

# Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Valsa Concerto No. 2, Op. 8* (1904) – Rediscovery and Completion of an Early Work for Solo Guitar by Stanley Yates

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The details of Heitor Villa-Lobos' early musical career are not well documented, especially those concerning his relationship with the guitar. We do know that by the age of 13 he had apparently written his first pieces for the instrument—*Mazurka in D major* (1899) and *Panqueca* (1900)—and that by the age of about 17 he had acquired sufficient skill as a guitarist to have become an accepted member of Rio de Janeiro's *choros*. The sole available account of Villa-Lobos' activities as a *choro* was related to Hermínio Bello de Carvalho and Turibio Santos in 1962 by the famous Brazilian popular musician Donga (Ernesto Joaquim dos Santos, 1889-1974), originator of the samba:<sup>1</sup>

In those days the *choro* was very fashionable. I played the *cavaquinho* and he [Villa-Lobos] played the guitar, always performing very well. He used to play accompaniments as well as solos and of course if you did not accompany competently they wouldn't let you in the place...The *choro* was very difficult.

As well as being a very fine solo guitarist, Villa-Lobos was someone who could always improvise. He played difficult classical pieces that required a good technique, which he always had and tried constantly to improve.

Villa-Lobos left guitarists a well-known homage to the *choro* in the form of the four *choros* for solo guitar composed between 1908 and 1912, the *Mazurka*, *Schottish*, *Valsa*, and *Gavota* (published by Editions Max Eschig in 1955 as part of the *Suite populaire bresilienne*); and the *Choros No. 1* of 1920 and *Petit Choro* of 1923 (also included in the *Suite populaire bresilienne*, with the title *Chorinho*).

Our familiarity with these works in Brazilian mode however, together with the fact that none of Villa-Lobos' remaining solo guitar works composed before 1920 (about 16 items) were ever published, has perhaps obscured a complimentary influence exerted upon the young composer by the European "classical" guitar tradition. Of his pedigree as a guitarist, Villa-Lobos himself later stated, "I knew all the technicalities of Carulli, Sor, Aguado, Carcassi, and the others."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Villa-Lobos sought to enhance his solo guitar repertoire by adapting classical works written for other instruments—in 1910 he transcribed a Prelude and two Waltzes by Chopin, and proudly claimed to be the first guitarist to have transcribed the Bach unaccompanied violin Chaconne.<sup>3</sup> Villa-Lobos also became acquainted around this time with the Catalan virtuoso Miguel Llobet, who toured in Brazil in 1910 and apparently made the young composer a gift of two guitars.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Turibio Santos, *Heitor Villa-Lobos e o violã* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu Villa-Lobos, 1975). English translation by Graham Wade and Victoria Forde (Gurtnaclonea, Ireland: Wise Owl Music, 1985), 48-9.

<sup>2</sup> Hermínio Bello de Carvalho again quotes Villa-Lobos, Santos, op. cit., 17.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph J. Gladstone, "An Interview with Villa-Lobos," *Guitar Review*, no. 21, 1957, 13.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, we find both Brazilian and European titles amongst Villa-Lobos' early unpublished solo guitar works; alongside such works *bresilienne* as *Canção brasileira*, *Dobrado pitoresco*, the eight-movement suite *Oito dobrados* (comprising *Paraguaio*, *Brasil*, *Chorar*, *Saudade*, *Paranguá*, *Cabeçudo*, *Rio de Janeiro*, and *Padre Pedro*) and the various *choros* published as the *Suite populaire bresilienne*, are several works with European titles—*Mazurka in D major*, *Valsa brilhante (Valsa Concerto No. 2)*, *Fantasia*, *Quadrilha*, and *Tarantela*.

One work from this latter group in European style is of particular interest. Brian Hodel once described it as "the most tantalizing guitar item to be found in the Villa-Lobos complete works."<sup>5</sup> Miguel Llobet apparently included it in his recital programs. It even featured in the legendary first meeting between Villa-Lobos and Andres Segovia that took place in Paris in 1924:

I first met Segovia in 1923 or 1924 (I can't remember exactly which year) at the home of Olga Moraes Sarmiento Nobre, in Paris. There were several distinguished people there. I saw a young man, with long hair, surrounded by women. I thought he was rather crass and arrogant but, at the same time, likable. Costa, the Portuguese violinist, asked Segovia if he knew Villa-Lobos, but without telling him that I was there. Segovia replied that Miguel Llobet, the Spanish guitarist, had told him about me and had shown him some of my works. I had written a *Valsa Concerto* for Llobet (unfortunately the score is lost).

It is therefore most exciting that an autograph manuscript of the *Valsa Concerto No. 2* has at last resurfaced. As first reported by Eduardo Fernandez,<sup>6</sup> the manuscript was included in a recent donation from the family of Villa-Lobos' first wife, Lucilla Guimaraes, to the Museu Villa-Lobos in Rio de Janeiro. Though incomplete, the three-page manuscript nevertheless provides the opening 122 measures of the piece.

The Museu Villa-Lobos catalogue of works lists a "1904 Valsa Brilhante, originally entitled Valsa Concerto No. 2, duration 3 mins, the manuscript is lost." Here is the title as it appears at the head of the rediscovered manuscript (figure 1):



And the sub-title that appears halfway down the first page, following the works' introduction (figure 2):

<sup>5</sup> Santos, op. cit., 17.

<sup>6</sup> Eduardo Fernandez, "Villa-Lobos: New Manuscripts," *Guitar Review*, Fall 1996, 22-28.

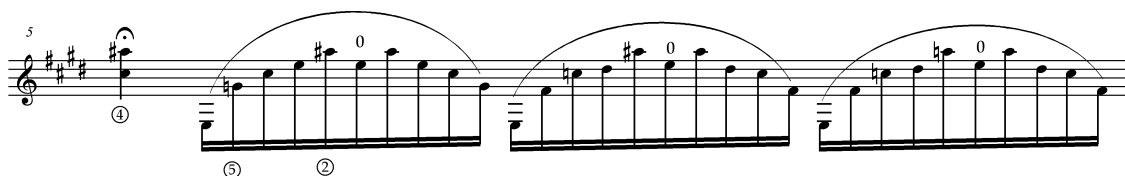


Dated Rio, 1904, the *Valsa Concerto* No. 2 would appear to be Villa-Lobos' earliest surviving work (the young composer would have been 17 years of age), and the designation "Op. 8," found at the head of the manuscript, suggests that it was preceded by at least seven others (there has never been any mention of a "Valsa Concerto No. 1"). The date of 1904 is interesting for another reason: since Villa-Lobos did not meet Miguel Llobet before 1910, it would appear that his statement that the piece was written for the Spanish guitarist is not entirely accurate. Perhaps Villa-Lobos revised or rewrote the work for Llobet or, more likely, simply presented the virtuoso with a piece he had already written. (It seems very unlikely that there could exist a later "Valsa Concerto" that Villa-Lobos did not include in any of his several catalogues of works.) The idea that Villa-Lobos may have rewrote the work for Llobet is not unreasonable, especially since the surviving manuscript presents the piece in an incomplete version. Villa-Lobos may have completed the work for Llobet in 1910, during the time of Llobet's visit to Brazil, retaining 1904 as the date of composition (it is well known that Villa-Lobos often assigned the date of *conception* rather than *completion*, sometimes resulting in considerable discrepancies in the dating of his works).

The title "Valsa Concerto" does not signify a *concertante* work, but a work in *brilliant* style suitable for concert use. The title also implies a distinction from those works in choro style, such as the *Valsa-Choro*. The *Valsa Concerto* No. 2 does indeed remain fundamentally distinct from the choros of the *Suite populaire bresilienne*; even though the *Mazurka*, *Schottish*, *Valsa*, and *Gavota* choros make little, if any, direct reference to the choro style (for example, they contain none of the syncopations found the later *Choro No. 1* and *Chorinho*), they do follow the standard rondo-like form of the choro—namely, ABAC(nostalgic)A. The *Valsa Concerto* No. 2, however, survives as a series of contrasting sections without a recurring A section (though one suspects that in the complete version of the piece Villa-Lobos would have employed at least some element of *da capo* to close-out his form).

Although predating the *Suite populaire bresilienne*, the *Valsa Concerto* No. 2 employs a device not otherwise found before the *Douze Etudes*, written approximately 25 years later. In the introduction to the *Valsa Concerto*, Villa-Lobos traverses the length of the fingerboard with chromatic descending chord shapes set against open strings, as he did later in the first Etude (figure 3):

Figure 3. *Valsa Concerto*, 5.



Villa-Lobos did not notate a right-hand fingering for this passage, though the slurs perhaps indicate that he intended a right-hand *glissando* (dragging the thumb and a single finger across the strings).<sup>7</sup> Other right-hand finger combinations are also possible, including those involving the little finger; Villa-Lobos' use of the right-hand little finger is well known, and five-note chords are found throughout the piece (figure 4):

Figure 4. *Valsa Concerto*, 88.



The introduction is followed by the *Valsa* itself which, in its unfinished state consists of two principal themes, the first in E-major and the second in A-major, connected via an audacious transition through A flat-major (figure 5):

Figure 5. *Valsa Concerto*, 39-42.



The second theme and the transitions that lead to and from it contain passagework which, at one to a bar, are fully worthy of the description *brilhante*. Directly following the first statement of this second theme, the manuscript contains eleven empty measures. Most likely, this represents a "placeholder" for a second statement of the theme, a notational shortcut that saves the composer the trouble of writing out what can wait until later. Villa-Lobos prepared a third theme, in A-minor, but after presenting only two measures of it the manuscript comes to an abrupt end (figure 6):

Figure 6. *Valsa Concerto*, 120-23.



Although incomplete, Villa-Lobos' surviving manuscript presents a work very much in an advanced state of composition (Villa-Lobos' catalogue of works lists the duration of the complete piece at 3 minutes), and provides almost all of the material needed to complete the piece. Unable to resist the temptation of presenting the piece in concert, in January, 1998 I undertook a

<sup>7</sup> For more on this see my article "Villa-Lobos' Guitar Music: Alternative Sources and Implications for Performance," *Soundboard: Journal of the Guitar Foundation of America* (Summer 1997, XXIV, No. 1, 7-20) and *Gitarre & Laute*, Germany (vol. xix, no. 6, 1997, 55-65).

completion of Villa-Lobos' *Valsa Concerto* (forthcoming, under the general editorship of Frédéric Zigante, from Villa-Lobos' principal publisher, Editions Max Eschig).

Although an open-ended form such as the one presented in Villa-Lobos' manuscript could, with the composition of additional material, be maintained almost at will, guitarists and audiences are perhaps more interested in what Villa-Lobos originally wrote in 1904, presented as a complete musical statement. My reconstruction of the piece therefore comprises a completion of the A-minor theme (developed with material derived from the transition that introduced it), a restatement of the A-major theme (to bring a sense of closure to the form) and, at the very end, a little tongue-in-cheek passage, in keeping with Villa-Lobos' taste for characterful endings (figure 7):

Figure 7. *Valsa Concerto*, 214-20.



It is remarkable that a three-page manuscript of an incomplete piece of guitar music, written by a seventeen year-old guitarist in Rio de Janeiro almost a century ago, could command our attention today. It is also a testament to the originality and genius of the most important composer to have written a substantial body of music for the guitar—Heitor Villa-Lobos.