INVESTIGATION OF SCORE OMISSIONS AND CONFLICTING PERFORMANCE
DECISIONS PERTAINING TO HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS’S FANTASIA, FOR
SOPRANO SAXOPHONE AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MUSIC
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Introduction

One of Heitor Villa-Lobos’s better-known compositions is the Fantasia, for soprano or tenor saxophone and chamber orchestra. This piece was written in 1948 and has since become an integral part of solo repertoire. Fantasia is comprised of three movements entitled I. Animé, II. Lent, and III. Très animé. Each movement incorporates stylistic elements drawn from Brazilian music that are unique to the personal compositional style of the composer. In addition to the Brazilian flavor, Villa-Lobos also incorporates styles such as neoclassicism and impressionism.

Currently, Fantasia is performed frequently by both students and professional saxophonists. However there are many interpretive omissions in the score pertaining to articulation and style changes. In addition are several unmarked or vague tempo changes. The purpose of this creative research project is to compare several different interpretations of Villa-Lobos’s Fantasia. I conversed with other saxophonists who have studied the piece to better understand their decisions concerning performance interpretation. In addition, I will discuss the rationality behind the varying performance decisions made by the performers. Comparing these different interpretations also sheds light on various notable score modifications.

In addition to comparing various performances and conversing with saxophonists who are familiar with the piece, I examined styles associated with Fantasia and how they influence this composition. The use of different styles such as traditional Brazilian music is mixed with western musical features such as neoclassicism and
impressionism. Distinguishing the styles within the composition helps explain the rationale underlining certain performance interpretations.

I incorporated information from various books, articles, recordings, and dissertations that relate to Heitor Villa-Lobos’s compositional style. A few of the written resources focus directly on Fantasia, but due to the lack of written information on this particular piece, I focused more on other articles that relate to Villa-Lobos’s compositions. I also examined performance reviews and conversed with saxophonists familiar with the piece in order to obtain a better grasp of various performance decisions. While examining different recordings of Villa-Lobos’s Fantasia, I plan to note stylistic influences as well as various interpretations in articulation and tempo changes.

Examining the origins of melodies and rhythms used by Villa-Lobos themes in this piece will help determine style, articulation, and vague or omitted tempo changes. This examination will help future saxophonists performing this piece make better interpretive decisions when playing Villa-Lobos’s, Fantasia.

Understanding the history behind Villa-Lobos’s life is essential to understanding his compositional style. Although most of his life was spent in Brazil, Villa-Lobos was also greatly influenced by Bach and other western composers. One of the issues in performing the Fantasia is whether to bring out the neoclassical aspects of this piece or focus more on the Brazilian components. Before discussing the Fantasia in detail, a brief biography of the life of Villa-Lobos is included along with an overview of the different musical styles used in the work.
Biography

Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1887, Heitor acquired much of his initial knowledge of music from his father Raúl. Raúl Villa-Lobos was an amateur musician and also made his living working for the National Library. According to Simon Wright, Heitor’s father was an amateur astronomer as well. The combination of his “well-to-do” financial status and the “Brazilian modernization and republican reform” allowed Heitor to grow in a progressive political environment.1 Lisa M. Peppercorn, a recognized expert on Villa-Lobos, makes no mention of this, but does, however, emphasize Raúl’s interest in music, literature, and pedagogical and historical subjects.2 From the time Heitor was a young boy, his father was adamant about teaching him music. They attended concerts and rehearsals together and Raúl questioned Heitor on different genres of music.3 In addition to listening to and identifying styles and genres of music, Raúl also taught Heitor the cello. An interview conducted in 1957 describes the rigorous instruction Heitor received from 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, if I didn’t get it right.4

The sudden death of his father due to malaria in 1899 marked the time when Heitor fully absorbed himself in the aboriginal music of Rio de Janeiro, especially the genre of folk music called *choro*. As a self-taught guitarist, he began to study the city’s street music, and it was at this time that Heitor became very fond of the *choro*. In order to support his mother and sisters, Heitor performed in theatre orchestras. Heitor also played in musical salons and even organized concerts at which he played the cello. In 1902, he participated in a concert at Rio’s Bouquet Club playing cello works by Rossini and Gomes.\(^5\) Life as a performer was not what his mother necessarily wanted for her son, so Villa-Lobos briefly went to school for medicine in order to appease her. This education was short-lived, however, because he disliked the subject enough to drop out of school and move in with his aunt Zizinha.\(^6\)

One of the strongest musical influences during Heitor’s early years in Rio was composer and pianist Ernesto Nazareth. Nazareth was most famous for writing tango music. However he also wrote waltzes and polkas. Appleby notes, “He had success in writing Brazilian tangos, polkas, waltzes, schottisches, *polka*-choros, quadrilles, *romances* without words.”\(^7\) Like Villa-Lobos, Nazareth was a mostly self-taught writer and pianist who made a living performing at local theatres and in salons.\(^8\) Not only did Nazareth compose and perform Brazilian folk music, he also made a living as a reputable pianist who specialized in the music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin and, he sustained a love for improvisation.

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\(^7\) David Appleby, *The Music of Brazil* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1983), 78.
Lucília Guimarães, a Brazilian pianist, was Villa-Lobos’s first wife whom he married in 1913. During his marriage to Lucília, he performed with the Rio de Janeiro symphony and opera orchestra. While performing with the orchestra, he became familiar with the works of composers like Stravinsky and Strauss and, in 1917, had the good fortune of meeting Darius Milhaud. Lucília and Heitor separated in 1936. In the same year, Villa-Lobos started living with his new love interest, Arminda Neves d’Alemeida, who would later become the director of the Villa-Lobos Museum.

In addition to performing, Villa-Lobos also took a great interest in music education and was an important contributor to the reformation of musical instruction in Brazil. He imposed the same emphasis on the importance of folk music in the educational system in Brazil as he did in his compositions. In 1932, he was appointed as the Director General of Education and was chosen to be responsible for the “musical education in public schools.” He maintained this position and was in charge of the “Superintendency of Musical and Artistic Education for Rio” while continuing his travels to North America, Japan, and Paris. Heitor continued to be an active composer and performer until his death in 1959 in Rio de Janeiro.

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Review of Literature

While researching for this creative project, I came across a series of articles written by Lisa M. Peppercorn. The articles covered in this collection encompassed topics such as the life and works of Villa-Lobos. One of Peppercorn’s publications covered some aspects of Villa-Lobos’s principles of composition. This provided guidance on how to approach the Fantasia in terms of interpretation. It comments on Villa-Lobos’s emphasis on Brazilian folk music as well as his love for Bach and neoclassicism. Although this compilation of articles extensively covers the life and compositions of Villa-Lobos, the Fantasia is not discussed.

Another valuable resource used to research the compositional style of Villa-Lobos was Eero Tarasti’s, Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Life and Works, 1887-1959. This book covers a survey of Latin American music history as well as various works of Villa-Lobos. These works include instrumental, vocal, chamber, concertos, orchestral, and stage productions. Unfortunately, this publication never mentions the Fantasia, but provides an in-depth examination of Villa-Lobos’s compositional style over a wide range of compositions.

Other books and articles by musicologists and historians that cover important aspects of Villa-Lobos’s compositions include those by Simon Wright, Vasco Mariz, and Gerard Béhague. All these resources provide biographical material covering different stages of Villa-Lobos’s compositional career. They offer valuable information on influences on Villa-Lobos such as education, influential composers, and musical compositional preferences. Although these resources examine much of Villa-Lobos’s
career, none of them examine the *Fantasia* for soprano saxophone and chamber orchestra.

My main source on the *Fantasia* itself is a dissertation written by James Dale Butler entitled, “The Compositional Use of the Saxophone in Orchestral, Chamber, and Solo Repertoire.” A section of his thesis directly examines the *Fantasia* and focuses on the Brazilian elements of the work as well as possible performance difficulties within the piece. Butler’s research was very beneficial because it identified all the Brazilian folk aspects of the piece as well as providing some theoretical analysis of the piece. However, this dissertation does not discuss current performance decisions pertaining to stylistic nuances and various possible interpretations.

Since part of this project focuses on current performance interpretations and aesthetics, I also consulted pedagogues, performers, and conductors as to their interpretive decisions. Much of this topic is discussed through the thoughts and words of current esteemed individuals who have extensive knowledge on the piece and who have taught, performed, or conducted Villa-Lobos’s *Fantasia*. This is important because it allowed me to discover first-hand information into discrepancies in performance practice and also allowed an in-depth view on the decision-making process.
Overview of *Fantasia* and Discussion on Current Performance Interpretations

Two versions of the *Fantasia* remain in existence today, but only one is published and performed. The original manuscript of this piece was written one step higher than the published version. Dedicated to Marcel Mule, the new version, written a whole step lower than the original, was never performed by Mule. Instead, the first performance of this piece was conducted by Villa-Lobos with soloist Waldemar Szilman. It took place at the Ministerio da Educacao e Cultura in Rio de Janeiro. Also, three years passed after Villa-Lobos composed *Fantasia*, in 1948, before the premier in 1951 and its publication was not released until 1963. Furthermore, many inconsistencies are found between the two scores in addition to the key. Incorrect notes are found scattered through the currently published version. Example 1 shows one instance of an incorrect note in the currently published version. Example A of example one shows the currently printed mistake, while Example B displays the needed correction.

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13 Jason Kush, conversation with author, June 1, 2012.
Example 1: Villa-Lobos, *Fantasia* for soprano saxophone and chamber orchestra, movement I, mm 66-67. Example A represents the printed version. Example B represents the needed correction which is circled in red.

Ex. 1A

Ex. 1B

My primary focus for this creative project is to discuss the current version which is much more widely performed. Each movement is examined and topics pertaining to tempo, articulation, stylistic nuances, and folk influences on interpretation are addressed.

Movement I. Animé

Movement one begins with descending eighth notes in the piano over a 3/2 time signature. An interesting quality of the rhythm in this first movement is the occurrence of polymeters. Simple meters like 3/2 and an implied compound meter of 12/8 occur together creating a polyrhythmic pattern. Example 2 shows measure 5 of the first movement of *Fantasia*. If looking at the piano reduction, the left hand rhythm implies a 12/8 time signature, but the right hand remains in a strict 3/2 pattern.14

14 James Dale Butler, “Heitor Villa-Lobos: Compositional Use of the Saxophone in Orchestral, Chamber and Solo Repertoire,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Austin, 1995), 228
**Example 2:** Villa-Lobos, *Fantasia*, movement I, (piano reduction), mm 5. Example of polyrhythm between 3/2 and implied 12/8.

Due to the nature of this first section, rhythmic liberties taken by the performer are less flexible. The time must stay fairly strict until rehearsal number 5. In a conversation with Marcello Ramos, a Brazilian conductor in Muncie Indiana, he expressed that taking too many liberties during the first part of the piece would jeopardize the feel of the rhythmic ostinato that occurs in this section. However, argument on interpretation does arise at rehearsal number 5, which is depicted in **Example 3**.

**Example 3:** Villa-Lobos, *Fantasia*, movement I, mm 37-43. Visual depiction of “Moin” marking and possible Spanish influenced triplets which are circled in red.

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This section begins at measure 37 and is noted with the vague marking of “Moins,” which means “less.” The performers must ask the question of how much less? Does this mean tempo, dynamics, or some other aspect of performance? In performing this piece and through conversation, I came to the conclusion that this section is slower in tempo as well as softer in dynamics. The dynamic contrast is actually notated in the score, but the tempo change is determined through previous performances of this piece as well as discussing the piece with other performers and pedagogues. Preston Duncan, a saxophone professor at Minnesota University-Morris, has both taught and performed this piece. He had the great fortune of performing Fantasia with Brazilian conductor Pedro Boesseo, and has also performed it with piano. In a personal conversation with me, Duncan said, “It’s really half tempo. ‘Less’ does not mean half! But I play it that way.”

The studio saxophone professor from Slippery Rock University, Dr. Jason Kush, agreed saying, “I perform this section at half tempo, or even less.” I had an opportunity to extensively study this piece through a series of private lessons with Dr. George Wolfe, the saxophone professor at Ball State University. During these lessons, I found that Professor Wolfe too played this portion of the piece at half tempo. Several other recordings of performers also reinforced my decision that the word “Moins” was vague and misleading and that this section should actually be marked at half tempo.

In addition to the tempo starting at rehearsal number 5, the melodic line of this section resembles a lyrical Brazilian folk singing style called a modinha. If taking this into account, the performer must also question whether to play the triplets in this section.

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16 Preston Duncan, conversation with author, June 12, 2012.
with a Spanish inflection or in a traditional Western manner. If the triples are played
with a Spanish inflection, they are performed a small fraction after the beat, or with a
slight hesitation. However, if performed in a traditional classical style, the triplets occur
directly on the beat. When listening to a recording of Eugene Rousseau performing this
piece, I noticed that he performed this section with the triplets occurring directly on the
beat. In fact, most of his interpretation was very strict in tempo and interpretation. Very
little deviation from actual written instruction in the score took place on this particular
recording. Dr. John Sampen, saxophone professor at Bowling Green State University,
also agrees with Rousseau on the issue of the triplets in this section. In a personal
dialogue with me he commented saying, “I play the triplets on the beat, but some people
do experiment with that. There is a lot of Brazilian influence, and I think that the
knowledge of these influences is important.” However, a few performers and
pedagogues disagree. Duncan also commented on the triplets saying, “I play them like
Spanish triplets, I hesitate a little.” While performing this piece, I also played the triplets
a little late in order to bring out the Spanish flavor. I was also advised to perform
“Spanish triplets” by my professor, Dr. George Wolfe. The inflections on the triplets are
not the only nuance found in this section that could have conflicting interpretations.

Kush informed me that he had the opportunity to speak to a Brazilian
percussionist, Ney Rosauro, who provided insight on phrasing. The advice given to Kush
was to perform the “Moins” section in a more vocal style, and to not focus as much on
keeping the tempo consistent. Also, the rhythmic emphasis should be on the upbeats
instead of the downbeat.\textsuperscript{18} \textbf{Example 4} highlights the accents as performed by Kush. I chose to place accents on the downbeats at this section, which was also advised by her professor, and as heard on many other saxophone recordings like Rousseau’s.

\textbf{Example 4}: Villa-Lobos, \textit{Fantasia} for soprano saxophone and chamber orchestra, movement I, mm 37-38. Accents located above, written in blue, show where many saxophonists place the emphasis. The accent marks placed below, noted in green, show where Kush places weight.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example4.png}
\end{center}

A saxophonist performing this piece will encounter similar discrepancies for the remainder of the piece. On his album \textit{Saxophone Colors}\textsuperscript{19} Eugene adheres to a rather strict interpretation of tempo with very little emphasis on Brazilian influences. Kush is quoted saying:

\begin{quote}
When I am playing this piece, I try to be spontaneous. I do not intend to reproduce the same interpretation every time it is performed. I have to be playing with a flexible pianist who realizes I want to have a more organic approach.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Some implied “quasi-cadenza” sections occur later in \textit{Fantasia}. For instance, measures 81-82 are occasionally performed with enough rubato to qualify this section as “quasi-cadenza.” When studying with Wolfe, I interpreted this section with some use of

\textsuperscript{18} Jason Kush, conversation with author, June 11, 2012.
\textsuperscript{20} Jason Kush, conversation with author, June 11, 2012.
rubato. The other performers and pedagogues consulted during this creative project made no mention of altering the time in this section. **Example 5** letter A depicts measure 81 as written in the score, while example B shows a possible interpretation used by me during performance.

**Example 5**: Villa-Lobos, *Fantasia* for soprano saxophone and chamber orchestra, movement I, mm 81. Letter A shows the unaltered score. Letter B depicts the interpretation used by the performer during her recital. A possible interpretation suggested by the performer during performance is marked under example B.

**Ex. 5A**

**Ex. 5B**

**Movement II. Lent**

The second movement of Villa-Lobos’s *Fantasia* is marked “Lent” and incorporates lush passages with a harmonic and melodic structure that focuses on a
particular 20\textsuperscript{th}-century, seven-note scale. This synthetic scale may be identified as an altered Lydian-Mixolydian.\textsuperscript{21} The altered note of this scale is the lowered sixth, and an example of the pattern can be found in Example 6. Two transpositions, Eb and Ab, of this synthetic scale can be found throughout this movement.

Example 6: Example of Lydian-Mixolydian scale with a lowered 6\textsuperscript{th}.

An argument regarding interpretation often arises especially in terms of how much liberty is left to the performer. Sampen, who performs the most of this piece with some rubato but primarily at strict tempos, commented that the second movement may be interpreted with a slightly more romantic aesthetic. Marcelo Ramos, who also takes a stricter approach to the overall performance of this piece, commented saying:

In the second movement, I would not change the tempo at the beginning before the soloist enters. In my opinion, I would prefer the soloist follow the marked accelerando and rallentando before rehearsal number 3 without deviation. From rehearsal 3 to 6, I would prefer the soloist play this section a little more straightforward until the rhythmic rate slows down at rehearsal 6. From rehearsal 6 to the end, the interpretation may be slightly more flexible. That being said, I would ultimately be at the mercy of the soloist.

During lessons with Wolfe, I was instructed to take a slightly different, more rhapsodic approach to this movement especially from rehearsal number 4 to the end. Also, various professionals I consulted, including Wolfe, marked a change in articulation during the first measure of rehearsal 4. Wolfe suggested that measure 23 be treated in a quasi-cadenza manner that connects to a rallentando in bar 24. Example 7 shows the change in articulation as well as the performance interpretation used by me, which is indicated in red.

Example 7: Villa-Lobos, Fantasia for soprano saxophone and chamber orchestra, mvt II, mm 23. My interpretive decisions are marked in red.

Later in the second movement, at about rehearsal number 6, some pedagogues and performers feel as though there is an opportunity to perform in a rubato fashion as well. However, difficulties performing with a pianist or an orchestra vary. While playing with

\footnote{Marcelo Ramos, conversation with author, 12, 2012.}
a pianist, the soloist has more opportunity to be expressive especially with regards to the use of rubato. When performing with a chamber orchestra, starting one measure after rehearsal number 6, the technical ability of the horn players determines the flexibility of time available to the soloist. Duncan commented on this issue saying:

In terms of dynamics and tempo, the orchestra must have good horn players. This decides whether the soloist changes how they perform this section with an orchestra as compared to piano accompaniment. There are so many times when the saxophonist is syncopated or playing with the horns. For example, at the end of the second movement, the horns are playing triplets while 16th notes sound in the saxophone part which needs to match the syncopation in the horns. They have to be able to follow your eighth-notes. The quality of the horn players makes the most difference in how free the soloist can be.\(^{23}\)

Wolfe also felt this section should be performed in a more rubato fashion. In addition to adding a “quasi-cadenza” feel, Wolfe also altered the articulations. He instructed me to write another set of articulations based on his own experimentation. These added articulations create musically interesting lines and add to the composition’s rhapsodic character. **Example 8** is an illustration of rehearsal number 6 to the end of movement two. The additional articulations and one possible interpretation as performed by me are notated in red. Notice the last measure of **Example 8** and its reference to the first movement. The octaves in the saxophone part are the first three notes of the soloist in the first movement. Unlike the transition from movement I to II, the shift from the second to third movement should be continuous. The last three notes of the second movement provide an attacca into the third movement.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{23}\) Preston Duncan, conversation with author, June 12, 2012.

\(^{24}\) Preston Duncan, conversation with author, June 12, 2012.

Movement III. Trés animé

One of the most disputed qualities of the third movement, *Trés anime*, is related to articulations. With a tempo written at quarter note equals 152, extremely fast tonguing may pose a serious difficulty for the performer. Also, with very little marked slurs over the sixteenth notes, the musicality of this movement becomes jeopardized. These rapid sixteenth-note passages begin at measure 11, are scattered throughout the piece and are approached in different ways by various performers and pedagogues. Some soloists choose to interpret this section as written, adding no slur markings. In some cases, the performer or instructor will add slur markings over certain runs in order to return the focus on musicality and slightly lighten the movement’s difficulty. Some performers chose not to add slur markings in order to display virtuosity. Dr. Kenneth Tse, a professor at the University of Iowa, adds articulations from measure 11 to 25. When
asked if he changed any articulations during the performance of *Fantasia*, he described his changes as follows:

I only alter articulations in the third movement. Beginning around rehearsal number 2, I slur two tongued two. Two measures after rehearsal number 4, I mark all sixteenth-notes slurred until one measure before rehearsal number 5. Three bars after rehearsal number 10 beginning on beats two and three, I slur two-tongue-two.²⁵

I found that Wolfe’s alteration in articulation was similar to that of Tse’s. In addition, Duncan instructed his students to adjust the tongued passages by adding slur markings even though he chose to double tongue much of this movement himself. However, Duncan’s students maintained the option of adjusting articulations or playing them as written. **Example 9** displays sections of the third movement that are most commonly adjusted in terms of articulation. Marked in red are the performance additions made by Wolfe, which are similar to Kenneth Tse’s interpretation. The most significant differences between Tse’s and Wolfe’s articulations are between measures 20 and 23.

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Example 9: Villa-Lobos, *Fantasia*, Movement III, Wolfe’s added articulations are noted in red.

**Ex. 9 A**  
(mm 11-14)

**Ex. 9 B**  
(mm 20-22)

**Ex. 9 C**  
(mm 53-57)

Articulation is not the only discrepancy associated with this movement. Like the past two movements, the amount of rubato and flexibility is debated among performers and pedagogues. Wolfe suggests a slight adjustment in tempo can occur between
rehearsal number 6 and 7. His reasoning behind relaxing the tempo during this section is the sudden change in style from the established, march-like melody to a passage in which the tonal center is departed from by the use of altered 9th chords. **Example 10** illustrates a possible interpretation of this passage which was used by the performer.

**Example 10:** Villa-Lobos, *Fantasia*, movement III, mm 28-32. A possible interpretation suggested by George Wolfe is marked in red.

With regards to articulation, a particularly difficult passage occurs three measures after rehearsal number 10. Some fluctuation in tempo can be applied during this section depending on the level of difficulty and ability of the performer. For instance, if the soloist or the chamber orchestra is not able to play the section at the marked tempo, then the pulse can slow slightly. Duncan actually accelerates and double tongues this section in order to display his virtuosity. Sampen comments on this section as follows:

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26 Preston Duncan, conversation with author, June 12, 2012.
Not everyone can perform rehearsal 10 at the end of movement 3 at tempo marking 152. If the soloist wishes to retain the written articulations then they may have to slow it down a bit especially single tongued. When coaching students, I add slurs in this section, but it ultimately depends on the ability of the student. Some of the very advanced students articulate it as written because it is flashy. I feel Villa-Lobos left out articulations to allow performers to make more performance choices, but I also think he just got lazy. He was extremely prolific and wrote many pieces, more than 1500 works. However, one of his faults is that he did not care much about writing in articulations. Nevertheless, I am thankful to have the piece.27

Conclusion

Since its premier in 1951, Villa-Lobos Fantasia for soprano saxophone and chamber orchestra has been performed with several conflicting interpretations. These differences include articulation discrepancies, varied tempo markings based on vagueness in the score, implied “quasi-cadenza” passages, and inconsistencies regarding stylistic performance practices. I chose to consult various publications, performers, pedagogues, and conductors in order to examine these dissimilarities. This creative project is aimed at providing guidance for saxophonists on how to interpret this composition. I concluded that Fantasia can be played a number of different ways depending on which stylistic attributes the soloist wished to highlight. If the performer wishes to emphasize the Brazilian attributes, the soloist can take more liberty in interpretation than if the piece is played with more of a neoclassical mindset. Regardless of the performer’s preferences, the Fantasia for soprano saxophone and chamber orchestra by Heitor Villa-Lobos will surely remain an important established work in the classical saxophone repertoire.

Bibliography

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