SOMM RECORDINGS

Treasures *from the* New World

Vol.4: Brazilian Piano Quintets

I Musicanti · Leon Bosch *director* Clélia Iruzun *piano*

With the impact made upon interwar Paris by the music of the single truly international Brazilian figure of Heitor Villa-Lobos, an opening up and recognition of the rich vein of South American – specifically Brazilian – art music occurred across much of Europe for the first time. Villa-Lobos died in Rio de Janeiro in 1959 at the age of 72, and his legacy persists across much of North and South America. However, neither that legacy, nor the work of the many subsequent South American composers who continue to be inspired by his example, has yet led to global recognition of that continent's significant art music. Nevertheless, for many people, the musical qualities of this programme, by five notable Brazilian composers from generations that succeeded Villa-Lobos, will be both evident and revelatory.

The long-lived Brazilian composer **Edmundo Villani-Côrtes** was born in 1930 in Juiz de Fora, a city in the extreme south of the state of Minas Gerais and roughly 100 kilometres north of Rio de Janeiro. As with many musicians, his talent manifested early, through a dual attraction for the acoustic guitar and the piano. He graduated in 1954 from Rio de Janeiro's Brazilian Conservatory of Music, then studied law at the state's Federal University, during which time – in 1956 – he also premiered his First Piano Concerto. He later became a pupil of the noted composer Camargo Guarnieri, and as a conductor, led the São Paulo Jazz Orchestra from 1990 to 1999.

Villani-Côrtes has acknowledged the dual influences of Shostakovitch and the leading French impressionists Ravel and Debussy on his earlier music, while also admitting that he avoided the characteristics more closely associated with the avant-garde. He has further stated that a good composer is able to convey new ideas competently and with clarity using the existing musical vocabulary, and that, in other words, "One does not need to invent a new vocabulary in order to be original". Such an approach has meant that Villani-Côrtes has never been associated with any definitive aesthetic movement. His output as a composer has been very prolific, with over 300 works covering a wide range of orchestral and chamber music.

Composed in 1978, the **5 Miniaturas brasileiras** (5 Brazilian Miniatures) were initially for flute and piano, yet the work's immediate success led to a significant number of transcriptions (no fewer than 17) for a variety of instrumental combinations, a proliferation that has fully established the work as a standard part of the country's art music repertoire.

Concluding our recital is another popular work by Villani-Côrtes, this one inspired by the city of Caratinga, in the south-east of the composer's landlocked home state. **Caratinguê** has been fittingly described as portraying with lightness and lyricism the spirit of Brazil, uniting art music and folk music by way of a memorable melody, lively rhythms and an irresistible musical atmosphere, similar to that which Darius Milhaud expressed in his *Saudades do Brasil*, composed in 1920–21 as a tribute to the country he had visited in 1917–18 while working as secretary to the French Envoy to Brazil, the poet Paul Claudel.

João Guilherme Ripper was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1959 and received his bachelor and master's degrees from the state's Federal University, where he later served as dean of the music faculty (1999–2003) and still works as a professor. Ripper's **From My Window No.3** – written for piano quintet and dedicated to his wife – dates from 2011–12 when he was composer-in-residence at Kean University in New Jersey. (*From My Window No.1* was scored for oboe, viola or bassoon, and piano, and *No.2* for string quintet.) Ripper has said that the work is intended to portray aspects of his native city. As he explained further:

> "Carnival Vertigo", the opening movement, is inspired by the crowd in the streets of Rio during the Carnival, when groups called "blocos" dance, sing and play percussion instruments. Eventually, two of these groups cross each other, producing unexpected polyphony and polytonality. The piano plays alternated chords in ostinato, interspersed with short interventions by the strings that sometimes converge into distinguishable melodies, though there is no direct quotation of any Carnival music. The movement is rather based on the ever-present music that comes from the streets at that time of year.

"Antique" is based on the overwhelming feeling of longing and remembrance, finding a love letter hidden in the pages of an old book forgotten on the shelf.

"Drums" brings back the atmosphere of the Carnival in Rio and the heavy percussion section of the Escolas de Samba [the samba clubs are called "schools"]. The double bass plays an ostinato that is gradually taken up by the other instruments. As in the first movement, the minimalist texture gradually thickens through the addition of new melodies and rhythmic layers and increases in tempo.

Quite a different expression is to be found in **Canção sem palavras** (Song Without Words) by the well-known Brazilian musician, actor and broadcaster **Arrigo Barnabé** (born in Londrina, Paraná in 1951). Barnabé is perhaps most famous for his 1980 avant-rock concept album *Clara Crocodilo*, which critics hailed on its release as the best new thing in Brazilian pop since the Tropicália movement of the 1960s. Whether in the pop or classical vein, he often utilises a heavily experimental approach, where atonal dodecaphonic techniques loom large. Also among his works are a number of acclaimed film scores. He hosts a radio show, *Supertônica*, on São Paulo's Rádio Cultura.

The gifted Brazilian musician **José Carlos Amaral Vieira** (artistically known simply by his two surnames) was born in São Paulo in 1952. His natural abilities were soon apparent, and it was as an outstanding virtuoso pianist that he initially emerged, following concentrated studies in Germany with Carl Seemann and in London with Louis Kentner. His recognition as one of the most significant and wide-ranging Brazilian composers after Villa-Lobos also became apparent following composition studies in Paris with Olivier Messiaen. In 1984, an Amaral Vieira Festival was held with no fewer than 14 concerts during which 157 of his remarkably diverse works were performed.

Written in 1999, Amaral Vieira's Piano Quintet **Fronteiras** (Frontiers), Op.297 is a testament to his qualities as both composer and performer. The tripartite work reveals genuine expression by way of technically challenging and true chamber-musical invention. This work – like all the music on this programme – is scored for the forces of Schubert's "Trout" Quintet, yet aside from that nod to the Viennese genius, there is a later master who is more directly quoted, his influence implied.

Fronteiras opens *Molto lento, espressivo* with a hauntingly significant, warmly unfolding melody that sets the scene. The "frontiers" are widely cast, however, as the four-note signature of the composer Dmitri Shostakovich (D–E flat–C–B)[1] enters. This motif appears as a quiet observer, threading through the music intermittently and widening the listener's perception of the expressive material on which the entire work is based. Initially, that "observer" seems to scan the horizon with shaded eyes, before the entry of the piano brings closer contemplation and the noble initial idea is explored more fully. The Shostakovich motif winds through the texture at its richest, and Amaral Vieira occasionally alters its central minor interval to the major, thereby revealing a more positive nature in a closely worked *fugato*. The wide-ranging nature of the music unfolds until the mood deepens and this movement gently closes. In the second, *Molto lento*, calm intimacy fosters feelings of contemplation, before the finale, *Allegro festivo,* brings the inspirational warmth of the noon-day sun. The mood now seemingly refreshed, it is the piano that begins, presenting a lively, outgoing theme (subtly related to that of the work's opening), as though the travellers from the first movement have arrived at their welcoming destination and are free to explore. A noble passage for solo strings grows in intensity to reach the brilliantly extended coda, where a great theme led by the violin prefaces the positive challenge of the concluding chords.

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1 Transliterating the Russian composer's monogram (Д. Ш.) in German yields D. Sch., and D–Es–C–H are the German note names for D–E flat–C–B.

Marisa Rezende was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1944. She began playing piano at the age of just four and commenced formal lessons the following year. In 1963, she enrolled in the composition course at the National Music School (now the Music Faculty of the Rio de Janeiro State Federal University) and made her debut as a concert pianist. She then paused her studies for three years, relocating to Boston, Massachusetts, before returning to Brazil, where she resumed composition studies. She completed her degree after a move to Recife in 1972, where she also performed piano concertos with that city's Symphony Orchestra.

Once again in the USA, Rezende earned a master's degree in piano in 1976 from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), studying under Erno Daniel. It was there that she wrote her first compositions.

After a few years teaching theory, harmony and analysis at the Pernambuco State Federal University in Recife, she returned to UCSB for a doctorate in composition under Peter Racine Fricker and David Gordon, which she completed in 1985. In 1987 she took up the post of Professor of Composition at the Rio de Janeiro State Federal University, later leaving to undertake post-doctoral work in music psychology with John Sloboda at the University of Keele in England. Marisa Rezende retired from academia in 2002 and is today a full-time composer.

Her works embrace compositions for orchestra, solo instruments and chamber ensembles. Amongst the latter is **Cismas** (Schisms) for violin, viola, cello, double bass and piano, written in 1999 and dedicated to her daughter Bel.

This work is certainly schismatic. It begins in a highly chromatic atmosphere of pervasive gloom, which is contrasted with the luminous diatonic passage that follows, before subsequently embracing what has been termed a series of metamorphic and reiterative events. These start with a lamenting solo viola theme, which emerges from a texture performed on the piano strings – an extended technique utilised in a number

of other pieces by the composer. Rezende experiments with tonal polarity in her work, systematically gravitating to the note E, thus lending the final gesture a sense of release.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2026

Leon Bosch is an internationally renowned double bass virtuoso and conductor, and one of the most distinctive musical voices of his generation. For nearly two decades he served as Principal Double Bass of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, before forging a wide-ranging career as a soloist, chamber musician, recording artist, educator and artistic director.

Photo: Juno Snowdon
Art Direction: Adam Hypki

A musician of exceptional breadth, Bosch's work extends far beyond performance. His acclaimed discography of over 20 solo recordings has transformed the double bass repertoire, bringing to light a wealth of neglected and newly commissioned works, many of them world-premiere recordings. His commitment to rediscovery and advocacy has become a defining feature of his artistic identity.

As a conductor, he appears with orchestras across the UK, Europe, Africa and Asia, drawing on a lifetime of experience working with the world's leading ensembles and conductors. He is equally at home directing from the double bass, a rare and distinctive dimension of his musicianship.

Born in South Africa, Bosch's artistic outlook is deeply shaped by his personal history and intellectual curiosity, reflected in projects that explore music in its wider cultural and historical context. In recognition of his contribution to chamber music, he was awarded the Cobbett Medal in 2024.

He is Professor of Double Bass at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and a committed mentor to young musicians worldwide.

leonbosch.com

Founded and directed by Leon Bosch, **I Musicanti** is a flexible, mixed-instrument chamber ensemble bringing together some of the UK's most distinguished soloists and chamber musicians. The ensemble was created to explore repertoire that falls between the cracks of convention: great works by neglected composers, overlooked masterpieces by celebrated figures, and historically significant music that deserves a renewed voice.

At the heart of I Musicanti's work lies a commitment to intelligent programming, rigorous scholarship and the spontaneity of true chamber music collaboration. Programmes are shaped by curiosity and rediscovery, often placing familiar works alongside unjustly forgotten repertoire, or presenting chamber reimaginings that illuminate major works from a fresh perspective.

A defining aspect of the ensemble's identity is its close partnership with SOMM Recordings, whose shared commitment to artistic enterprise has enabled I Musicanti to build a distinctive and critically acclaimed discography. Releases such as *British Piano Quintets* and the ongoing *Treasures from the New World* series (see page 11) exemplify this collaboration, combining advocacy, scholarship and performance at the highest level.

Regularly appearing at leading venues including Wigmore Hall, I Musicanti approaches each project not simply as a performance, but as a lasting contribution to the living chamber music tradition.

imusicanti.co.uk

Photo © Elisa Maciel

Clélia Iruzun's endearing artistic personality, which combines her native Brazilian spirit with her exceptional musical gifts, has enabled this much-admired London-based pianist to build an enviable reputation for her performances of a wide range of music, from the great classical repertoire to works by significant figures from across the Americas.

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Clélia began playing the piano aged four and made her orchestral debut at 15. At 17, she moved to London on a scholarship to study with the legendary Maria Curcio, later completing her studies under Christopher Elton at the Royal Academy of Music, where she won several prizes before graduating with the Academy's highest accolade, the Recital Diploma. She also received top prizes at the Paloma O'Shea International Piano Competition in Santander, the Pilar Bayona Competition in Zaragoza (Spain), and the Tunbridge Wells International Piano Competition in the UK. Her artistic development was further shaped by mentors including Nelson Freire, Stephen Kovacevich and Fou Ts'ong, and by the famous Brazilian teacher Mercês de Silva Telles.

She has performed over 30 concertos for piano and orchestra, covering the great classical and romantic works and pieces by important Spanish and Latin American composers. In her extensive discography are acclaimed albums of music by Villa-Lobos, Francisco Mignone, Marlos Nobre and Mompou – the latter praised for how "memorably she understands" the music (*Gramophone*) – as well as concerto recordings with the Ulster Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, such as the International Classical Music Award-nominated *Piano Concertos by Albéniz & Mignone* on SOMM Recordings (SOMMCD 265), conducted by Jac van Steen.

Clélia has performed at major venues worldwide including Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Cadogan Hall in London, Shanghai Grand Theatre, Oriental Art Center (Shanghai), Forbidden City Concert Hall (Beijing), the Gothenburg and Stockholm Concert Halls, Sala São Paulo, the Municipal Theatres of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and for institutions and events including the Poznań Philharmonic, Prague State Opera, the Chopin Concerts in the Royal Łazienki (Warsaw) and the Festival de La Roque-d'Anthéron in Southern France. She also appears frequently on BBC Radio 3 and other radio and TV broadcasters worldwide.

Clélia is the co-founder of Poliphonia, a charity promoting music from the Americas through concerts in London.

cleliairuzun.com

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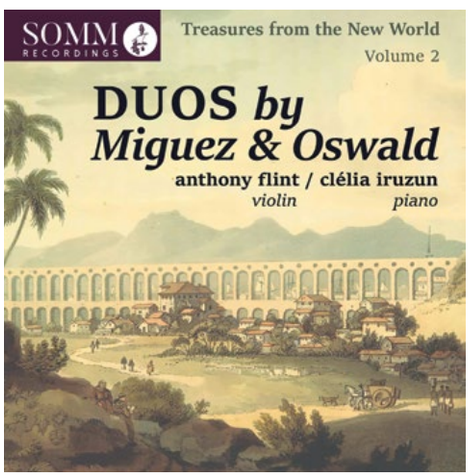

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Martyn Jackson *violin* · Robert Smissen *viola* · Richard Harwood *cello*

Clélia Iruzun *piano*

	Edmundo Villani-Côrtes (b.1930)		
	5 Miniaturas brasileiras		[9:05]
1	I.	Prelúdio	2:56
2	II.	Toada	1:01
3	III.	Chorinho	0:58
4	IV.	Cantiga de ninar	1:29
5	V.	Baião	2:40
	João Guilherme Ripper (b.1959)		
	From My Window No.3 *		[18:08]
6	I.	Carnival Vertigo	6:19
7	II.	Antique	7:11
8	III.	Drums	4:38
	Arrigo Barnabé (b.1951)		
9	**Canção sem palavras**		2:46
	Amaral Vieira (b.1952)		
	Fronteiras, Op.297		[24:02]
10	I.	Molto lento, espressivo	6:39
11	II.	Molto lento	9:08
12	III.	Allegro festivo	8:15
	Marisa Rezende (b.1944)		
13	**Cismas**		6:23
	Edmundo Villani-Côrtes		
14	**Caratinguê**		8:45
	Total duration:		**69:11**

*** FIRST RECORDING**

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