

Portuguese Piano Trios • 2

FREITAS BRANCO • DELGADO

BRAGA SANTOS • FREITAS

Trio Pangea



Portuguese Piano Trios • 2: Luís de Freitas Branco (1890–1955)

Frederico de Freitas (1902–1980) • Joly Braga Santos (1924–1988) Alexandre Delgado (b. 1965)

Chamber music played a substantial role in the renewal of Portuguese music that took place during the course of the 20th century. Interestingly, Luís de Freitas Branco (1890–1955), who, as well as being one of the most hugely talented and versatile Portuguese composers of any era, was also one of the most prolific, wrote most of his chamber music earlier in his life – the last work of his that may be so categorised, the *Theme and Variations* for three harps and string quartet, dates from 1929.

His *Trio* dates from 1908, a very productive year for the composer, who was then just under 18 years of age. It might be classified as an experimental work: it is a substantial composition, of curious construction: a single movement made up of a series of episodes that seem to follow some unknown programme, though closer acquaintance with it makes one aware of the kind of internal coherence that is so characteristic of the composer's work in general. It begins with effervescent flurries of notes, couched in a somewhat Debussyan chromaticism, but as always with Freitas Branco there is also a clear instinct for counterpoint, which the rhythmic fluidity and sweeping melodic style cannot disguise. There are a number of 'pictorial' episodes, such as a triumphal, march-like *Largo* section and, at the end, a triple-time *Allegro* marked '*in modo popolare*', which follows a brief recapitulation of the opening material. One of the most memorable moments in the score is a brief passage (which returns twice more, slightly altered), with the muted violin playing four octaves above the cello, producing an effect of remarkable eeriness.

This kaleidoscopic work was, later in 1908, transformed by the composer into a piano quartet, with the intention of entering it in a competition (which he won in any case, with his first *Violin Sonata*), but he subsequently decided to revert to the original trio format.

The output of the composer, conductor and teacher Frederico de Freitas (1902–1980) was also vast, and his musical language eclectic. Over the course of his life he composed music in practically every genre one might

imagine, from opera and symphonic music to light music and film scores (he wrote the music for the first Portuguese film with sound, *A Severa*, in 1931). His work in the latter fields earned him some barbed comments from some quarters, but this unjustified snobbery merely serves to underline the outstanding quality of his 'serious' works, such as the outstanding *Quarteto concertante* for two violins, two cellos and string orchestra (1945). Until recently, he has often been seen as a composer whose orientation was essentially nationalistic, towards folk music, and this was certainly to have a hugely important role in his work, especially in his compositions for the ballet, but the reality is that he does not fit comfortably into any stylistic category, which explains the fact that he has not historically been accorded as much attention as other Portuguese composers such as Freitas Branco.

Freitas's talent was evident from early on; in 1926 he won the National Prize for Composition with his *Poema sobre uma Ecloga de Virgílio* for string orchestra while still a student at the Lisbon Conservatoire. The exuberant *Prelúdio, coral e fuga* is a work written three years earlier still. The light delicacy of the *Prelúdio* is followed by the brief *Coral*, in which thick, organ-like chords in the piano are responded to by the violin and cello in four-part textures. The closing *Fuga* is truly impressive. It is excellently constructed and rigorously contrapuntal, but also highly colourful, making full, idiomatic use of the instruments; given this, it is no surprise that he was subsequently to make a remarkable orchestration of the *Chaconne* from Bach's *Partita in D minor*.

Joly Braga Santos (1924–1988) was a pupil of Luís de Freitas Branco, and continued his inheritance in a series of six symphonies, concertos, vocal works, operas and, importantly, chamber music. The *Trio* is a late work, dating from 1985, and is a remarkably mysterious and introspective creation. The composer's essentially modal style had undergone a profound change with the *Três esboços sinfónicos* ('Three Symphonic Sketches') of 1962, in which there is evident an interest in atonality, in

timbre as a structural element, and in continuous variation rather than clearly audible formal divisions. However, there is no sense of the composer rejecting his earlier work. Indeed, his infectious lyricism is evident across the entire chronological range of his work, and the *Trio* is a good example of this.

It begins with the violin and cello playing in harmonics, chromatically halting a slow melody in the piano which could certainly be described as modal. Thereafter the piano plays chromatic aggregates of notes while the violin and cello wander through what one might describe as a 'false fugato'. There is a more aggressive central section before the piano's initial melody returns, this time in the strings. The movement closes with what in any other context would be considered a perfect cadence, but here sounds utterly unexpected and original. If sections of the middle movement particularly suggest the night music of Bartók, they also, unexpectedly, seem to anticipate some of the later work of Górecki in their combination of dense, percussive clusters and wide-ranging melodic writing. There is, in addition, a feeling of tremendous transparency – Braga Santos was highly skilled at extracting the maximum impact from minimal means.

In the third movement, the composer returns to the nocturnal ambience of the first, though he renders it even stranger in the way he uses the harmonics of the strings over a kind of chromatic chorale in the piano. The music is thereafter carried forward by the principle of continuous variation, such that one is constantly surprised by new textures and rhythmic procedures – the pizzicato strings in the *Un poco più mosso* section is like the ticking clock of doom, preceding an outburst of lyricism which returns us once again to nocturnal ambivalence.

In turn, Alexandre Delgado (b. 1965) was a pupil of Joly Braga Santos, and has a keen sense of his

compositional lineage, as he has, indeed, of the breadth of Portuguese culture as a whole. His *Trio Camoniano*, written in 2017, originated as a sequence of songs to sonnets by the great Portuguese poet Luís de Camões, for voice and piano trio, in 2013, commissioned by the Performa Ensemble. The composer notes that the idea was to connect the worlds of classical music and *fado*, and, for lack of familiarity with the latter, he initially considered refusing, but then decided to go ahead, surprising himself with the *fado*-like elements that do in fact appear in the music. This purely instrumental version was made in 2017. It retains the intensely lyrical quality of the original songs (something one might not have expected of the composer, given his frequently more acerbic earlier music), and is characterised by a remarkable textural transparency.

The first movement is an exquisite lover's plaint ('With what voice shall I lament...'), famously set to music by Alain Oulman for the renowned Portuguese *fado* singer Amália Rodrigues, as indeed were the other two sonnets), in which the poet's voice is represented simultaneously by violin and cello, perfectly illustrating the poem's rhetorical question. The second movement also concerns love gone awry, but this time the tone is resentful, placing the blame squarely on Fortune. Correspondingly, Delgado writes music that is tempestuous and which, in spite of dance-like moments, ends with angry protest at the injustice of love. The third and final movement of a trio as Portuguese as this could only end, surely, with an evocation of *saudades* – longing. And so it does. Delgado's music for Camões's sonnet *Memory of my love, carved in flowers* is delicate, fragile and fatalistic, but there is yet a glimpse of hope in the entirely unexpected C major chord in the final bar, a touch so subtle as to be almost silent.

Ivan Moody

Trio Pangea

Adolfo Rascón Carbajal, Violin · Teresa Valente Pereira, Cello · Bruno Belthoise, Piano

All photos:
João Vasco



Adolfo Rascón Carbajal



Teresa Valente Pereira



Bruno Belthoise

The Pangea Trio arose from a shared desire to introduce audiences to 20th- and 21st-century music. The distinctive flavour of its output stems from its members' choice to express their Spanish, French and Portuguese musical backgrounds through a repertoire that includes many performance premieres of new works, while simultaneously creating original interpretations of Classical and Romantic trio repertoire. All three musicians have performed in various duos, both with each other and with other musicians, and the trio has performed together in France, Portugal, Spain and Belgium, at the Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB) in Lisbon, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal, the Casa da Música in Oporto, the Institut Français, the Auditorium L'Odyssee in Dreux, Mosan Summer Festival and the Fundación Museo Evaristo Valle among others. They are regularly invited to play in the most prestigious festivals and concert cycles of Portugal and Spain such as Cistermúsica in Alcobça, the Festival Internacional de Música de Marvão (FIMM), international music festivals in Leiria and Alcobça as well as Música em São Roque in Lisboa, Cine-Teatro Avenida in Castelo Branco, Serões Musicais no Palácio da Pena in Sintra and Clásicos en Verano in Madrid. The trio frequently collaborates with contemporary composers such as Sérgio Azevedo, Alexandre Delgado and Alberto Colla, and dedicated their debut album *Une Goutte d'Ombre* to the music of Emmanuel Hieaux (Disques Coriolan). They regularly perform for the Portuguese national radio station RTP – Antena 2. The trio have also created the *Portuguese Trios Anthology* project in collaboration with Naxos.



Chamber music played a substantial role in the renewal of Portuguese music that took place during the 20th century. Freitas Branco's kaleidoscopic *Trio* has an experimental feel, brimming with his typical rhythmic fluidity and sweeping melodic style, while Frederico de Freitas's *Prelúdio, coral e fuga* is both colourful and technically impressive. Braga Santos's infectious lyricism is evident in his *Trio*, and the origins of Delgado's *Trio Camoniano* as a sequence of songs connects the worlds of classical music and *fado*. Volume 1 of Trio Pangea's 'superbly played' (*MusicWeb International*) *Portuguese Piano Trios* can be heard on 8.573402.

PORTUGUESE PIANO TRIOS • 2

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|----|---|--------------|
| 1 | Luís de Freitas Branco (1890–1955): Trio (1908)* | 19:05 |
| | Frederico de Freitas (1902–1980): Prelúdio, coral e fuga (1923)* | 7:59 |
| 2 | Prelúdio | 2:26 |
| 3 | Coral | 1:18 |
| 4 | Fuga | 4:13 |
| | Joly Braga Santos (1924–1988): Trio, Op. 64 (1985) | 25:23 |
| 5 | Largo | 6:01 |
| 6 | Allegro | 6:15 |
| 7 | Lento | 12:59 |
| | Alexandre Delgado (b. 1965): Trio Camoniano (2017)* | 9:26 |
| 8 | Calmo (Com que voz chorarei) | 2:56 |
| 9 | Agitato (Erros meus, má fortuna) | 2:36 |
| 10 | Lento (Memória do meu bem cortado em flores) | 3:53 |

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**



Trio Pangea



Adolfo Rascón Carbajal, Violin
Teresa Valente Pereira, Cello
Bruno Belthoise, Piano



Recorded: 29, 30 and 31 July 2018 at the Auditório Vianna da Motta da Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa (ESML), Lisbon, Portugal • Producer: Trio Pangea • Engineer and editor: Rui Sampaio
Recording supervisor: Léo Belthoise • Booklet notes: Ivan Moody • Publisher: AvA Musical Editions, Lisbon
This recording was made possible thanks to sponsorship from Fundação INATEL, Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, AvA Musical Editions, and ESML – Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa.
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