

# Heitor Villa-Lobos

**H**as there ever been a composer quite like Heitor Villa-Lobos? He was not only hugely prolific, but also completely unique, his music living in an exotic sound and tone world like no other. He wrote in classic forms – symphonies, concertos, string quartets, ballets, operas – but his music, even in his earliest pieces, is refreshing and original.

Villa-Lobos was born in 1887 in Rio de Janeiro, and began composing in 1912, with his first composition published the following year. Very quickly he found his musical voice, using Brazilian folk music and rhythms to inform his style. His music became very popular all over the world and by the end of his life he was known as the best South American composer of all time, with over 2,000 published works – eclectic and diverse works that remain as fresh, vibrant, and vital today as the day they were written.

His catalogue includes twelve symphonies, seventeen string quartets, five piano concertos, concertos for harp, harmonica, soprano saxophone, much solo music for piano and guitar, many ballets, operas, and orchestral pieces, and of course his amazing *Choros* and *Bachianas Brasileiras*, which were amongst his most famous and admired works. His music appealed to jazz musicians, several of whom made jazz renditions of his music, including Bill Evans, Claus Ogerman, and guitarist Jan Akkerman. He had a healthy concert career conducting his own music. His music was also adapted

by the writing team of Robert Wright and George Forrest (*Kismet*) for the Broadway musical, *Magdalena*.

The music of Villa-Lobos was always very evocative and would have been at home in any number of films. He did, in fact, write one major studio film score, but it was not a happy experience. He was hired to score the MGM film, *Green Mansions*, starring Audrey Hepburn and Anthony Perkins. He was paid \$25,000 and conducted the soundtrack himself. But as these things go in Hollywood, much of his music was replaced by composer Bronislau Kaper. But Villa-Lobos took his score and created a wonderful work called *Forest of the Amazons*, which he recorded for United Artists Records in 1959. He passed away that same year.

“Choros No. 6” received its premiere in 1946 in Rio de Janeiro, conducted by the composer. Villa-Lobos describes the piece as “a kind of romance of the backcountry atmosphere of Northeastern Brazil. The climate, color, temperature, light, chirping of birds, the scent of honeyed grass between the hen-houses, and all elements of nature of a hinterland served as inspiration for motives in this work; however, it does not represent any objective aspect nor a descriptive flavor.”

“Bachianas Brasileiras No. 7” is the longest of the Bachianas and probably the third most popular after No 5 and “The Little Train of Caipira” movement of No. 2. Composed in 1942, the premiere took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1944, conducted by the

composer. Both it and the “Choros No. 6” are filled with Villa-Lobos’ trademark exotic instrumentation and orchestral color and both pieces have stunningly gorgeous melodies and are profoundly beautiful.

There has, thankfully, been an amazing amount of Villa-Lobos recorded, which include complete recordings of the symphonies, piano concertos, and the *Choros* and *Bachianas*, along with recordings of his solo music and ballets. He himself recorded several of his works, including the two works on this CD. They were recorded in mono sound by Remington Records in Berlin during 1954. While Villa-Lobos recorded “Bachianas Brasileiras No. 7” for Pathe/EMI, this remains the only recording of him conducting the “Choros No. 6.” These two works were issued on CD back in 1986 sounding as good as the then technology would allow. But for this CD they have been given what we hope you’ll find is a large and significant upgrade in sound – they now sound as good as the day they were recorded and the mono sound is crisp, clean, open, and detailed as never before. These are wonderful performances and historically important.

— Bruce Kimmel