

A THEMATIC STUDY
OF THE
VILLA-LOBOS STRING QUARTET NO.3

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ABSTRACT

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) is known largely as a Brazilian nationalistic composer and as a pedagogue who played a huge role in establishing Brazil's musical national identity. However, little has been written about his chamber works, particularly his seventeen string quartets. This DMA document seeks to begin to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on Villa-Lobos's third quartet. Written in 1916, this quartet is a snapshot of a time when he was still developing his musical voice. Because the Brazilian elements of his music became significantly more prominent in the latter two-thirds of his life, many scholars dismiss the earlier works as derivative of his European contemporaries. This document will demonstrate the reverse, through a thematic study of one of Villa-Lobos's early quartets, Quartet No. 3. Additionally, this paper will provide biographical information to contextualize the piece and discuss influences of Brazilian popular music on Villa-Lobos's chamber music, particularly Quartet No.3. It will also lay out a thematic study of each of the movements by identifying the themes, their influences, as well as some contrapuntal observations, and will address some of the performance practice issues relating to Villa-Lobos's use of texture, instrument roles, and string techniques.

DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my colleagues, teachers, friends, and family who helped make this project possible. In particular, this work is dedicated to my Lord, who gave me capability and patience. 2 Corinthians 10:17-18.

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I would also like to thank my parents and my sister for being my support team. They have been my role models on how to reason, learn, teach, and doggedly pursue my goals to glory of God.

Most importantly, I thank Jesus Christ my Lord for saving me and giving me the gift of music. With His help, I hope to bless others with it just as I have been blessed. As always, John 15:5.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF EXAMPLES.....	vi
1. EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES.....	1
2. CHORO, MODINHA AND CIRANDA.....	11
3. MOVEMENT I.....	17
4. MOVEMENT II.....	29
5. MOVEMENT III.....	39
6. MOVEMENT IV.....	46
7. CONCLUSION.....	56
REFERENCES.....	57

LIST OF EXAMPLES

1. Villa-Lobos String Quartet No.3, Mvt.1 – Opening and mm. 189-End.....	18
2. Ravel String Quartet in F Major – Opening.....	18
3. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 150-159.....	19
4. Villa-Lobos String Quartet No.3, Mvt.1 - Mm. 1-3.....	20
5. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 1-11.....	20
6. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 19-24.....	21
7. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 38-46.....	22
8. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 89-92.....	23
9. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 47-66.....	25
10. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 84-88.....	27
11. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 1-11.....	30
12. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 53-62.....	31
13. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 76-85.....	32
14. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – m. 11 motive, Violin 2.....	36
15. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 15-18.....	37
16. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 101-105.....	38
17. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.3 – Mm. 1-8.....	41
18. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.3 – Mm. 35-41.....	41
19. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 1-12.....	46

20. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Melody 2 from Mvt.3 (mm. 39-40).....	47
20b. Mvt.4, Opening of Melody 2 (mm. 7-8).....	47
21. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 45-48.....	48
22. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 258-262.....	49
23. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 157-172.....	52
24. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 91-92.....	53
25. Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 342-349.....	54

1. EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES

Heitor Villa-Lobos's legacy in twentieth century music history stands as the most influential in the building of Brazil's national identity. Instead of de-emphasizing Brazilian musical elements in favor of European ones, he drew from Brazilian folk and popular genres and introduced them to the concert stage. His background as a performer of European classical music and popular Brazilian genres made him uniquely capable of this feat.

Brazilian Identity

Brazil's cultural and racial heritage draws from indigenous Brazilians, Europeans, and Africans.¹ As a result, it is very common for a Brazilian to have mixed roots, as was the case with Heitor Villa-Lobos, whose paternal grandparents were Spanish and whose Brazilian mother had a Portuguese father.² Especially during the twentieth century, Brazil was attempting to modernize and be seen as equal with Europe. To this end, racial mixing was encouraged for the "whitening" of the Brazilian population.³ This resulted in a great complexity of identity which was also combined with regional, and socio-economic status.

These variations of cultural identity were reflected in different musical styles, which also carried class distinctions. European, classical music was considered erudite and highbrow.

¹ Clarence Bernard Henry, *Let's Make Some Noise: Axe and the African Roots of Brazilian Popular Music* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi), 2008, 7.

² L.M. Peppercorn, "Villa-Lobos: Father and Son," *Americas* 24, no.4 (April 1972), 23-24.

³ Henry, *Make Some Noise*, 8.

Indeed, during the lifetime of Raúl Villa-Lobos, Heitor Villa-Lobos's father, Brazilian high society closely followed European art and literature.⁴ At the same time, Brazilian popular music, which included African rhythms, percussion, and guitar, was considered a lower form.⁵

In an effort to unify Brazil with his nationalistic policies in the 1930s, Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas provided government funding for professional performances of Brazilian popular music such as choro in order to legitimize and celebrate innately Brazilian culture.⁶ To this end, Villa-Lobos wrote multiple publications for musicians and teachers, and emphasized choral music as the ideal medium for the musical expression of national pride.⁷ In addition, Villa-Lobos's *Choros* and *Bachianas Brasileiras*, which blended Brazilian with classical genres, were brought to the concert stage in a way that defined and celebrated Brazil's unique identity and also mixed the high and low forms existent in the culture.

Villa-Lobos's Identity

Villa-Lobos was uniquely equipped to have such an impact on Brazil's musical and national identity because he hailed from both of Brazil's musical worlds: the sophisticated classical music and the commoner's popular music. If he were a merely classically trained composer in the tradition of Europe who discovered Brazilian music and brought it to the concert stage, he would not have been as influential because his appropriation of Brazilian music would not have resulted from authentic participation as a native street performer. By the same token,

⁴ Eero Tarasti, *Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Life and Works, 1887-1959* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc. 1995), 8-15.

⁵ Tamara Elena Livingston-Isenhour, and Thomas George Caracas Garcia, *Choro: A Social History of a Brazilian Popular Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 22.

⁶ Livingston-Isenhour, *Choro*, 2.

⁷ Simon Wright, *Villa-Lobos* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108-109.

were he just a Brazilian street musician, he would arguably have been unable to translate this exotic music for European audiences who at the time regarded the otherness of the tropics as incapable of modernity and even dangerous.⁸ In order to do what he did, he had to act out of his own mixed musical heritage.

Villa-Lobos's Early Life and Influences

Villa-Lobos's biographical information is often contradictory, largely because he made a good deal of it up. In fact, simply ascertaining Heitor Villa-Lobos's birth date, 1887 in Rio de Janeiro,⁹ required much deliberation and research on the part of musicologists. Since keeping birth records was not mandatory in Brazil at the time, the exact date of this pivotal composer's birth was largely left to speculation.¹⁰ In fact, Villa-Lobos himself did not know the exact date and made up a new one whenever asked by musicologists or journalists, resulting in the use of a variety of erroneous dates to grace scholarly publications such as Grove's *Dictionary For Music and Musicians*, which had the date of 1881 in their 1940 edition.¹¹ In addition, the closest thing to an autobiography, written by Villa-Lobos's friend C. Paula Barros, has been shown to be a fantastical version of actual events, some of which may never have occurred at all.¹²

The assertions of musicologists and Villa-Lobos often conflict regarding Villa-Lobos's musical influences, particularly concerning his early music. Many scholars have postulated the

⁸Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 21, 147.

⁹ Vasco Mariz, *Villa-Lobos: Life and Work* (Washington D.C.: Brazilian American Cultural Institute, Inc. 1970), 2.

¹⁰ Lisa Peppercorn, *The Illustrated Lives of Great Composers: Villa-Lobos* (London: Omnibus, 1989), 10-11.

¹¹ L.M. Peppercorn, "The History of Villa-Lobos' Birth-Date," *The Monthly Musical Record* 78, no.898 (1948):153-5.

¹² Gerard Béhague, *Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul* (Austin, TX: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas, 1994), 1-2.

influence of Debussy, Puccini, and Wagner on his chamber music and operas, something the composer himself denied, saying, “As soon as I feel someone’s influence on me, I shake myself and jump out of it.”¹³ In fact, Lisa Peppercorn indicates that— true to his evidently confident personality— “He is ignorant of the year of his birth, and says that there are only two great composers in the world, ‘Bach and I.’”¹⁴ While it is easy to dismiss this comment as brash aplomb, it actually sheds light on the musical elements that appear in his music, such as his *Bachianas Brasileiras* series which is a blend of Bach and Brazil.

Perhaps the earliest and greatest influence on Villa-Lobos’s music, both in terms of classical and Brazilian genres, came from his father, Raúl Villa-Lobos. At the time of Heitor’s childhood, European art and music was highly valued in Rio de Janeiro. The popularity of Italian operas, salon piano performances, and later the works of *Les Six* grew to become the driving force in Brazilian high society.¹⁵ Raúl Villa-Lobos was a shining example of this environment. An avid scholar as well as a cellist and chamber music connoisseur, Raúl taught Heitor how to play the cello and encouraged him to learn the clarinet as well. In fact, Raúl Villa-Lobos would invite friends over to their home to discuss and play parts of operas and chamber music.¹⁶ In an interview, quoted by Gerard Béhague, Villa-Lobos recounted some of his time spent with his father,

With him, I always attended rehearsals, concerts, and operas... I also learned how to play the clarinet, and I was required to identify the genre, style, character and origin of compositions, in addition to recognizing quickly the name of a note, of sounds or noises... Watch out, when I didn’t get it right.¹⁷

¹³ Mariz, *Villa-Lobos*, 10.

¹⁴ L.M. Peppercorn, “Some Aspects of Villa-Lobos’s Principles of Composition,” *The Music Review* 4, no.1 (1943): 14.

¹⁵ Tarasti, *Heitor Villa-Lobos*, 8-15.

¹⁶ Peppercorn, “Father and Son,” 22; Mariz, *Villa-Lobos*, 4-5.

¹⁷ Béhague, *Brazil’s Musical Soul*, 3.

Raúl Villa-Lobos also instilled in Heitor a loving fascination for Brazil's people, geographical regions, and folklore.¹⁸ According to Lisa Peppercorn, he would show his son maps of the hinterlands and tell stories about the people who lived there. It is thought that his father's story telling may have in part inspired Villa-Lobos's later ballet, *Amazonas*.¹⁹

When he was six years old, Villa-Lobos experienced these far-off places in person. Rio de Janeiro was under the power of Marshall Floriano Peixoto who would soon become the next president. After the publication of Raúl's articles criticizing the Marshall, he moved his family out of the capital and settled in the region of Minas Gerais where, according to Vasco Mariz, Heitor first became acquainted with the folk music of the Brazilian hinterlands.²⁰ One of these folk traditions that Villa-Lobos featured in his compositions was *ciranda*, which will be discussed in chapter two.²¹

After the family returned to Rio de Janeiro around 1896, young Villa-Lobos took to making music with other children in the neighborhood, leading ultimately to his learning guitar and setting him on a path to becoming a Brazilian street musician.²² When he came home, he would play popular children's songs he learned from his friends on his cello and improvise pieces based on them.²³ In addition, Villa-Lobos started learning guitar with the help of a neighbor, keeping the fact a secret because of the lower class associations of the instrument.²⁴

¹⁸ Peppercorn, "Father and Son," 21.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Mariz, *Villa-Lobos*, 4.

²¹ Eldia Carla Farias, "Creative Treatment of Folk Melodies in Selected Cirandinhas and Cirandas of Heitor Villa-Lobos," (DMA diss., University of Kentucky, 2015), 24.

²² Peppercorn, "Father and Son," 23.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Béhague, *Brazil's Musical Soul*, 4.

After Villa-Lobos's father died suddenly in 1899, Villa-Lobos's trajectory as a musician accelerated, particularly as a street musician; this trajectory also led him indirectly to discover the works of Bach. Villa-Lobos took the opportunity to join local *choro* groups, particularly one that played at the restaurant Cavaquinho de Ouro.²⁵ In fact, he developed a very unique and virtuosic style of playing the guitar in which he would use all five fingers of his right hand.²⁶ This style not only made him stand out amongst *chorões*, but also appears in his classical compositions, particularly the second movement of Quartet No.3. However, his mother did not approve of this lifestyle because of the now strained financial situation of the family, and she wished her son to pursue a more lucrative job, such as medicine. This created tension because Villa-Lobos preferred his street-musician life. In order to escape this tension, Villa-Lobos would occasionally stay with his aunt Leopoldina do Amaral, or "Zizinha," a pianist with a fondness for Bach.²⁷ It is possible that this is where Villa-Lobos first got his inspiration for his *Bachianas Brasileiras*.

By 1913, Villa-Lobos was working in both the classical and popular music scenes; it was also the year he married Lucília Guimarães, a concert pianist. Although Villa-Lobos had made attempts at writing piano music before this, he did not have the practical skills to inform his composition. According to his wife, she was the one to teach him the basics of piano.²⁸ Afterwards, he composed numerous piano works, many of which were premiered by Lucília

²⁵ Tarasti, *Life and Works*, 38.

²⁶ Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia, *Choro*, 187.

²⁷ Wright, *Villa-Lobos*, 3.

²⁸ Tarasti, *Life and Works*, 40.

Guimarães.²⁹ During this time Villa-Lobos was also performing as a cellist with the Rio de Janeiro Symphony and Opera Orchestra.³⁰

The Fork in the Road

An important shift in Villa-Lobos's trajectory occurred during his trip to Paris in 1923. He was given a grant to travel to Paris after many of his pieces, including some of his early quartets, were included in the pivotal "Week of Modern Art." Although Villa-Lobos was expected to go to Paris to learn, his attitude was not that of a student. According to Tiago de Oliveira Pinto, "In his own words – he was never lacking in self-confidence – he embarked for Europe in order to show what he had already done, and not in order to continue his studies."³¹ However, it took him time to gain attention, and he ultimately discovered that in order to hook the interest of the musical elite in France, he had to lean into what made him unique: his Brazilian heritage.³²

Villa-Lobos took advantage of his inherent exoticism by not only making the Brazilian elements in his work more obvious, but also by building up the hype around not only the music but also around himself. This involved telling many tall tales. According to these stories, he traveled into the wilds of Brazil in his youth and was abducted by cannibals, where he heard the folk melodies he placed in his compositions. He also told of how he met and rescued his wife from among the natives.³³ He continued to tell and embellish these stories throughout his life,

²⁹ Béhague, *Brazil's Musical Soul*, 8.

³⁰ L.M. Peppercorn, "Heitor Villa-Lobos," *The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians* (1985), 2368.

³¹ Tiago de Oliveira Pinto, "Art is Universal – On Nationalism and Universality in the Music of Heitor Villa-Lobos," *The World of Music* 29, no. 2 (1987): 107.

³² Peppercorn, "Heitor Villa-Lobos" 2369.

³³ L.M. Peppercorn, "Villa-Lobos's Brazilian Excursions," *Musical Times* 113, no.1549 (March 1972), 263.

never denying them, leading some scholars to wonder if he had begun to believe them himself. Needless to say, his own countrymen were not terribly pleased with his fantasies.

The turn to emphasize his Brazilian heritage has led scholars to view the earlier works as based almost entirely on European tradition, and the later works as a renunciation of tradition. Lisa Peppercorn, for example, views Villa-Lobos's use of Brazilian characteristics as a distinct point of change in his style.

It was the turning point in Villa-Lobos's life. He had made one of the most important decisions in his entire career. He renounced the past, took leave from traditions, broke almost completely with everything to which he had adhered previously.³⁴

Although this may be partly true, the strong influences of both Brazilian popular music and classical music in his life mean that Villa-Lobos was the legitimate child of two musical worlds: the European classical tradition, and Brazilian popular and folk tradition. Rather than saying that he renounced the past, perhaps it should be said that when he came to a fork in the road, he chose a side. Villa-Lobos's early use of Brazilian influences is particularly evident in his third string quartet.

Quartet No. 3

Of Villa-Lobos's seventeen string quartets, the first four were written between 1915 and 1917. Quartet No.3, written in 1916, is a snapshot of the time just before his post-Paris shift in style, and yet it is not well studied.³⁵ This may be due to the fact that the string quartets written

³⁴ L.M. Peppercorn, "Foreign Influences in Villa-Lobos's Music," *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv*, 3, no.1 (1977): 37.

³⁵ Virginia Farmer, "An Analytical Study of the Seventeen String Quartets of Heitor Villa-Lobos," (DMA diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1973); Lisa M. Peppercorn, *Villa-Lobos: The Music - An Analysis of His Style* (White Plains, NY: Pro/Am Music Resources Inc. 1991); Tarasti, *Life and Works*.

after Villa-Lobos's visit to Paris were more overt in the inclusion of Brazilian themes, drawing more attention from scholars. As a result, the early quartets are sometimes dismissed as being derivative of Russian and Impressionist music.³⁶

The four movements are entitled *Allegro non troppo*, *Molto Vivo*, *Molto Adagio*, and *Allegro con Fuoco*. This structure of movements is like that of Ravel's string quartet in F Major and Debussy's string quartet in G minor in terms of tempo relationships. With all three works containing a pizzicato-centric second movement, it is clear why some scholars have seen a strong line of influence between the French Impressionists and Villa-Lobos's early string quartets. However, there is little evidence of Villa-Lobos's familiarity with either of those quartets, though he certainly performed other works by those composers during his time playing at the theater in 1913.³⁷

The first movement, discussed in chapter 3, demonstrates Villa-Lobos's brand of contrapuntal writing, primarily built through the use and layering of themes. In addition to this Bachian idea, he applies his experience from choro ensemble performance to his treatment of subjects. This is significant as this quartet's blending of Bach and Brazil predates Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras* series by almost fifteen years. The themes introduced in this movement continue to appear throughout the piece.

The second movement stems from Villa-Lobos's renowned choro guitar technique. This movement features complex rhythms, often pitting the instruments against each other. The

³⁶ Farmer, "The Seventeen String Quartets," 112; Peterson, Elaine Leigh Peterson, "The Quintette En Forme de Choros by Heitor Villa-Lobos: An Analysis of Stylistic Influences," (DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2004), 60-61; Pinto, "Art is Universal," 106; Tarasti, *Life and Works*, 3.

³⁷ Pinto, "Art is Universal," 60-61.

inclusion of left hand pizzicato and other extended techniques makes this a truly challenging work for performers.

As will be discussed in chapter two, choro is not the only genre that Villa-Lobos draws from. The third movement is derived from *modinha*, a Brazilian song form. In this movement, Villa-Lobos incorporates extended techniques and florid melodies to achieve some of the most beautiful sound colors of the quartet.

The final movement of the quartet synthesizes all the themes and melodies of the previous movements into a virtuosic choro session. Musicians participating in choro often seek to compete and even trip each other up with ever increasing complexity of rhythm. In this movement, the competitive nature of the choro musician is woven into the fabric of the score, resulting in a tumult of combatting rhythms and syncopations. It is a blustery end to this work and can only be properly understood through a discussion of choro, which will be presented in the next chapter.

2. CHORO, MODINHA AND CIRANDA

In order to better understand the Brazilian influences present in Villa-Lobos's chamber music, this chapter will lay the groundwork for the genres themselves, such as *choro*, *modinha*, and *ciranda*. As a choro performer in Rio de Janeiro, Villa-Lobos would have been highly familiar with the popular genres of choro and modinha. His exposure to the folk tradition of ciranda may have come from his time in Minas Gerais or his later travels in the Bahia region. Each of these genres make an appearance in his music, including Quartet No. 3.

Choro

As is true of many music genres, the term choro has come to mean various things over the years. It can mean a group or ensemble, a style of playing, or a social gathering where this style is performed.³⁸ In the late nineteenth century, this style was participatory, rather than for formal performance.³⁹ Choro musicians, or *chorões*, many of whom had day jobs, would gather at clubs, cafés, or restaurants and enjoy making music together over food and drink.

What started out as gatherings of street musicians at the beginning of the twentieth century, became the flagship of the Brazilian national musical identity through professional choro performances. In order to further his nationalist policies in the 1930s, President Getúlio Vargas employed professional musicians to perform the popular genre in a series of concerts.⁴⁰

³⁸ Livingston-Isenhour, *Choro*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

This, combined with Villa-Lobos's efforts, brought choro from the street cafés to the concert stage.

Typical instrumentation of choro groups of the early twentieth century included a melodic instrument such as a flute or other woodwind that would play an ornamented version of a familiar melody, often a popular song. For this reason, choro music cannot be defined as folk music, as folk melodies are often either created by a group or anonymously.⁴¹ Choro music also does not typically include a singer, making it a truly instrumental genre.

The rest of the accompanying ensemble can be made up of guitar, *cavaquinho* (a small steel guitar), and a *pandeiro* (a type of tambourine). Each instrument takes on a role within the group, though these roles may be traded during improvised music-making. According to musicologists and choro enthusiasts Thomas Garcia and Tamara Livingston-Isenhour, the roles of the choro ensemble are the melody, the center, the bass, and the rhythm.⁴² These roles can be filled by multiple musicians each in a larger ensemble, or one musician per. With the informality of the meetings, personnel may change over the course of an evening as musicians come and go.

The melody instrument tends to dictate the direction of the ensemble, often playing improvised versions of the melody. This and the participatory nature of choro can be compared with jazz. However, while jazz improvisations tend to be harmonically derived, choro improvisations never stray too far from the established melody, ensuring that each variation is recognizable. This can be seen in Quartet No.3 with every restatement of a theme being altered, but not so much as to be undiscernible from the original.

⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

⁴² Ibid, 3.

This focus on horizontally generated material may explain why Villa-Lobos admitted to having been influenced only by Brazilian music and Bach. He was certainly aware of Bach's superb use of melodic counterpoint, having been introduced to it by his Aunt Zizinha, and sought to develop his own Brazilian version of the technique. Choro performance practice and Villa-Lobos's counterpoint complement each other uniquely and are on display throughout his third string quartet.

Returning to the roles within a choro ensemble, the center role is typically taken by the cavaquinho (steel guitar), which provides the rhythmic and harmonic basis for the piece. It does this by strumming chords and emphasizing off-beats. This instrument has a percussive quality to it, making it an effective driver for the ensemble. Garcia and Livingston-Isenhour also point out that the up and down strokes provide difference of emphasis, making the syncopations and rhythms it provides more poignant.⁴³ Villa-Lobos evokes the percussive timbre of this instrument through the use of major 2nd intervals, whose overtones ring less than thirds, sixths or fifths. This device is seen in movements two and four of Quartet No.3.

Because the cavaquinho/center is responsible for the harmonic structure, the guitar is free to improvise a bassline and riffs, which may also be traded with the cavaquinho. The goal of the musicians, however, is to add without duplicating. For this reason, syncopations and accents may be placed in different spots than the other instrument, ultimately resulting in an interlocking framework of continuous sixteenth notes, as is most obvious in the fourth movement, though is also present in the pizzicato movement.

⁴³ Ibid, 5.

The final instrument to be added to the choro ensemble is the pandeiro, a type of tambourine. It fills the rhythmic role by providing a constant sixteenth note pattern in much the same way the inner voices do in the fourth movement Quartet No.3. It then plays accents on the second or third sixteenth note of a given beat. While the pandeiro line will typically provide continuity for the other members, it may also play against the other musicians, thus issuing a challenge to the other improvising *chorões* to “play against the groove.”⁴⁴

Because Villa-Lobos was a practitioner of choro, it is important to understand its aesthetic attitude in relation to his style. Choro wants to show off, to rebel, to dare the other musicians to trip up. Thomas Garcia and Tamara Livingston-Isenhour refer to this attitude as *Malícia*. This term originally came from African slaves rebelling against their masters under the guise of feigned fealty.⁴⁵ In choro, it refers to the competitive spirit of the musicians who would show off their skills either through tripping up their comrades with increasingly complicated rhythms or failing to take the bait. As Vasco Mariz so eloquently puts it,

...the chorao has a deep feeling for the spontaneity of his creation. He would surrender his soul when playing. It was to him a cult, a religion. The chorao lived to play, to compose, and to sing.⁴⁶

Modinha

Another popular genre associated with choro is modinha, which predated and gave rise to many urban genres, choro included. It originated in Brazil in the late eighteenth century as a sentimental serenade for voice and guitar that could be compared to an art song. It was taken to Portugal, where the guitar was replaced by the piano, an instrument deemed more appropriate for

⁴⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁶ Mariz, *Villa-Lobos*, 6.

salon performances. This is significant as it means that modinha began as a Brazilian tradition before it was adopted by Europeans. Before the turn of the twentieth century, the part of the voice was replaced by a wind instrument, often a flute, and rhythms from the increasingly popular choro were included.⁴⁷ Although choro arguably was spawned from modinha, the two styles coexisted, and it was not uncommon for choro groups to play these serenades as a contrast to the more energetic fare.

Ciranda

Another genre that Villa-Lobos may have become familiar with in his travels, particularly in North Brazil, is ciranda. In fact, he wrote a series of cirandas and *cirandinhas* in the 1920s.⁴⁸ Ciranda is a round dance from Portugal in which people would gather in a circle and dance for hours. The music for this dance is primarily percussive, though a singer may also be a part of the group. Villa-Lobos's own cirandas included folk songs for children, which he transcribed for piano.⁴⁹ The foundation of the dance is a rhythmic ostinato that shares its sixteenth note underpinnings with choro. As in choro, multiple percussion instruments may emphasize different off-beat sixteenth notes.⁵⁰ A change in the ostinato pattern is a cue to the dancers to change the direction of the dance circle.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Livingston-Isenhour, *Choro*, 22-23.

⁴⁸ Gustavo Schafaschek, "Villa-Lobos's Compositional Techniques and Treatment of Folk Melodies in Cirandas for Piano" (DMA diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2017), 27.

⁴⁹ Schafaschek, "Compositional Techniques," 26.

⁵⁰ Michael de Miranda, Youtube Channel Host, "Ciranda lesson with Ivison and Matthias" (Tutorial), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecz0Z5C-Q_Y.

⁵¹ "Ciranda," *Music and Folklore*, <http://www.maria-brazil.org/ciranda.htm>.

The fact that Villa-Lobos wrote choros and cirandas in his middle and late periods is the obvious evidence of his decision to lean on his Brazilian roots as a composer after his first visit to Paris. But in 1916, his third quartet also carries elements of each of these genres while at the same time employing contrapuntal techniques. The following chapters will demonstrate this through a thematic study of each movement.

3. MOVEMENT I

This movement takes the idea of contrapuntal subjects and treats them in a Brazilian manner. Villa-Lobos uses techniques such as fragmentation, augmentation, and diminution, and then layers them resulting in an unfolding development where the texture can become very thick. However, even within the complex texture, the melodies themselves remain recognizable. This approach to melodic alteration may relate to the creation of a choro, where melodies are only varied as far as they remain recognizable. The interest comes from weaving the different players' lines, often resulting in an elaborate rhythmic tapestry. It is possible that this is the reason that uses of retrograde and inversion are rare within this work, as the listener may not immediately recognize it.

Harmony

None of the movements carry a key signature, and Villa-Lobos certainly does not adhere to tonal harmonic language. Shown in Example 1, the first chord of the first movement is an F major seventh chord, which tempts listeners to think of the Ravel Quartet in F Major (Example 2), which begins with a similar harmony. However, it is a very short-lived similarity and the movement ends on what can perhaps be described as an A minor seventh with an added ninth. This unfinished effect of the nontonic-sounding last chord is fitting as it demands completion in the remaining movements. The fact that this quartet ends in an ambiguous tonal area different from the one in which it began is one of the clues that this quartet, while evoking music by

European masters of the day, plays by different rules. That is, this quartet is not built harmonically, but melodically and contrapuntally.

Example 1 – Villa-Lobos String Quartet No.3, Mvt.1 – Opening and mm. 189-End

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system on the left is the opening of the piece, featuring a 'Solo' section with dynamics of *p* and *p*. The second system on the right shows the end of the movement, marked with 'harm.' and a dotted line above it, indicating a harmonic section.

Example 2 – Ravel String Quartet in F Major - Opening

The image shows the opening of Ravel's String Quartet in F Major. It consists of four staves (violin I, violin II, viola, and cello) in 4/4 time, all marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

Although this movement is harmonically ambiguous, there are moments where Villa-Lobos achieves an effect seen in Bach fugues to signal the approach to the final cadence: the pedal. Starting in m. 150, shown in Example 3, a quarter note triplet ostinato appears in the cello, acting as a predominant pedal. The viola takes the ostinato from the cello in m. 175 and moves it up a seventh while the cello holds a new pedal tone. In a fugue, the pedal would likely have moved to the dominant here, but the harmonic ambiguity makes this difficult to determine as there is no real guessing what the tonic actually is.

Example 3 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 150-159

Brazilian Influences

The movement opens with a series of parallel chords with the second violin, viola and cello moving in fifths, seen in Example 4. This use of parallel motion is a common characteristic in Villa-Lobos's music and of this quartet. The reason behind this is connected with choro guitar playing in which parallel intervals are played sliding up and down the fretboard.⁵² A synonymous section begins in m. 17, only this time, the cello's lower line is missing, while the upper is given to the viola to play parallel fifths. The first violin joins the parallel motion at a fifth above the what was previously the melody in the second violin. This idea of sliding intervals reappears often throughout the movement, including a spot in mm. 28-36 as the cello plays a series of parallel fifths.

⁵² Livingston-Isenhour, *Choro*, 189.

Example 4 – Villa-Lobos String Quartet No.3, Mvt.1 - Mm. 1-3

1st Violon
2^d Violon
Alto
Violoncelle

Allº non troppo (M. ♩=120)

Solo

p < *p*

p < *p*

p < *p*

Thematic Treatment

True to the influences of a contrapuntal structures, such as a fugue, most of this movement is derived from material presented in mm. 1-10 of the first and second violin lines, as seen in Example 5. These themes and their variations in this movement reappear in the following movements, creating thematic continuity throughout the work. The prime subject appears in the second violin line in the first three measures, marked “solo” and is answered at the major 2nd by the first violin in diminution. Because of the liberal use of the first violin’s version of the subject, it is labeled as Sv.1 The remaining instruments arguably continue to play a countersubject, still moving in parallel motion until m.6.

Example 5 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 1-11

1st Violon
2^d Violon
Alto
Violoncelle

Allº non troppo (M. ♩=120)

Solo

p < *p*

mf

p < *p*

p < *p*

Continuing in the vein of fugal entrances, the cello plays a statement of Sv.1 at the sixth, starting in m.11. The viola answers in m. 13, also starting on a C-sharp. Once each instrument has voiced the prime subject or its variation, the prime subject from the opening bars returns in m.17.

After measure 17, many of the entrances are altered either by interval or by rhythm, suggesting the beginning of a fugal episode. For instance, the cello reenters in m. 20 with an altered version of Sv.1, as seen in Example 6 below.

Example 6 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 19-24

The prime subject reappears in the first violin part in m.30, this time starting on a G-flat. Instead of being accompanied with parallel chords in a more homophonic texture as in the previous iterations in the opening and in m.17, the texture here is more polyphonic. Measure 30 also marks the beginning of another set of entrances of the prime subject and Sv.1 in each voice except for the viola. The first violin has the prime form of the subject, followed by the answer in diminution in m.33 of the second violin. Although in diminution, this answer is at the same pitch of the prime subject. This is followed by the first violin with a true answer at the octave.

The material in the cello in mm. 38-39, shown in Example 7, is also sourced from Sv.1, but with added passing tones and arpeggios. It seems to serve as a transition to another set of entrances of the subject variation, starting with the first violin in measure 41. This new version of the subject, or Sv.2 is stated in its entirety until m.45, accompanied by the other three voices in syncopation. Another section of Sv.2 entrances begins in m. 93 in which the latter half of the subject appears in rhythmic augmentation.

Example 7 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 38-46

From m.65 to the end, a triplet motive works its way to becoming an almost constant motor. At first it is passed back and forth in the form of arpeggios or neighbor tones. Then they

appear in rhythmic augmentation in the viola in mm. 73-76, where they are picked up by the second violin in mm. 77-80. This is significant as these triplets morph into a new theme, or Sv.3. played by the second violin in mm. 89-91, seen below in Example 8.

Example 8 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 89-92

Performance

Because of Villa-Lobos's approach to his themes and subjects, performers must contend with issues of balance arising from the notated voicing. One such issue occurs in mm. 17-21, with the restatement of the prime subject, now raised a fifth with the first violin, sans cello. On paper, this is a conundrum in terms of voice prominence. Up until this point, Villa-Lobos demonstrates which voice should be heard most by marking that voice as *solo*, or by assigning it a higher dynamic level, which he continues to do throughout the piece. Here, all the voices carry the same dynamic and there is no *solo* marking. Rule of thumb would state that the first violin should be prominent. However, if the musicians attempt to play this passage from the top down, they will find that the stacks of fifths will not sound in-tune. Here is one of the many spots in this piece where it must be trusted that the first violin will be heard due to its higher register and that best balance will come through a stronger viola.

In mm. 72-76 is another ensemble balance issue. All instruments have a crescendo and the violins are in a high register. However, the viola is marked at the highest dynamic level with double stops. The viola should be the primary voice here, but its middle register is unlikely to override the two violins at a true forte with a crescendo, and the cello in its low register. This is a spot where the violins will have to start the crescendo from an even softer piano and fit their sound within that of the viola for a more eventual dynamic rise. Even then, it is unlikely that they will be able to go to a full forte without drowning out the viola.

Sometimes this movement raises questions of voice prominence, especially in very thick, layered sections where the melodies have been severely fragmented. This occurs starting in m. 49 with the second violin's statement of Sv.2, which is interrupted by the first violin with the latter half of the same subject, giving the illusion of stretto. This section is shown in Example 9. In addition to this, the cello enters at m. 51 with the prime subject. As if the texture was not thick enough, a triplet motive, derived from the second violin in m. 6, flits in and amongst the voices. This contrapuntal flex on Villa-Lobos's part creates a challenge for the performers who must bring out their melodic fragments to form a cohesive melody. In addition to this, there are sometimes secondary and even tertiary melodies occurring at the same time. Villa-Lobos tries to provide clarity by marking higher dynamic levels when a motive should take prominence. For the individual performer this presents a line that is divided, sometimes quite abruptly, by subito fortes and pianissimos. When done correctly however, it should sound like waves of melodies coming in and out.

Example 9 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 47-66

Occasionally the musicians are faced with a coordination decision that can be made according to either expediency or to knowledge of Brazilian performance practice. For example, in mm. 25-30 the second violin plays a set of triplets; an accent is placed on the very last triplet

of the measure and the note is tied over to the downbeat of m.30. This is an interesting place to put an accent and can be likened to the placement of emphasis in choro and ciranda. There are a couple of ways to play this passage. It can be played perfectly in time, allowing the rest of the ensemble simply to enter on m.30 metronomically. Alternatively, the second violin, being the only moving line, can dictate the tempo and any fluctuation thereof in the last triplets. In the spirit of choro, the latter makes more sense. This is a moment where the musicians must listen very carefully. If a choro group were to perform this, it is likely that this measure would be timed differently each time for the amusement of keeping the other musicians on their toes, thus invoking that attitude of *malícia*, as described in chapter two.

This *malícia* can also be found in statements of Sv.3, starting with the 2nd violin mm. 125-126. The cello picks it up in m.127, and reiterates it twice more, each time moving up in register, ultimately moving to alto clef. In the cello's second and more insistent statement of Sv.3, the first violin enters with a competing statement of the prime subject. In the spirit of choro, these lines are in competition. At best, one can be labeled melody and countermelody, but they must both vie for the listener's attention. This competition climaxes in mm. 141-148 as the first violin and cello trade subjects. The violin plays Sv.3 in a higher register while the cello takes the prime form, with powerful, double-stopped parallel fifths.

This movement, and the rest of the quartet, contains extended string techniques. Starting in measure 82 are statements the prime subject are played with harmonics, starting with the viola and the cello. This is shown in Example 10. The violins come in with the prime subject and an Sv.1 segment in mm. 84-85 and 87-88 respectively, also in harmonics.

Example 10 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.1 – Mm. 84-88

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, specifically measures 84-88 of the first movement of Villa-Lobos' Quartet No. 3. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The music is characterized by a high density of harmonics, indicated by the 'harm.' markings and solfège syllables (Si, Ré, Mi, Sol, La, Ln) placed above the notes. The dynamics range from forte (f) to piano (p). The score is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The notation includes various articulations and phrasing marks, such as accents and slurs.

A striking feature of this movement is Villa-Lobos’s extensive use of harmonics. The harmonics written for the viola and cello in particular are sometimes a bit misleading. In the score, they are marked as double stopped, natural harmonics, or harmonics that are created by placing a finger lightly on a node point of the string. This technique effectively “cuts” the string shorter, resulting in a higher pitch usually an octave or higher than a fully stopped string. The pitches of natural harmonics are limited to the ones occurring on these nodes. To make up for this limitation, artificial harmonics can be created by fully stopping a string with one finger, often the index or thumb (for cello), and placing another finger lightly on the now artificially relocated node. This allows for virtually any pitch class to be played as a harmonic. In the score, however, the notation denotes natural harmonics that simply do not exist. Villa-Lobos then marks solfège syllables over the tops of these faux harmonics to denote pitch relationships within the double-stops. This suggests that his use of harmonic notation simply indicates that the tones should be in the form of harmonics, but it is left up to the performer to figure out how. For this reason, this section cannot be read literally in terms of technical information and the use of artificial harmonics is indeed necessary.

As the movement approaches its conclusion, the cello takes up Sv.3 in rhythmic augmentation. The first violin plays one last motive derived from the ninth measure of the second violin part, complete with the displaced accents. The viola dictates the allargando as the ostinato begins to run out of steam, bringing the quartet to rest on the atmospheric, ambiguous cadence, made up of harmonics and open strings. The only instrument not on a harmonic or an open string is the second violin, who can elect to play its B senza vibrato to match the texture of the other strings.

Movement one of this quartet serves as an introduction to the work as a whole. It is an early synthesis of Villa-Lobos's two loves: Bach and Brazil. Its subjects continue to appear throughout the work and the Brazilian elements, though tame in this movement, will only grow in prominence as the piece progresses.

4. MOVEMENT II

The second movement of Quartet No. 3 carries the subtitle “*Pipocas*,” or popcorn, in reference to the liberal inclusion of pizzicato. What makes this pizzicato movement stand out from the Ravel or Debussy pizzicato movements is the significant amount of left hand pizzicato, which is a tricky technique, even for advanced players. This chapter will discuss how Villa-Lobos references Brazilian guitar in this movement, how he continues to use the subjects of the first movement along with new material, the movement’s quasi-sonata form, and performance issues that arise from extended pizzicato techniques.

Guitar and Other Brazilian Influences

As mentioned in chapter 2, Villa-Lobos developed a technique of choro guitar playing that involved the use of all five of the fingers of his right hand, resulting in a very distinct sound. This influence is evident in this movement with the abundant use of left hand pizzicato, an apt analog for Villa-Lobos’s unique method. This technique also lends to the virtuosic nature of the movement.

Villa-Lobos’s treatment of rhythm in this movement also comes from his choro experience. The movement opens with the viola playing pizzicato double-stop triplets, alternating right and left hand pizzicato. This constant motor is reminiscent of the role of the *pandeiro* (tambourine) in providing rhythmic continuity within a choro group. The difference here is that the basic rhythmic unit is the triplet as opposed to choro’s sixteenth notes. The motor

in this movement alternates between triplets and duples, creating a shift in the groove for the other musicians to play from, which is also similar to a choro session.

Throughout this piece, it is common for the instruments to play multiple subdivisions against each other, creating a chaotic rhythmic complexity as each instrument adds variety while avoiding duplicating another line. This, again, is a principle of choro performance practice. One example of this begins with the cello's first entrance, a descending scale, or Theme 1, which presents sixteenth notes against the triplet motor. After the cello repeats the theme, the violins play leaping eighth notes, three against the two downbeats of the cello. All of this is over the top of the viola's triplet ostinato, as shown in Example 11.

Example 11 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 1-11

Molto vivo (M. ♩ = 144)

The musical score consists of four staves: 1st Violon, 2^d Violon, Alto, and Violoncelle. The 1st Violon staff is mostly empty. The 2^d Violon staff has a triplet of eighth notes. The Alto staff has a triplet of eighth notes. The Violoncelle staff has a descending scale of sixteenth notes. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *p*, and *mf*, and performance instructions like *Pizz.* and *Solo*. A first ending bracket is marked with a '1' in a box.

Another rhythmically complex passage occurs in m.49, when the first violin takes the melody, Theme 2, and the second violin plays duples against the triplet pattern of the first. The

cello and viola move to playing three notes to a measure, creating that layered set of syncopations.

The rhythmic complexity of Brazilian choro again appears in a section that takes an old idea and shifts the groove. After the Theme 2 section there is a return to Tempo 1 (see Example 12) and the reappearance of the triplet motor in the second violin. However, the feel of this section is different due to the alternating on and off-beats of the viola and cello, creating emphasis on the first, third, and fifth eighths, resulting in a hemiola. In fact, the viola is even notated with a simple duple time signature against the compound duple of the rest of the ensemble. The first violin completes the effect by adding a slurred pizzicato motive/counter melody from the previous section.

Example 12 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 53-62

The idea of competition and the inclusion of riffs is a hallmark of the participatory nature of choro and appears in mm. 68-76. Here there is a fight for control of the motor as the cello and second violin alternate between triplets and duples. Sometimes these alternating rhythms are

played against each other as the viola plays a repeating motive derived from Theme 1 in a riff-like style.

With all the syncopations and subdivisions throughout this movement, moments of rhythmic agreement stand out. This occurs in m.77 (see Example 13) as the whole ensemble lands on duple chords, ascending in parallel motion in much the same way a guitarist would slide chords up the fretboard. Another instance of this happens in mm. 173-176 and briefly in mm. 227-228.

Example 13 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 76-85

In addition to the guitar-like pizzicato and the rhythmic complexity between the instruments, Villa-Lobos also goes so far as to duplicate the timbres of instruments traditionally included in a choro group. In mm. 92-152, triplet double stops with a major 2nd interval are passed around the ensemble. This is a device of Villa-Lobos's to create a more percussive sound,

perhaps derived from early choro that did not yet include the pandeiro and had to rely on the guitar and the cavaquinho (small steel guitar) to fill the rhythmic, percussive roles.

The percussive major 2nds return in mm. 215-220, played by the violins, in duples. The lower strings move to a syncopated, and augmented version of Theme 2. The roles of the upper strings and lower strings are reversed as the violins take the augmented Theme 2 over the cello and viola 2nds, which soon switch to triplets for the final time in this movement.

Returning Themes

As alluded to in the previous chapter, Villa-Lobos continues to bring back musical material from the previous movement and add it to the new material of this one. The first instance of this is in m.27 with the appearance of the prime subject of the first movement, divided note by note between the violins and viola in the form of plucked chords. Another occurs from mm. 121-152 with the reappearance and slight reimagining of Sv.2 which is passed from the second violin to the first violin and cello. This is combined with this movement's pizzicato-glissando motive (mm. 121-122) as well as other new material. Finally, in m. 55 the lower strings pluck resonating chords on the downbeats of each measure, resulting in yet another appearance of the prime subject from the first movement in augmentation. This happens again in what will later be described as a coda in mm. 199-214.

Form and New Themes

This movement uses Villa-Lobos's version of sonata form. Traditionally, a sonata form contains an exposition in which themes in (often) contrasting key areas are presented, followed by a development section, recapitulation, and sometimes a coda. This is not a common-practice era sonata because it does not employ the opposition of tonal areas characteristic of sonata

procedures, making the structure rather nebulous in reference to key areas. However, there are two distinct melodic themes indigenous to this movement that are presented before what appears to be a development section (m. 53), which also sees the return of material from the preceding movement. A partial recapitulation (m. 177) follows and the piece ends with new material that can best be described as a coda, starting in m. 199.

The exposition begins with Theme 1 being presented by the cello in the third bar, to be picked up by the violins in the pickup to m. 9, but only the second violin repeats the theme's rhythms exactly, as the first violin embellishes with filler sixteenth notes. By this time, the cello has taken over the motor and has made it duple while the viola responds by matching the duple patterns and adding sixteenth triplets via left hand pizz. This motive gets tossed around the ensemble until the original triplets return in m. 15.

A transition occurs starting in m. 33 as the cello plays pizzicato glissandi against the second violin's triplet motor. An embellished version of Theme 1 between the first violin and viola has now turned into descending scales. The fortissimo tumult seems to lose steam as it slows to a full stop just before m. 41. Here begins a new tempo, and a new theme, which will be called Theme 2. It is first presented by the viola in mm. 41-42 with whole tone characteristics. In sonata terms this could be vaguely referred to as the second tonal area, or perhaps more aptly as a second theme area.

A development section begins in m. 53 with a return of the original tempo and the triplet motor from before. In fact, the following section does naught else but develop the two main themes and the previously introduced motives. In m. 55, there is the first instance of arco in the piece as the first violin plays a rhythmically augmented version of Theme 2, following in up with

the left hand pizzicato of Theme 1. The triplet motor continues in the second violin line, now without the added hemiola.

Throughout the development, Villa-Lobos continues to alter and develop his themes through rhythmic manipulation and transposition, even occasionally throwing in new material. For example, in m.87 the first violin presents a new theme that appears only once. That said, it could also be argued that its roots come from the descending scalar motion of Theme 1.

Finally, there is a recapitulation at m. 177, with the first violin starting off the triplet motor and the second violin taking what was previously the cello's Theme 1 entrance. The leaping pizzicato response previously played by the violins is now played by the lower strings. The triplet, sixteenth-note motive returns and is passed around until m.188. While this cannot be said to be a tonal recapitulation, nor does it repeat all the material, it is the only reappearance of this exact combination of themes and motives as presented in the beginning of the movement.

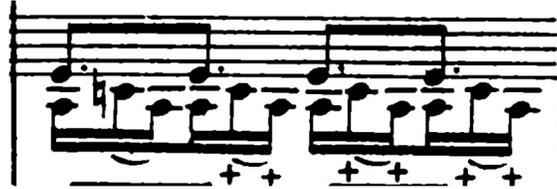
A *rallentando* leading to a full stop signals the end of the recapitulation and the beginning of the coda in m. 199. In mm. 199-214, the violins are engaged in left hand pizzicato, descending scales. This material is derived from mm. 39-40 in the section of the exposition immediately before the initial introduction of the second theme. Here it is expanded to create a unique and distinct section to end the piece.

Performance

Most of the performance difficulties in this movement arise from the use of left hand pizzicato. Theme 1 lends itself to left hand pizzicato due to its descending scalar motion, allowing the performer to place all the fingers on the string and then lift them in reverse order, plucking the string on the way. However, the motive which first appears in mm. 9-10 of the viola

part and then the violins does not follow this pattern. The second violin's version of the motive appears in Example 14.

Example 14 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – m.11 motive, Violin 2



Because of the necessary speed of the left hand pizzicato on the triplet sixteenths, and the upward arpeggiation (as opposed to downward passing motion), this is an exceedingly difficult motive to play. There are a couple of ways to do it. One way is exactly as it appears on the page: one right hand pluck followed by two left. This requires that an additional finger land above the middle note of each triplet. All fingers must land in a block to prepare for the left-hand pizzicato. While this method would be true to the score, it is remarkably difficult, especially when played on inner strings where left-hand pizzicato will already tend to be softer. Another option is to treat this motive as an effect and use what can be described as a “guitar slur.” This means plucking the first note of the triplet group and letting it ring as the finger for the next pitch lands, eliciting the sound of the next pitch without the need to pluck it individually. Then the last note of the triplet group can be played with the now-prepared left hand. The pitches will be audible, and this method can be executed quickly.

Another uncommon technique, pizzicato glissando, is introduced by the viola in m. 17 (see Example 15). This technique requires the first note to be plucked with the right hand as it slides up. Once the first (or first and second fingers) reach the next double stop, it is plucked with the pinky of the left hand. This is incredibly difficult, requiring the fingers of the left hand to remain in enough contact with the fingerboard to elicit the glissando while remaining relaxed

enough to slide. Too much tension can also keep the pinky from being free enough to pluck both strings with rhythmic accuracy.

Example 15 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 15-18

The introduction of Theme 2 in m. 41 brings with it a second violin countermelody including pizzicato slurs, resulting in a hemiola against the theme and the eighths in the first violin and cello. These pizzicato, slurred octaves are played by plucking straight across from the lower string until the finger hits and plucks the next. This is different than normal pizzicato which has the finger coming away from the string before the next note. The difference in sound is subtle and aided by the fact that the octave pattern creates the hemiola on its own.

Playing pizzicato chords can sometimes raise issues of melody prominence. In mm. 101-111, shown in Example 16, the second violin plays pizzicato chords with a note from Villa-Lobos to make the lowest notes sing out. These lowest notes are derived from the theme that the cello is playing with some inversion. To make the low notes most prominent is difficult with the open string ringing out so loudly at the top of the chord. The second violin must emphasize the lower notes and angle the pizzicato stroke so that the E string is more “grazed” than plucked. In addition to this, these chords alter the feel of the meter by switching between duple and triple over the top of the triplet motor in the first violin. This would largely be the role of the cavaquinho in the role of the “center” from chapter 2.

Example 16 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.2 – Mm. 101-105

Another voicing issue appears in mm. 233-236 as the viola plays motives from Theme 1 now notated at its loudest dynamic of triple forte. This presents a problem. Left hand pizzicato is rather difficult to make come out in the middle register while the rest of the ensemble is also playing loudly. This is a spot where the viola will have to be extra present, while the rest of the ensemble must maintain the character of the crescendo without drowning out the viola. This is especially difficult with the ringing open strings of the violins.

One last idiosyncrasy of this movement is in m.236. All the instruments play their last note on beat 2 before the empty measures, except for the second violin who has just one more eighth note. The effect is that the second violin appears to have miscounted, accidentally playing an extra note. Whether or not this was intended by the composer is impossible to tell.

Movement 2 of the third string quartet stands out in standards of motivic, rhythmic complexity, presenting its own themes and motives while also including the subjects of the previous movement. Like the first movement, the performers must contend with issues of the extended techniques that Villa-Lobos uses as well as voicing within the thick and complicated texture. The movements to come are no exception to this pattern.

5. MOVEMENT III

Molto Adagio, the third movement of Quartet No. 3, contains some of the most beautiful moments of the quartet and serves as a stark contrast to the excitement of the rest of the piece. While the previous movement was largely motivically constructed, this one features long melodies floating over the static sparkle of the accompaniment moving in homophonic harmonics. What makes this movement stand out is Villa-Lobos's use of techniques and mutes to create different sound colors.

Brazilian Influences

It has been said that Villa-Lobos uses song form in this movement.⁵³ To a degree, it is possible to find a binary form within the framework of this movement. However, it would perhaps be appropriate to compare this movement with a song genre that Villa-Lobos had firsthand knowledge of, namely modinha. Modinha was the love aria of the choro world and perhaps one of the first truly Brazilian music genres to spread to Europe. It originally featured a singer with a simple accompaniment, usually provided by a guitar.⁵⁴ Around the turn of the twentieth century, the singer was replaced by a melodic instrument. As was always the case with serenaders, improvised lines were common.

⁵³ Farmer, "The Seventeen String Quartets," 111.

⁵⁴ Livingston-Isenhour, *Choro*, 22.

This improvisatory spirit is also present in the manner melodic material is presented. The first instrument presents a melodic idea which is then taken up by the next instrument and extended. This is different than the idea of fugal entrances where the subject is stated in its entirety before being cannibalized for motives. The development of the melodies in this third movement seems to mirror the building of ideas that occurs when musicians improvise together. As an aside, the fact that these melodies and motives are largely arpeggiated suggests that Villa-Lobos was looking more to the instrumental *modinha* with idiomatic leaps rather than the earlier vocal tradition, which would feature more stepwise voice leading.

Old and New Themes

As has been the pattern so far, Villa-Lobos continues to sprinkle in material from previous movements along with the new. In m.33, the cello plays an arco rendition of Theme 1 from the second movement, acting as a transition to the Largo in m.34. This same theme appears again in m.89, this time played by the first violin to herald the ending of the movement. In a new section featuring tempo changes, Sv.3 from movement one appears in a series of statements in mm. 47-48 and 51-52.

In terms of new material, Melody 1 introduced by the viola in m. 4 (Example 17). This melody is picked up and elaborated by the second violin in mm. 8-14. The melodic material presented before m. 4 by the second violin can best be described as introductory because it does not reappear.

Example 17 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.3 – Mm. 1-8

Molto adagio (in 6) (M. ♩ = 88)

Melody 2 appears in the pickup to m.37 in the viola and is shown in Example 18. While the tempo here is slightly slower than before, the line is more active with sixteenth notes and syncopations. The viola is answered at the fifth by the first violin in mm. 39-40, who again adds more to the original melodic idea.

Example 18 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.3 – Mm. 35-41



After the first violin's continued embellishments of Melody 2 through m.46, a new section with the afore mentioned Sv.3 material appears in mm. 47-56. Melody 1 returns at the A Tempo in m.57. Starting in m.61 to the end, we see a return to opening material with melodies and motives given to different instruments. The first violin takes Melody 1 in mm. 63-68 over the pizzicato harmonics in the viola and cello.

Sound Colors

Color is an important aspect of this movement; one unique color comes with instructions regarding muted strings. The use of a mute in the slow movement of a string quartet is common, especially in the impressionist period. However, Villa-Lobos includes an instruction to place the mute on the side of the bridge (rather than on top) to imitate the nasal sound of a bagpipe. This makes one wonder if this is a sound he became familiar with during his time in the hinterlands of Brazil as a child.

Regardless of the style of pipe, the modern musician will have trouble executing this command as most modern mutes will not fit over the side of the bridge. It seems that this instruction was meant for an older, wooden mute that is not commonly used anymore. However, the use of two small, wooden clothespins on each side of the bridge works as a decent stand in. The resulting sound is not only significantly dampened but is noticeably different than the tone produced by a modern mute. A modern mute produces a sound that will make this movement

sound more covered and “French.” The wooden mute stand-ins do sound more nasal, but can more positively be described as glassy, and serves as a perfect combination with the many static harmonics that this movement requires.

Another element in this movement that evokes the bagpipe is the use of drone notes. The first of these occurs in the opening with the cello’s answer to the first violin’s opening three quarter note pulse. After the viola’s Melody 1 statement in mm. 4-5, it plays another drone note which holds through the quarter note pulse of oscillating perfect fourths of the other instruments.

Sprinkled throughout the movement are quarter notes that ascend and descend in perfect fourth interval leaps. These oscillating fourths also have a drone-like quality. They return in the violins and viola over a cello drone in mm. 14-15, to be altered into quarter-note triplets by the violins in rising arpeggios derived from the leaps in Melody 1. The accompaniment settles into the oscillating quarter-notes again, along with harmonic pizzicato from the cello until the color changes at m.20, with a note to the musicians to play without vibrato. The wooden mutes, the lack of vibrato, and the almost static rhythm produces a color that is almost harmonic-like, even though neither the violins nor the viola are playing harmonics. This also provides space for the cello to enter at the end of m.20 with a singing and rhythmically augmented version of Melody 1. It is almost as if Villa-Lobos composed this while listening to church bells out his window and improvised a melody to go along with it. This idea returns in mm. 74-89. The Largo starting in m. 34 slows the tempo while also allowing the accompanying strings to come out of the texture, and bring back the vibrato for another color change, preparing for the introduction of this movement’s Melody 2.

Performance

Again, Villa-Lobos employs extended techniques that challenge the musicians. Some of these techniques and difficult-to-coordinate passages also have their roots in guitar technique and improvisation. In a very guitar-like technique, the cello emerges from the viola's drone in m.7 with pizzicato harmonics and is joined by the first violin a bar later. This technique is difficult without the guitar's frets and with the addition of a mute. The tone is rendered less resonant and more percussive than an open or fully stopped string. The metronomic and percussive nature of this section suggests that the quasi improvised line of the second violin in mm. 8-13 (Melody 1) should keep to a consistent beat, relying on the syncopations and natural contours of the line to create interest.

In contrast to this static section, a series of tempo changes follow, requiring the ensemble to choose which line will determine the new pulse. Measure 56 serves as a transition from a section of unstable tempos to the marked *Allegretto*. This transition is dictated by the second violin and viola quarter notes at the end of the measure. Although the tempo change is not written until m.57, in the spirit of the metronomic quarter notes in other parts of the movement, it makes sense for the inner voices to set the tempo for the upcoming Melody 1 syncopations, which must play off of a pulse that disappears as soon as they begin.

Finally, there is a question of tone color at the end of the movement. On the penultimate chord, all the instruments, except for the second violin, are playing open strings. This raises the issue of whether the second violin should be vibrating the last notes. Seeing as the melody is being carried by the second violin at a higher dynamic level than the others, it makes sense that vibrato should be used to warm the sound of the chord, perhaps lessening or disappearing for the

final fermata, where absolutely all of the other instruments are on open strings. This is matter of interpretation of blending and can legitimately vary from one ensemble to the next.

This movement's unique blend of color makes it truly special while also including evidence of Villa-Lobos's love of extended techniques and experimentation. Because of this, the performers must demonstrate a significant amount of skill and musical sensitivity when performing this song. This serenade serves as a breath before the plunge of the wild final movement to come.

6. MOVEMENT IV

It is almost as though Villa-Lobos were demonstrating the evolution of choro with the fourth movement of Quartet No. 3. After the modinha of the previous movement, as well as all the material presented before, the choro movement wraps it all together. He takes the now familiar melodies and plays with them in true choro fashion.

Themes old and new

It comes as no surprise that this movement has no key signature nor an easily discernible form. Bits of all the previous movements reappear, often with a steady stream of energetic, accompanying sixteenth-notes. The opening melee is shown in Example 19.

Example 19 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 1-12
Allegro con fuoco M. ♩ = 152

The musical score for Example 19 consists of four staves: 1st Violon, 2^d Violon, Alto, and Violoncelle. The tempo is marked 'Allegro con fuoco' with a metronome of 152. The 1st Violon part begins with 'mf molto spiccato'. The 2^d Violon part features 'sffp' and 'mf molto spiccato'. The Alto part also features 'sffp' and 'mf molto spiccato'. The Violoncelle part features 'sffp'. The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes with various dynamics and articulations. The 2^d Violon and Alto parts have a steady stream of sixteenth notes. The 1st Violon part has a more melodic line. The Violoncelle part has a more rhythmic line. The score is marked with 'ff très sauvage' in the 2^d Violon and Alto parts.



After the blustery opening, the movement opens with the now freshly familiar Melody 2 from the Poco Adagio of the preceding movement, here covered by the first violin and the cello in mm. 7-19. Unlike the previous movements, which start out with their own melodies before referencing others, Villa-Lobos moves directly to referencing old material. This version of Melody 2 augments the opening sixteenth notes into quarter-note triplets. The rest of the line continues in augmentation until the motive-like 16ths in m.12 and 13. Examples 20 and 20b show this comparison. In m.27, the cello rejoins the first violin in another statement of Melody 2 in augmentation, this time transposed up a third.

Example 20 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Melody 2 from Mvt.3 (mm. 39-40)



Example 20b – Mvt.4, Opening of Melody 2 (mm. 7-8)



In mm. 33-34, the first violin moves from Melody 2 of the third movement to a snatch of Sv.2 from the first movement. By this time, the viola is the only member still playing the sixteenth-note motor as the second violin line forms suspensions with the melody. The second violin line itself is formed of tritone ascending and descending leaps. These tritone oscillations could be a rhythmically and melodically augmented version of the oscillating fourths from

movement three. This is made more obvious by their appearance in diminution in mm. 47-52, which can be seen in Example 21.

Example 21 – Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 45-48

In mm. 37-38 the first violin plays what appears to be an inversion of Sv.3 (mvt.1) in augmentation, after which the viola interrupts with Melody 1 from movement three. The cello takes over the sixteenth-note motor in mm. 39-46. Before the viola finishes Melody 1, the first violin jumps in again in m.43 with the inverted and rhythmically augmented Sv.3. However, the line loses its inversion as it moves into m.46.

Another instance of layering familiar themes from all over the quartet occurs in m.47. The viola takes over the 16ths with the cello now voicing Melody 1 (mvt.3) down an octave. The second violin begins playing oscillating tritones in diminished triplets from the third movement's quarters and the first violin plays a brief motive from the second measure of the prime subject of the quartet in quarter-note triplets.

Harkening back to the pick-up 16ths of Melody 2 in the third movement, there is an argument for saying that a connection exists with that and the melodic material in the violins in mm. 64-73. The pitches in the first violin are a match for major thirds and are repeated in a motivic manner with rhythmic augmentation and syncopation. It is also arguably a variation derived from the material presented only a few bars before (m.54). In a spot like this, perhaps one should follow the principle of Ockham's Razor.

In mm. 112-122, Sv.3 from the first movement appears first in the viola and then briefly in the cello in mm. 115-117. Over the top of this, the violins enter in m.116 with a transposed prime subject, completed by the first violin in m.129. The second violin also plays the triplet arpeggio from the countersubject of the first movement in m.122 and 125, and in retrograde in m.123.

Having not been seen in a while, Theme 1 of the second movement appears, syncopated and augmented in the upper strings of mm. 166-170, although it cannot be called a true rendition with some of the intervals being altered. Sv.1 makes a comeback in mm. 270-282, played by the first violin. This is followed by another entrance of Theme 1 from the second movement played by the first violin and cello, this time with the original rhythm.

At the point at which new themes are presented, it is often done in layers with old material, making it challenging to divide the old and the new. In one circumstance, the material is hinted at early long before gaining the spotlight. One such example starts in m.35 and in m.37 with a short triplet riff introduced by the cello. In 256-269 (see Example 22), that riff is resurrected by the first violin and played as an ostinato against the slurred sixteenths of the viola. It appears again in the final drive to the end of the movement, played by both violins starting in m.342.

Example 22 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 258-262

The musical score consists of five staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. It features a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat, showing a melodic line. The third staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, showing a rhythmic pattern of slurred sixteenth notes. The fourth and fifth staves are bass clefs with a key signature of one flat, showing a melodic line. The piece ends with a double bar line and the dynamic marking 'ff'.

A section of primarily new material starts at m.53, losing the 16th note motor. A new melody is played and harmonized in the violins and violas with the cello providing a bassline. The viola splits off in m.55, echoing the melody of the first violin. Mm. 59-63 are a transition section with a significant amount of chromaticism and a descending bassline in the cello. Another new, chromatic melody is presented by the viola in mm. 98-106 which is then joined in mm. 107-112 by the upper strings. This returns in mm. 332-339 in the transition to the Vivo.

The *A Tempo* at m.171 brings back the material from m.53, but this section features an interesting, seemingly improvised melody from the second violin in mm. 176-188. It contains not only the new material from the fourth movement, but also snatches of Melody 2 from movement 3. The first violin plays a pedal point above while the lower strings play a very rhythmically augmented version of the prime subject. Not to be left out, the upper strings bring in Sv.1 until m.197. This transition seems to create a symmetry to the quartet as for the most part, prime subject material has been in the minority until this point where it is now quite blatant.

Finally, the sixteenth-note motor returns in m.199 in the lower strings, soon to be picked up by the rest of the ensemble in m.201. The accents from the beginning of the movement return in mm. 206-243. In mm. 215-243 there is a hint of a recapitulation (though not in the nonexistent “home key”) where the Melody 2 material is played by the inner voices. The melody is repeated in mm. 244-255 by the second violin while the viola branches off to play a variation of Sv.3 from movement one. By the time of m.244, the sixteenth-note motor has been smoothed by the cello into slurs and is passed to the viola in mm. 250-285. As the sixteenths return to the rhythm of the opening in m.324, the viola plays another augmented statement of the prime subject before another Theme 1 cameo from the second movement, this time played by the violins.

The final push starts at the Vivo in m.340 with the cello taking the sixteenths and walking down chromatically. The violins bring back the triplet motive ostinato, playing against the cello's groups of four sixteenths. The final touch is one last statement of the prime subject, played in octaves by the viola, lasting all the way to the energetic chords at the end.

Brazilian Influences

Any subtlety of Brazilian influence that may have existed in the first and third movements of this piece is gone in this crowning finale. The movement opens with the second violin and viola in sixteenth-note, percussive 2nds. Sixteenths notes are the basic unit of a typical choro (as noted in chapter 2) and it seems that the inner voices are playing the part of the "rhythm" instrument, or the pandeiro (tambourine). Sforzando-pianos are placed on the first and seventh sixteenths in the first bar, and the fifth of the next. This accent scheme is not unlike a typical pandeiro part in either choro or ciranda, though a ciranda would be at a slower tempo. The sixteenth motor is present in at least one line for most of the movement.

Another characteristic of choro playing is odd placement of accents, syncopation, and layered subdivisions. For example, the melody in mm. 12-13 is syncopated across bar-lines, placing accents in different places than the ones played by the inner voices' sixteenths. This comes from the idea of each instrument adding to the ensemble without always duplicating, thereby creating complexity rhythmically.

In another instance of simulating choro ensemble instruments, the cello departs from the melody to provide a bassline in the latter half of m.19. The bassline role is traditionally covered by the guitar in choro. True to guitar form, this bassline contains parallel fifths.

In mm. 62-82, the ensemble is split in two, the upper strings versus the lower. They trade offset rhythms, the lower strings diverging to enter triplet motives, adding to the syncopations and rhythmic complexity. The second violin joins the lower strings in mm. 83-89 with a syncopated bassline that could have been played by a *cavaquinho* as the “center” member of the choro. This assertion comes from the fact that the line presents harmonic underpinnings for the section with rhythmic drive, in a similar way to how the strummed steel guitar would.

This idea of upper versus lower strings reappears in another way in mm. 148-170, seen in Example 23, after some Sv.3 and Melody 2 cameos by the viola and second violin. In this section, the lower strings act as center, at first matching the rhythmic groove of the melody in the second violin. However, when the lower strings steal Melody 2 in mm. 158-170, the upper strings take over the center role and force them to play “against the grain,” offsetting their accents and making this a truly formidable passage for musicians to coordinate. This also brings back that idea of *Malícia* where the instrumentalists try to trick each other, and prowess is displayed through not being tricked.

Example 23 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 157-172

Performance

As can be easily imagined, the most difficult to execute bits of this movement are largely thanks to the incredibly complicated layers of rhythms. In addition to this are balance issues, and technical challenges. Measures 91-97 reintroduces a variation of Melody 1 from movement 3, played by the inner voices. This is accompanied by a terribly difficult passage for the cello in which the musician must play trilling sixteenths while executing left hand pizzicato on the open C string (see Example 24). This requires the musician to use enough force to make the pizzicato ring, but also be relaxed enough to keep a steady stream of sixteenth notes.

Example 24 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 91-92

In mm. 262-269, the cello enters with Sv.3, soon to be in competition with the second violin who enters three measures of the prime subject (albeit with altered intervals) in triple forte, the loudest dynamic level of the piece. However, it should be noted that this dynamic could simply be to keep the second violin from disappearing into the already thick texture.

The section from mm. 314-323 is a barrage of sixteenths that the whole ensemble joins in. For the most part, accents are placed in the same spots, except in m.316, where the violins have an accent on beat two that the lower strings do not. It might be assumed that this is an error in the score and that an accent is either missing or extra. However, in choro, the musicians would strive to place accents in different places from their choro mates in order to create additional rhythmic interest. Is that what is happening here? It is hard to say. The ensemble will have to make their own choice.

In the last Vivo section, part of which is shown in Example 25, there is a curious voicing choice that is difficult for the ensemble to execute. The violins are playing a series of triplets, covering the upper and middle registers, while the cello plays double-stop sixteenths on the low end. Amidst this cacophony, the poor viola is given the melody in octaves in the middle of its range. Even though the rest of the ensemble is marked piano, and the viola is marked fortissimo, it is ridiculously hard to get the balance right. It is odd that Villa-Lobos did not assign the earlier used triple forte for the viola's melody. What does make sense is the crescendo that is not written for the violins until after the viola has finished the melody, allowing for the ostinato to move into the foreground. Even so, the ensemble must play an even softer dynamic than it normally would before the crescendo and be very careful not to crescendo too early. Doing so runs the risk of drowning out the viola's melody.

Example 25 - Villa-Lobos Quartet No. 3, Mvt.4 – Mm. 342-349

Overall, this movement is a whirlwind synthesis of all the musical ideas presented throughout the piece. Villa-Lobos takes all those ideas and places them in a choro framework, creating variety through interesting rhythms and different combinations of themes. It is almost as though he has demonstrated the birth his style all within the one piece, starting with the counterpoint of the first movement, his love of guitar in the second, the modinha of the third, and full-blown choro at the end.

7. CONCLUSION

Heitor Villa-Lobos was the legitimate offspring of two musical worlds. Through the teaching of his father, he became a member of the world of classical music, learning the cello. His Aunt Zizinha exposed him to the counterpoint of Bach. But his father also instilled in him a love of Brazil. By becoming a choro guitarist, he became a native in the urban popular music landscape. Both loves, that of classical music and Brazilian, never went away his whole life. By developing his own, unique style, he discovered how to have it both ways.

Villa-Lobos's Quartet No. 3 is one of the most overlooked of his seventeen string quartets, and yet it is a poignant example of not only his early style, but also of the fork in the road before his trip to Paris. It is my hope that this study will serve as a gateway for future consideration of Villa-Lobos's early chamber music and create a better understanding of his sources of inspiration beyond that which is superficially observable.

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