: You mentioned writing mazurkas. How long did the tradition of dances in the home continue in Recife?

NOBRE: Look, when I was nine or ten I would sit at the piano and play for people to dance. They loved my version of Granada. When I was nine years old, I came with my family by ship from Recife to Rio, on the Itatinga, which took fourteen or fifteen days for the voyage, it would stop in Bahia and other points along the way. A long trip, so people needed something to do. At the time, there was no television, tapes or records were rare, but there was a piano, and so I played waltzes, mazurkas, polkas -- I was already playing music by

[Ernesto] Nazareth -- Brejeiro, Odeon -- lots of arrangements of the songs that were popular at the time -- Orlando Silva, and so forth. The commanding officer would come to dance, the young women would dance, and I would play for hours and hours. This would have been around 1948. At home in Recife, on the weekends, I would go to visit at the houses of my aunts, my grandmother, and so forth, and they would say "Marlinhos, come to the piano," and I would sit down. It would be in a large parlor, everyone would come and sit down, and I would play, but not for dancing, but for them to listen. I would play for hours, improvising. I loved to improvise. I had a facility which was something that hinted at a future as a composer. I didn't know. My mother would say "what is this?" "Oh, Mom, I am just making it up." I was too lazy to want to work hard. I would take a look and imitate. Beethoven, everyone. This, interestingly enough, was a sort of exercise. I was working on different styles extempore. When I wrote the first piece which I left in my catalogue, the Concertino, Op. 1 -- of course I had written more than one hundred pieces before this one -- it had a mixture of Ernesto Nazareth, Villa-Lobos, a little Schumann, Chopin, but it's a piece where I can recognize my own individual style, and in the Nazarethiana [Op. 2]. I was very much influenced by Nazareth, but with a rhythmic style which didn't come from Nazareth, but from maracatu, from frevo -- a very strong rhythm, something different. And I left that in the catalogue. It was even recorded.

MOORE: You were awarded a prize for Nazarethiana, and then studied in Teresopolis with Koellreutter. Here in Rio, Koellreutter is known for having brought serial composition to a very traditional environment, compositionally speaking. What was the climate like at the Summer School, what were the other students interested in?

NOBRE: The situation with Koellreutter was interesting, because I was considered to be a "little genius" from somewhere else. I had already won the prize from Radio MEC for the Concertino, and it had been performed by the Radio MEC orchestra. I wrote with considerable facility. I was practically the only composition student. The other was Orlando Leite, a very gifted young man, but not a composer, a teacher. But Koellreutter said to me "You are a composer." He sensed that I had a facility for writing serial music, and said "you should continue with this". And I said "No". I didn't like orthodoxy. I said "No, I don't like it." "How can you know that?" I wrote a 12-tone piece for solo oboe for him in one day. This is when I wrote the trio for piano, violin and violoncello, which has a twelve-tone theme, and mixes this 12-tone theme with something Brazilian. Koellreutter said, "I think you are mistaken. Technically you are mixing two different concepts."

He was very theoretical. "You are mixing a serial, 12-tone concept, which abolishes tonality, and tonal series, with a neo-tonal, Brazilian concept, which accepts tonality." And I answered that there was no other way that I could do it. I am not going to force my material. And so we had a serious esthetic problem. He didn't like anything. By the end of the course he wasn't talking to me. That was when I won the prize. I saw him in the street, and said "Professor, I won the prize with that piece that you didn't like." "Oh, that doesn't mean anything. I still think that you are mistaken. You have a lot of talent to waste on music that is not new." This was always my problem -- I never accepted the esthetic of the new music that imposed on Brazil from Europe. I was always opposed to Boulez, to Luigi Nono, opposed to Stockhausen in that period, always. My work was always a mixture of that technique -- and for me, dodecaphonicism was a technique, not an esthetic -- just another technique that I could use... My way of working with twelve tones was something very personal. It had nothing to do with the approach of Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Boulez... None of them. It is a way perhaps closer to that of Alban Berg, where he uses a series, with elements pointing in some way to the presence of tonality -- the Violin Concerto, for example, where the series is constructed with triads. I would construct my series with certain ideas, certain key, basic intervals, which would give the idea of the theme. Schoenberg used to say "the series is not a theme; the series is the beginning of everything." For me, I would build the series as a scale. Just another scale. In works where I would elaborate a series, 4x3, or 3x4, where there would be an interpolation of sounds creating certain centers which interested me. For example, the trio begins completely atonal, and little by little starts to incorporate tonality. The twelve tones of the series admit the presence of certain tonalities. Not leading tone, tonic, dominant, it doesn't resolve... Atonal. But not serial. It's an atonality that I use. I use it for example in the divertimento, a tango by Nazareth, Tenebroso [solfege the melody]. I took out all the repeated notes and made a series. I serialize the tango, and make something which you can hear, and feel, is a recollection. What I do here is to serialize themes. I remember that Koellreutter was very aggressive at the time. Later I studied with Guarnieri, which was another problem. Guarnieri gave me a theme based on folk music, which he used to give to all his students, and I made a twelve-tone series from the folk music. He was furious. "This is absurd! This is a crime! You can't make a 12-tone row from a folk tune!" "Why not? What's the problem? I want to..." I had serious conflicts with both of them.

MOORE: Did Guarnieri's esthetic become gradually more nationalistic?

NOBRE: He was always nationalistic. I studied with Koellreutter in 1960 and with Guarnieri in 1961. They were two extremes, because Guarnieri detested twelve-tone music. So what happened? Koellreutter thought that I should write only twelve-tone music, and Guarnieri thought that I had to be nationalistic. I didn't want to do either one. I was never nationalistic, I detest nationalism, I abominate nationalism. If you want to offend me, just say that my music is nationalistic. I will take it as a personal offense. My music is the result of my personal experiences. It happens that I was born in Brazil, I was born in Recife -- if I had been born in the Congo, things would have been different. My experience of sound is this. It incorporates all this. This is what Guarnieri did not understand. He wanted me to write a music that was Brazilian in a nationalistic way. I didn't like his music. I thought it was extremely repetitive, with national clichés, imitating themes from the Northeast from a music that he did not know personally... He used a modalism from the Northeast. It was boring, without rhythmic impetus. I had a great collision with him, because I wrote a piece which said this for me.

MOORE: For Koellreutter your music was too Brazilian, and for Guarnieri it was too modern.

NOBRE: So what happened? I only found a balance when I met Alberto Ginastera in Buenos Aires. He was the only one who thought I was on the right path. "You are a composer, and you have no reason to write Brazilian music, nor to write serial music. You have to get to know and work with everything" I did a lot of work with him on contemporary techniques. So I wrote the *Variações Rítmicas* for piano and percussion, typical of Brazil, in Buenos Aires, a piece that is serial and dodecaphonic, with the freedom that I use in the theme and variations, and the percussion is typically Brazilian, with *cuíca*, *agogô*, *reco-reco*, *atabaque*, *tamborim* -- it couldn't be more Brazilian. It sounds very strange -- dodecaphonic music with a Brazilian rhythm. Sometimes it seems like Webern -- but a Brazilian Webern. I didn't want to do this, but given the timbre that I had in my mind -- this timbre of the *agogôs*, with *cuíca*, *reco-reco*, *afoxe*, *atabaque*, *tamborins*, *pandeiros* gives a very interesting effect -- but it is not clichéd. You don't hear those rhythms of *baiao* or *samba* -- that has nothing to do with it. But it does have something which suggests something different. People say "it suggests the forest" -- it has nothing to do with the forest. Americans hear "rain forest," What the heck is this? In their imagination that is what the rain forest sounds like. It is a work that is strictly constructed from the technical point of view. My primary concern is to be a good artisan -- my work has to be solid in terms of technique.



With ideas, or else it would be simply a matter of construction. So this piece from 1963 is still in the repertoire, being played in Russia, for example, and by European ensembles. Marvelous! I never met them, but using the score they played what I was looking for. Swiss musicians! The composer becomes international based on the quality of the writing. I know that my work is well-made, technically well-made. Ravel put it this way: "Above all else, I am an artisan." I was mad about the Concerto for the Left Hand by Ravel. I read many biographies of Debussy and of Ravel at the library, and there were passages relating what he said and wrote. Ravel's writing is perfect, simply perfect. The perfection of his realization is at the highest level. This is the point where I connected with Ginastera, who helped me a great deal. He also said: "You worry about technique, not for the sake of technique, but so that the work is solid, so that it has a foundation, so that it is not a continuous improvisation." This is something I detest in contemporary music -- this, then this, then this -- but without a logic connecting them. When you are always making use of contrast it shows that you are an amateur. Our beloved Villa-Lobos is a little this way -- lots of imagination, but no logic. For me the great pleasure of creation is in the structure. My Sonata Breve for piano from 1976 has one thematic idea which is present in the entire work -- three movements. It is all derived from the first idea. Someone who plays it, who listens to it, will perceive the logic of the musical thought. Something can be modern, but it has to have coherence. I detest incoherence, formlessness, those "avant-garde" composers who just try anything. Composing like that is easy -- just do one thing after another -- but I don't get any intellectual pleasure from it. Music is a creation of the spirit that has to communicate something intellectual -- not just a physical pleasure -- a noise here, a noise there, an explosion here....that is not a creation of the spirit. I was criticized by the "avant-garde" -- "that's traditional music". But that traditional music that I wrote in 1963 is played more and more, and the "avant-garde" music from that time is no longer played. Music for one performance -- there is no second performance. What interests me is the 100th performance, the 500th performance. And thank God, this happens. We know now that there was this great problem with the avant-garde -- the ultra, the total serialism of Boulez, Stockhausen, Nono -- which created an impasse, and the public gave up.

MOORE: What was the culture of contemporary music like in the Buenos Aires of the early 60's?

NOBRE: Buenos Aires made a big impact. Musical activity in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo was quite limited to traditional music, something that continues today. But Buenos Aires had active contemporary music

groups, and playing the music that was written. In Buenos Aires, in addition to Ginastera, I was in contact with Olivier Messiaen. It was marvelous.

MOORE: How long was he there?

NOBRE: One year. He did analyses of his works, Stravinsky as well, and about the way he worked with rhythm. He was interested to know how I worked with rhythms, and said "you are on the right path", and mentions this in a very nice dedication of a piece of his to me. With Malipiero I worked on the area of orchestration. With Dallapiccola I worked above all on the voice, and after this contact with him I wrote many vocal works. He looked at the problem of the text and the voice, and the particularity of the voice within the orchestra, within the chamber ensemble. He was against treating the voice as an instrument, which was usual at the time. He said "vocal writing is different from instrumental writing. The voice is not a clarinet, the voice is not a flute -- it has timbral characteristics depending on whether it is soprano, tenor, baritone.... I worked on some opera texts with him, and the contact with him was marvelous. My work with Copland was very brief, because it was more in the area of orchestration, with wonderful ideas. But I thought that Copland's music was very vulgar -- I didn't like it, thought it was very banal.

MOORE: Which works of his?

NOBRE: Almost everything. He has some pieces that are more interesting -- the Piano Sonata is a work which is more solid, the Symphony No. 3 is an important work, but Appalachian Spring, Rodeo -- these things that are "made in USA" are horrible, vulgar. The symphonies are solid, the Piano Variations are very good. He is a great composer. What was important in Buenos Aires is that we could hear what the others were writing immediately. You would write a piece, and could hear it the following week in concert. Lots of concerts of new music, of contemporary music, five or six a week. It was incredible.

MOORE: Where did the financial support come from?

NOBRE: Ginastera managed to get support from the Rockefeller Foundation, together with the Torcuato Di Tella Institute, the city of Buenos Aires, which had the Teatro Santa Fe. The Teatro Colon presented modern operas -- I saw Wozzeck there, Ginastera's opera Don Rodrigo.

MOORE: Wozzeck had not been done at the Theatro Municipal in Rio.

NOBRE: Never. We asked Ricordi to import the score of *Wozzeck*, and we studied it, went to hear the rehearsals, followed the score -- a great apprenticeship. This would have been impossible in Rio. In fact until today *Wozzeck* has never been performed in Rio, nor in Sao Paulo. I would go to the opera every Saturday, heard Wagner's tetralogy, all the traditional operas. We got into the Teatro Colon for free. Incredible. There was nothing remotely like it in Rio. The quality of the orchestra of the Teatro Colon was fabulous. This experience in Buenos Aires meant that Rio was a big shock. I had to travel, and I began to travel a lot.

MOORE: Today Brazilian music is chic, and the New York Times writes about all the latest releases, and in the early 1960s there was an international presence for bossa nova. What was the situation for classical music in the early sixties?

NOBRE: After I came back from Buenos Aires, in the mid-sixties, composers and conductors in Rio were very concerned about this. The choreographer Arthur Mitchell, of the Brazilian Ballet Ensemble, had the idea of doing ballets with scores by Brazilian composers, and so they commissioned Rhythmetron for percussion, which was a big success. The director of cultural affairs in the United States was enchanted, and they arranged an invitation to the US. I went to Tanglewood in 1969, met Leonard Bernstein, Gunther Schuller (I became good friends with him), Luciano Berio; it was marvelous. Other Brazilian composers were writing for ballet as well. Rio de Janeiro began to have a very strong contemporary music scene -- the Bienal of Contemporary Music began in 1977, Inter-American Music Festivals... the group of composers who were working at the time had a lot of good ideas -- Edino Krieger, who created the Bienal, and began to work at Radio MEC, with concerts for young people... We began to work in the administration of music in Rio, so things changed. There started to be LPs of contemporary music, with two collections of young composers from Brazil. The Orquestra Sinfonica Nacional always was playing contemporary music. At every concert they had to play a new modern piece by a Brazilian composer. There was enormous growth. This continued until 1981, 1982. Then the idea of the market got started, that this music did not make money, and so composers of popular music began to take over the scene, with a much greater presence than they had had before. These were people I had worked with -- I worked with Glauber Rocha, Maria Bethania sang a song of mine for one of his films, I worked with Gilberto Gil, with Caetano Veloso. I was the first to do an arrangement of a song by Gilberto Gil for a show of popular music. I had a lot of contact with these people. But little by little the commercial recording industry began to invert things. There were lots of

records published at the time by labels like Odeon and Philips of Brazilian music. By about 1982-1985 the situation began to get worse. Why? The labels began to say "Records of culture are for the government to worry about. We are commercial labels." The government, in turn, in order to show that it was popular, began to support popular music. When these laws to provide cultural funding were created, there was the slogan "Records are culture." Records are only culture if the product is culture. If someone sings reggae or rap, they consider that culture. There began to be a great inversion of values. Industrially Brazil began to enter the pre-globalization era, and when Fernando Henrique came in with neo-liberalism and globalization, the game was over. The laws which were passed in Brazil to support culture only benefited popular culture, or mass culture. Petrobras, Shell, Esso -- the multinationals -- were very happy because they could support a disc by Chico Buarque, got a deduction on their taxes, and at the same time got free publicity. But a record of music by Francisco Mignone, by Radamés Gnattali, or by Camargo Guarnieri, even Villa-Lobos wasn't good business, because they would press 1000 copies, and would have a very hard time selling all 1000. With popular music, 150 thousand, 200 thousand, 300 thousand -- at the very least. Any show of popular music today is sponsored by Petrobras, Casas Bahia, Sendas -- any show will be sponsored. Before, people realized that classical music, concert music, could not survive on ticket sales. Of course. If you produce a concert you know very well that you cannot have 100 thousand applauding. You can have 300, 400. For contemporary music the tickets have to be free. Every Bienal was free. When they tried to charge, no one came. Now, music by Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethania sells tickets. The sponsorship goes directly to them, so they get extremely high fees -- 200,000, 300,000 reais to perform. It's a great deal. This is the current scene in Brazil. Due to the lack of opportunities in classical music, the movement has fallen apart. Composers have lost a unity which they once had, and it's every man for himself. Thank God, my activity as a composer is focused outside Brazil -- with music published outside Brazil, recordings released outside Brazil. I am a member of GEMA in Germany, my royalty fees come from outside Brazil. I live on my music that is performed outside Brazil. In this year, 2002, I had 278 public performances around the world, which is reasonable. In Brazil, four. My work is played in London, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, festivals in Arizona, Pennsylvania. Here in Brazil? Why? I struggle to present the work outside Brazil.

For the composer here who don't have this chance outside Brazil, the problem is this strange situation where commercial music has support both from private enterprise and from the government. It's a great scam. And classical music is the poor sister.

MOORE: Is there a possibility of changing the situation?

NOBRE: Possibly. Let's see what happens with Lula, but I don't think so. You know why? The populism of Lula's party is obvious. Benedita da Silva, who was governor, the first thing she did was present a concert of popular music at the Theatro Municipal. Their idea is to popularize the theaters. At the same time the Orquestra Sinfonica Brasileira has gone for six months without receiving their salaries. We have a crisis of high culture in Brazil. Why? The government, institutions, think that culture is elitist, and that they have to sponsor popular culture. Yesterday I was very sorry to hear the President of the Republic give the Great Cross of Cultural Merit to Roberto Carlos. A great master of culture!? This is an inversion of values. Why Roberto Carlos? It as if in the USA they were to give the great cultural prize to Michael Jackson. Even Bush wouldn't think of doing something like that. And the cultural media in the USA would react. Here in Brazil no one says anything, because people are afraid of seeming to be elitist, erudite. They say that I'm elitist. I did concerts of popular music on television, of classical music, for 10 years on Rede Globo, competitions for young people – it was a success. But even that is not enough. If you compare the sales of a popular record, with 3 million sound, and a classical record which is a great success with 8,000, it is tough. It's almost impossible to deal with these numbers.

MOORE: No one expects a serious novel to sell three million copies.

NOBRE: The cultural work that I do, that other composers do, with music that is extremely sophisticated, it can't disappear from the face of the earth because it has been accused of being elitist. We are putting our money on the imbecilization of the human race, on the culture of the bunda, of Carla Perez, those women who shake their booties on television. They have sponsors. Even their weddings have sponsors. Brazilian intellectuals don't speak out, and even if they try, there is no space in the press. If you ask me about the situation, this is what it is: savage capitalism carried to its extremes in the area of culture.

MOORE: I tell my American friends that Brazil is a far more capitalist country than the USA.

NOBRE: Because it does not have the "socialized" capitalism of countries where there is a greater sharing of wealth. Access to cultural goods in the US is much more socialized than is the case in Brazil. At the moment what we have in Brazil is savage capitalism, where what counts is producing money. If what you do doesn't pay off you are marginalized. We are marginalizing the thought of young Brazilian writers, of young musicians, who, in order to survive, have to play the game. There are serious composers of popular music who have to write these lambadas, bottle dances, all these things with extremely vulgar erotic content which television broadcasts, in a fight for ratings. This is what sells. You will never see an orchestra on television -- that's passe. When I used to do concerts for young people, people from humbler backgrounds -- taxi drivers, housewives -- would stop me on the street to say "I heard that little boy" -- I was presenting talented children who were eight years old, ten years old, playing violin, violoncello. They loved it. You say they don't like it? They do. But how can they like it if you don't give them the chance to hear it? It was a joint production of Rede Globo together with MEC, but Rede Globo decided that they had to show auto racing, Formula 1, instead. The concerts were on Sundays at 10 PM, for ten years, with a huge audience. They loved it. But the younger generation is being massacred, because they are already accustomed to hearing this garbage. I have a daughter who is ten years old. She likes Vivaldi, Beethoven, modern music, but that is because she is exposed to it at home. But Brazilian children in general, at home, do not have music, do not have books, do not have musical scores, they just have television. My daughter likes things that every child likes, but likes things that children generally don't like as well. I am really concerned about whether the government will be able to solve this problem, because I think they are being carried by a wave of populism.

MOORE: Why doesn't the Brazilian elite give more value to cultural products like music, literature, architecture?

NOBRE: Brazilian literary figures are also immersed in the search for sales. Take the example of Paulo Coelho. If you ask me this is sub-literature. Out of curiosity I tried to read it, but I didn't get more than five pages in. If you compare this with the great Brazilian writers, it's frightening. And yet it sells and sells. He is flattered by the elite, gets into the Brazilian Academy, and why? Because they are afraid of being labeled as retrograde, as elitist. They think that his presence in the Academy will bring them a few droplets of fame. "Who knows? Maybe if they take my picture with him my book will sell too." This situation is contagious, because a person feels that he has to sell.

Take the case of Jacques Morelenbaum, the son of Henrique Morelenbaum. He is an orchestral cellist, a very talented composer, young -- so he is tempted to do arrangements for Caetano Veloso, appear playing cello, and earn a fortune. What is he going to do? Is he going to struggle to do something else? Life is difficult for a young composer. The other path is easier. Not everyone is strong enough to stick it out. In 1974 I was invited by Rede Globo to become the musical director for their novelas on television, with a salary of 22,000 dollars a month at the time. I wasn't even making a thousand dollars a month. That was quite a temptation. I said no, and people said "he's crazy." Why did I say no? Am I going to use my technique, my music to make arrangements for the orchestra of Rede Globo? I would

make a fortune, and within three years I would kill myself. I would be feeling such contempt for myself, in spite of the money I would make, that it would put an end to me. It wasn't a question of being an anti-hero; it was a matter of survival. If I had gone into that, it would have been all over. Not everyone can manage to say no, because it really is difficult. Even if you are known and played around the world, even so it is hard. I may be the only one in Brazil who lives from music, from composition. I support myself from my work. I am a composer, nothing else. I could earn in one day what I make in five years. But I refused; I refuse. It is difficult for young people to do this.



# Chronicle

July 2

The New York Philharmonic, conducted by Bramwell Tovey, in New York, New York. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "Amid snappy comments about why orchestras rarely use saxophonists ('you don't know where they've been') as well as Independence Day, Canada Day and dog-walking in New York, he offered nicely phrased descriptions of the music at hand, which he conducted deftly. Turning to the audience just after the curtain-raiser, the Kander and Ebb classic New York, New York, Mr. Tovey told a stream of latecomers, "I'm ever so sorry you just missed that," and suggested that they buy tickets to the Sunday performance for a second chance. They didn't miss much, really. Bruce Broughton's splashy symphonic arrangement included tips of the hat to everyone from Dvorak to Nelson Riddle, and it had a certain endearing energy at times. But the Philharmonic doesn't do this sort of thing well: mostly, it was trying too hard to sound as if it were having fun rather than simply slumming. Gershwin's *Walking the Dog*, with Stanley Drucker shaping the sultry clarinet line nicely, was more persuasive. So were three charming trifles by Leroy Anderson, *Fiddle Faddle*, *The Penny-Whistle Song*, and *Bugler's Holiday*, period pieces that nevertheless let the orchestra's strings, flutes and trumpets show their strengths. Leonard Bernstein's music suited both the program's New York theme and its crossover ambitions. *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs*, for example, is top-drawer symphonic jazz. And if the orchestra's brass and reed instruments were slightly strident, they captured the music's sizzle, with Mr. Drucker arresting the attention with a beautifully fluid account of the virtuosic solo line. Bernstein's more emotionally intense side was represented by the symphonic suite from his dark-hued *On the Waterfront* soundtrack. The program also included a solid if insufficiently atmospheric reading of Aaron Copland's *Quiet City*, with Thomas Stacy as the English horn soloist and Thomas V. Smith playing the solo trumpet line" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/4/05].

July 8

Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by James Levine, in Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 8* ("Of a Thousand"). Tanglewood, MA. This work's logistics and cost (there are eight vocal soloists), to say nothing of the complexities of directing vast choral and orchestral forces in so dense a score, have made it a rarity, yet this is its third appearance at Tanglewood since 1972. Mr.

Levine launched into the score with decisively brisk tempos - no lingering on that opening "*Veni, creator spiritus*," just a grand choral statement accompanied by a remarkably taut orchestral sound. There would, of course, be ample time to temper those qualities, both by magnifying them, as in the over-the-top conclusion of Part 1, and by pulling back to create transparent, heavenly pianissimos, and in the most compelling moments in Part 2. Among the vocal soloists, Heidi Grant Murphy's exquisitely floated rendering of the "*Mater gloriosa*" lines, sung from a perch above the orchestra, proved the most memorable. But the other singers - Deborah Voigt and Susan Neves, sopranos; Yvonne Naef and Jane Henschel, mezzo-sopranos; Johann Botha, tenor; Eike Wilm Schulte, baritone, and John Relyea, bass - all made important contributions, as did the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and the American Boychoir. But the real thrill here was the Boston Symphony's rich sound and sheer virtuosity. It has been many years since this orchestra sounded so energized" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/11/05].

July 12

Paul Jacobs in music of Max Reger, and movements from Maurice Durufle's *Suite* (Op. 5) and Olivier Messiaen's *Nativite du Seigneur*. Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, New York, NY. "[M]ovements from Durufle's *Suite* (Op. 5) and Messiaen's "*Nativité du Seigneur*" were offered as an uninterrupted group. . . . Reger's *Fantasies on 'Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme'* (Op. 52, No. 2) and '*Hallelujah! Gott zu loben, bleibe meine Seelenfreu*' (Op. 52, No. 3) are craggy and torrential, and Mr. Jacobs played them with an intensity and a thoughtful, fluid use of dynamics and color. Those same qualities helped create a surprising common ground between Durufle's worldly *Sicilienne* and *Toccata* and a pair of Messiaen's mystical ruminations" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/14/05].





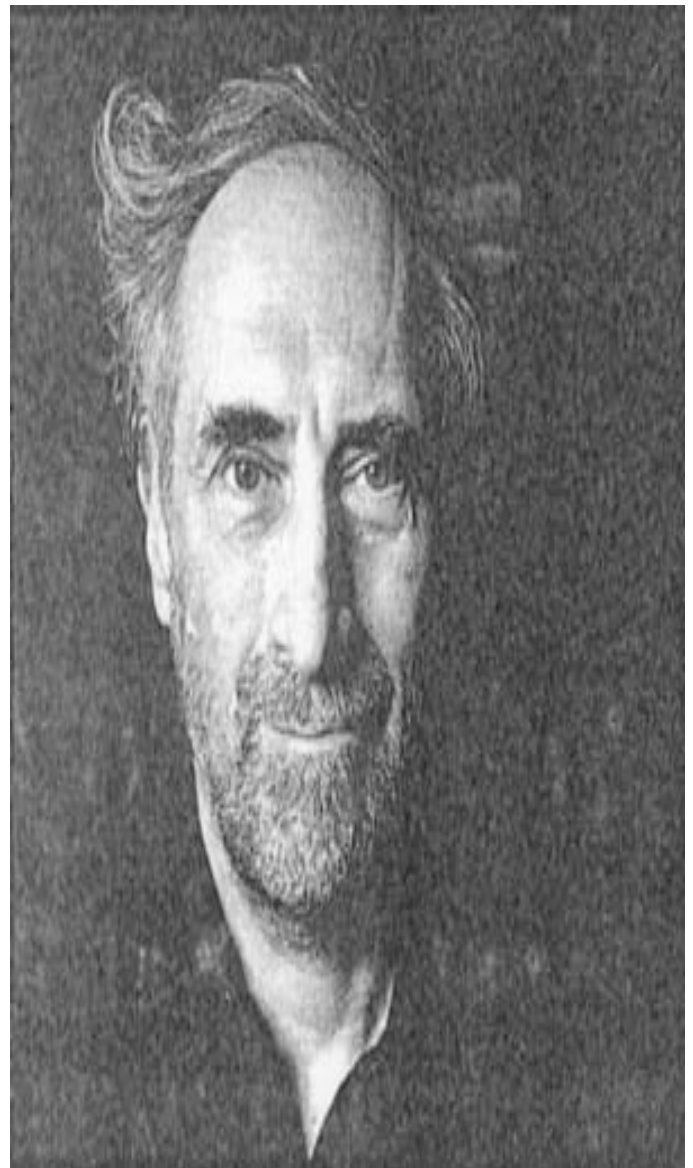
July 17

Summergarden. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. "Sitting in the air-conditioned museum, looking out at the soggy sculpture garden and remembering how the roar of Midtown traffic overwhelmed the amplified concerts in past summers, it was hard to fathom the attraction of having these performances outdoors in the first place. The museum really should reconsider; the rest of us can pray for rain. . . . The most memorable of the program's five works was the opener, Benjamin Yusupov's Quintet (1996). Mr. Yusupov, a composer from Tajikistan who now lives in Israel, writes in a style that is bold, assertive and more complicated than it seems: its harmonies often seem static over all, yet there is extraordinary movement and interplay in the individual lines. Roberto Sierra's Kandinsky (2003), a piano quartet, was as colorful as Mr. Yusupov's work and more varied, since each of its 11 movements represents a Kandinsky painting, and each is scored for a different combination of the four instruments. Conveying visual art in music is difficult, and to do it a composer relies partly on the listener's suggestibility. Do those rash strokes of violin tone really evoke Kandinsky's sharp lines? Why not? As it was, Mr. Sierra's piece, with its shifting color combinations and its inherent virtuosity -- most notably in a blistering solo viola movement, played brilliantly by Glenda Goodman -- worked well in purely musical terms. Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, a composer from Azerbaijan whose works Mr. Sachs has presented both with the contemporary-music ensemble Continuum and at the Juilliard School, contributed *Impromptus* (2004), a seven-movement piano trio cast in sometimes fiery, sometimes haunting hues, with vivid solo movements for violin (Miranda Cuckson) and cello (Claire Bryant). The program also included Gerald Barry's *Piano Quartet No. 1* (1992), a weirdly off-kilter work that was sometimes agreeably zany and sometimes plain annoying, and Paul Schoenfield's *Carolina Réveille* (1996) an eclectic set of variations on *Carolina in the Morning*" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/19/05].



July 20

International Keyboard Institute and Festival: Ursula Oppens. Mannes College of Music, New York, NY. "[A]nyone looking for Liszt's shadow in her program might have found it in Frederic Rzewski's *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* and in *La Valse*, [Maurice] Ravel's swirling and sometimes muscular evocation of the ballroom. . . . *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* . . . first evokes the mechanistic din of the mill, then moves through a Gershwin-esque fantasy on the song it was named for toward an eerie finale. Ms. Oppens gave incisive, transparent performances of Conlon Nancarrow's texturally spare but rhythmically thorny *Two Canons* for Ursula. She closed with Ravel's waltz fantasies, the poetic *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* and the bright-hued *La Valse*. Her readings, if not note-perfect, capture the music's spirit vividly" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/23/08].



July 21

Brian Ferneyhough' *Shadowtime* (libretto by Charles Bernstein. Rose Theater, New York, NY. "[T]heir new work based on the writings and life of the German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin, a "thought opera." Among operatic types, that's a new one. "Shadowtime," which had its premiere at the Munich Biennale in 2004, is a work of uncompromising complexity. By calling it a thought opera, Mr. Ferneyhough, a high modernist British composer, and Mr. Bernstein, a noted American poet, are doing more than signaling that the work explores the intellectual issues Benjamin dealt with, including the nature of time, language, melancholy and dialectical materiality. They are implying that the audience must put aside traditional notions of musical drama - of storytelling, narrative and character development - and enter an intellectual journey. A large audience presumably willing to do just that arrived at the Rose Theater on Thursday night when the Lincoln Center Festival presented the North American premiere of *Shadowtime*. But halfway through this work, which lasts two hours and 15 minutes without intermission, a steady trickle of audience members began leaving. While I was intrigued by *Shadowtime*, which bracingly challenges the very notions of what opera can be, I sympathized with those who gave up on the work. . . . [T]he opera seems intentionally obscure and needlessly convoluted. It relies on the surreal images of the director Frédéric Fisbach's production and, of course, the subliminal pull of Mr. Ferneyhough's music to make the drama, such as it is, emotional and resonant. For all its ingenuity, Mr. Ferneyhough's music, scored for diverse chamber orchestra and chorus, becomes exasperating. What makes his style engaging, but also difficult, is his penchant for layering events. In the instrumental prologue, as a gaggle of instruments snarl and dart about in barely contained frenzy, other instruments -- lacy melodies in the winds, a ruminative cello line -- slowly thread through the din of atonality. Amazingly, though, Mr. Ferneyhough writes with uncanny clarity even in the densest moments. Yet when the textures thin for long stretches of delicate and pensive music, the multiplicity of musical events keeps right on going. Almost never does Mr. Ferneyhough give listeners a break -- say, a passage where all the instruments play in unison or an episode of sublime harmony, the kinds of moments that ravish you in the operas of earlier modernists like Berg and Messiaen. In one scene, called *Shadow Play*, which depicts the descent of Benjamin into the underworld, a solo pianist and reciter, meant to be a Liberace-type entertainer, plays a violently difficult and mesmerizing piano work of nearly 20 minutes while reciting a text that mixes droll philosophical questions with gibberish. As a major work on a solo piano recital, this piece would be a knockout, especially as performed here by the

formidable pianist and actor Nicolas Hodges. But as a scene in an opera it seemed artificially inserted. *Shadowtime* also challenges the traditional role of words in opera. From the opening scene, phrases of the libretto are sung and spoken simultaneously, often layered as thickly as the instruments in the orchestra. There is not even a pretense that the words will be audible to the audience as sung from the stage. Essential lines are projected in supertitles. The text becomes just another element of musical fodder. . . . The choristers from the Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart and the musicians from the Nieuw Ensemble Amsterdam, brilliantly conducted by Jurjen Hempel, seemed engrossed by this work. The festival deserves much credit for courageously presenting it. In a program note, Mr. Ferneyhough writes that listeners must 'let go of a fixed notion of what constitutes musical form' to understand *Shadowtime*. Maybe so. But that comes very close to saying that if you don't like my opera it's your fault" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 7/23/05].





July 24

Alarm Will Sound in music of Richard D. James -- the British techno composer who works under various names, most notably Aphex Twin -- plus works by Richard Devine and Stefan Freund. Allen Room, Rose Hall, New York, NY. "On its new recording, *Acoustica* (Canteloupe) Alarm Will Sound offers 13 of Mr. James's concise electronic tone poems in arrangements for an orchestra fortified with electric guitar and bass and a handful of exotic instruments. . . . There is a degree to which the medium is the message in Mr. James's music. His recordings use a large palette of timbres that often morph in surprising ways. Some are entirely electronic; others are sampled acoustic instruments, though even those are often manipulated, distorted, speed-shifted or set within a distinctive electronic ambience. His selection, juxtaposition, balancing and stereo placement of these sounds are compositional decisions, but instead of a printed score his efforts yield a recording that is in effect the piece. Or maybe not. Alarm Will Sound's view is that Mr. James's quirky, often wistfully melodic works transcend their original timbres and textures. The players could justifiably argue as well that in Mr. James's world, great value is placed on inventive remixing - even to the point where the original is barely recognizable - and that their arrangements are essentially deferential remixes. (Oddly, they abandoned this argument by calling their concert 'Unremixed.') The performance, conducted by Alan Pierson, did not fully resolve this debate, but even though a listener inevitably made piece by piece comparisons, the ingenuity of the rescoring and the vigor of the performance were seductive. In *Mont St. Michel*, for example, Alarm Will Sound replaced tightly focused electronic beats of the Aphex Twin version with a hefty percussion sound - a very different sensibility, but it created its own powerful resonance. In *Cock/Ver 10*, the ensemble gave up on Mr. James's synthetic splashes and reproduced his rhythms and riffs with the energy of a hot jazz band. In some cases the job was easy: Aphex Twin's *Avril 14* is a sweet piano solo, and the Alarm Will Sound version added nuance and warmth that pointed up its Parisian hues. And in some cases the group's arrangements are still evolving. On its recording of *Logon Rock Witch*, the ensemble replaced Aphex Twin's low-pitched repeating electronic tone with a male voice. In concert, the group used a jaw harp, which better approximates the original sound. The Aphex Twin pieces were punctuated by imaginative and involving electronic improvisations (billed as remixes) by Richard Devine, and ended with Stefan Freund's *Unremixed*, a work that begins as a Philip Glass-style essay in repetitive transformation and quickly grows into a big, ferocious score with jazzy rhythms and rich, brassy textures" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*].

July 25

River to River Festival: Summer Stars: Svet Stoyanov. Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University, New York, NY. "Mostly, he played the marimba, and he did so with a winning combination of gentleness and fluidity. He also doubled on the vibraphone in one work, and offered short solos on a trap set and the tapan, a Bulgarian drum. . . . He began with Eric Sammut's *Four Rotations*, an easygoing, gracefully melodic suite for marimba. Mr. Sammut's jazz-inflected harmonic language and contrapuntal textures often called to mind the Modern Jazz Quartet's flirtations with classical works. And at four short movements it was exactly the right length. For a *Fantasy on Popular Bulgarian Rhythms*, the first of two works played bearing Mr. Stoyanov's composition credit, he used the tapan, a round drum that looks like a small military bass drum but produces a lighter timbre. The piece offers what its title promises: an inventive and varied essay built on the metrically uneven patterns of Bulgarian folk dances, presented with an understated but unmistakable virtuosity. Mr. Stoyanov's other work, *Improvisation*, for trap set, is based on Latin rhythms, or so he said when he introduced it. Here too, the textures were complicated and understandably showy, but the Latin influences were only fleetingly noticeable. The centerpiece of the program was Mr. Stoyanov's arrangement of Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*, originally for guitar and a recording of 10 more guitar lines and two bass parts. Mr. Stoyanov persuaded Mr. Reich to let him transcribe the work for marimba and vibraphone, and made the recording that he uses in his performances. The transcription works, although the marimba and vibraphone produce softer-edged sounds than the guitar. But if the work seemed gentler over all, this version surrenders nothing in rhythmic drive. Mr. Stoyanov closed his concert with *Khan Variations*, Alejandro Viñao's rhythmically wide-ranging meditation on a theme he heard sung by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the great Qawwali master" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/27/05].

