

Three Paragraphs about Mário De Andrade, a Man Focused On Things That Make Life worth Living

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*True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, / As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
But true Expression like th'unchanging Sun, / Clears, and improves what'er it shines upon, / It gilds
all objects, but it alters none.*

Alexander Pope

We become like that which we love. If we love what is base, we become base; but if we love what is noble, we become noble.

Fulton Sheen

I. Introduction: a citizen of the world

Born in 1893 and deceased in 1945, the Brazilian Mário Raul de Moraes Andrade was what one may call *a citizen of the world*, in the sense of having been “a person who is at home in any country”.¹ But what is most extraordinary of this is that he never left his native country. Mário de Andrade’s cosmopolitan mind was totally *made in Brazil*, so to say. Indeed, “Andrade was born in São Paulo and lived there virtually all of his life. As a child, he was a piano prodigy, and he later studied at the Music and Drama Conservatory of São Paulo. His formal education was solely in music, but at the same time, as Albert T. Luper records, he pursued persistent and solitary studies in history, art, and particularly poetry. Andrade had a solid command of French, and read Rimbaud and the major Symbolists. Although he wrote poetry throughout his musical education, he did not think to do so

¹ <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/citizen+of+the+world>.

professionally until the career as a professional pianist to which he aspired was no longer an option”.² Andrade was definitely a man of wide-ranging interests, skills, proficiency and, most importantly, *results*. He became an accomplished poet, novelist, musicologist, art historian, art critic and photographer. In more than one sense, Andrade was a man who lived ahead of his own time. His cutting-edge ideas and offbeat concepts influenced whole generations of Brazilian students and scholars. Western Europe was not immune – if one may say so – either to him nor to his inimitable way of being: indeed, Andrade’s influence “has reached far beyond Brazil”.³

II. A blessing in disguise

The setback in Andrade’s career as a pianist may be considered “a blessing in disguise”. As the other saying goes, “every cloud has a silver lining”. Let us go to the facts: “In 1913, his 14-year-old brother Renato died suddenly during a football game; Andrade left the Conservatory to stay at Araraquara, where his family had a farm. When he returned, his piano playing was afflicted intermittently by trembling of his hands. Although he ultimately did receive a degree in piano, he gave no concerts and began studying singing and music theory with an eye toward becoming a professor of music. At the same time, he began writing more seriously. In 1917, the year of his graduation, he published his first book of poems, *Há uma Gota de Sangue em Cada Poema* (*There is a drop of blood in each poem*), under the pseudonym Mário Sobral. The book contains hints of Andrade’s growing sense of a distinctive Brazilian identity, but it does so within the context of a poetry that (like most Brazilian poetry of the period) is strongly indebted to earlier European – particularly French – literature. His first book does not seem to have had an enormous impact, and Andrade broadened the scope of his writing. He left São Paulo for the countryside, and began an activity that would continue for the rest of his life: the meticulous documentation of the history, people, culture, and particularly music of the Brazilian interior, both in the state of São Paulo and in the wilder areas to the northeast. He published essays in São Paulo magazines, accompanied occasionally by his own photographs, but primarily he accumulated massive amounts of information about Brazilian life and folklore. Between these trips, Andrade taught piano at the Conservatory, and became one of its professors in 1921”.⁴ Brazilian ethnomusicology owes Mário de Andrade its very existence, since he is among its pioneers and founders. As a matter of fact, “The suppressed Spanish Jesuit Antonio Eximeno (1729-1809) is considered the theoretical founder of the field. Folklorists, who began preserving and studying folklore music in Europe and the US in the 19th century, are also considered precursors of the field prior to the Second World War. The term *ethnomusicology* is said to have been first coined by Jaap Kunst from the Greek words ἔθνος (*ethnos*, ‘nation’) and μουσική (*mousike*, ‘music’). It is often defined as the anthropology or ethnography of music, or as musical anthropology”.⁵ Andrade became a key figure in the Brazilian avant-garde culture for, at least, two decades. His inspiration came mainly from European Modernism and all other “isms” that welcomed proceedings, guidelines and practices in general that had been considered out of ordinary in art, culture and Western society as a whole.⁶ No exaggeration is in the assertion according to which Mário de Andrade was the “driving force behind the Week of Modern Art, the 1922 event that reshaped both literature and the visual arts in Brazil”.⁷ It is not useless to remember that “The Modern Art Week (*Semana de Arte Moderna*, in Portuguese) was an arts festival held in São Paulo, Brazil, that ran from February 10 to February 17, 1922. Historically, the Week marked the start of Brazilian Modernism. Though a number of individual Brazilian artists were doing modernist work before the Week, it coalesced and defined the

² Esther Gabara et alii. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A1rio_de_Andrade.

³ Ib.

⁴ Ib.

⁵ Anthony Seeger et alii. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnomusicology>.

⁶ See, for instance, John Picchione. *The New Avant-garde in Italy: Theoretical Debate and Poetic Practices*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 64; and José Maria Neves. *Música Contemporânea Brasileira*, 2nd edition, Rio de Janeiro, Contra Capa, 2008, p. 59.

⁷ Esther Gabara et alii. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A1rio_de_Andrade.

movement and introduced it to Brazilian society at large. For Brazil, it was as important as the International Exhibition of Modern Art (also known as the Armory Show), held in New York City in 1913, which became a legendary watershed date in the history of American art”.⁸

III. Conclusion: life is worth living

Mário de Andrade could not be imitated, as we have already pointed out in these lines that are already coming to an end; he had his own and extremely peculiar style, always remembering that “Style is essentially a personal thing, something peculiar to each individual”.⁹ In fact, “A polished floor is still made of wood; it is wood, as it were, made good. In the same way, what is called ‘good style’ in writing should not, ideally, be separable from the message or content”.¹⁰ According to the Portuguese musicologists Tomás Borba (1867-1950) and Fernando Lopes-Graça (1906-1994), authors of the most important dictionary of music ever written in Portuguese language, “Andrade was a brilliant writer and his personality was full of life and, therefore, attractive”.¹¹ Still as they put it, “after Andrade’s relatively premature death, Brazil could not easily replace him, when still was so much to expect from his intelligence and his work capacity”.¹² Several distinguished Brazilian composers were disciples of Mário de Andrade – namely the so-called Nationalist Generation, formed of Luciano Gallet (1893-1931), Lorenzo Fernandez (1897-1948), Francisco Mignone (1897-1986) and Camargo Guarnieri (1907-1993) – and expressed in their works unveil how much they owed him, starting with their choice of themes for their own musical compositions.¹³ Among all of them, Camargo Guarnieri was the one on whom Andrade’s influence was deeper. The almost daily coexistence with Andrade gave Guarnieri aesthetic and (why not to say?) cultural bases which become essential for his career as a musician and a composer as well. As he himself once said: “I began frequenting his house. I used to have dinner there every single Wednesday. This coexistence offered me the opportunity to learn a lot. The little house on Lopes Chaves street was bustling like a beehive. Literature, sociology, philosophy, art... everything was debated there!”¹⁴ Now a century after Andrade’s heyday, that is to say, the zenith of his multiple activities, his absence is still keenly felt among us. Andrade, who never married nor had children, had few intellectual and artistic heirs worthy of his talent and cultural achievements – let alone his simplicity and essentiality. As Mário de Andrade himself used to say, essential things are those that make life worth living; in his own words, “*O essencial faz a vida valer a pena*”.¹⁵

⁸ Aracy Amaral et alii. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Art_Week.

⁹ Martin Manser & Stephen Curtis. *The Penguin Writer’s Manual*, London, Penguin Books, 2002, p. 195.

¹⁰ Id., p. 197.

¹¹ Tomás Borba & Fernando Lopes-Graça. *Dicionário de música ilustrado*, Lisbon, Cosmos, 1963, v. I, p. 66.

¹² Ib.

¹³ As for certain exaggerations in Andrade’s nationalist point of view, see Mário de Andrade. *Pequena história da música*, Belo-Horizonte, Itatiaia, 1987, p. 80 et passim; Marcelo Coutinho & João Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira. “Henrique Oswald: a Brazilian Foreigner in Brazil. Comments on a Gap in the History of Brazilian Classical Music”, in *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, n. 5, July 2018, p. 10; and Marcelo Coutinho. *O ciclo “Ofélia” no contexto da obra vocal de câmara de Henrique Oswald* (Master’s Thesis), Rio de Janeiro, UFRJ, 2009, pp. 1-3 et passim.

¹⁴ Quoted by José Maria Neves. *Música Contemporânea Brasileira*, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁵ Quoted in https://www.pensador.com/frases_de_mario_de_andrade/.