

NAXOS

Fernando
LOPES-GRAÇA

Symphony for Orchestra

Rustic Suite • December Poem

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Álvaro Cassuto



Fernando Lopes-Graça (1906-1994)

Symphony · Rustic Suite No. 1 · December Poem · Festival March

Fernando Lopes Graça, or Lopes-Graça as he himself used to write, to preserve his two family names, was born in Tomar, a small city northeast of Lisbon, in 1906 and died in Parede, a small town west of Lisbon on the Atlantic Coast, in 1994. He was one of the most prolific Portuguese composers of the twentieth century, with compositions encompassing a wide range of genres. The most relevant aspect of his musical style is, however, his endeavour to use Portuguese folk-music as a medium to forge his personal style, very much like Béla Bartók, although some of his works are very cosmopolitan in style and approach. As a pianist Lopes-Graça regularly accompanied singers in performances of his own works for voice and piano, and as a conductor he dedicated a great deal of his time to conducting the chorus from the Academia de Amadores de Música in Lisbon, for which he arranged a great deal of Portuguese folk-songs. All his works are characterized by a high degree of technical perfection. As a member of Lopes-Graça's composition class (I studied with him between 1957-59), I had the opportunity to appreciate his emphasis on detail and technical discipline. This trait can be found in every one of his works.

The personal life of Lopes-Graça was not an easy one. He never married, and very early in his life was drawn to Communism. Although he was not active as a politician during the dictatorial regime that was ended by the Portuguese Revolution in 1974, he was prohibited from teaching at the National Conservatory in Lisbon, and imprisoned more than once. Yet he maintained a low profile (for instance, during my two years while I studied with him on a weekly basis, he never uttered a single word about politics), and he was held in high esteem by fellow musicians of every political persuasion for his artistic and personal integrity.

The four works included in this recording represent a wide range of Lopes-Graça's creative spirit. One can appreciate his very personal way of treating Portuguese folk-music in the *Rustic Suite*, his sombre approach to

music in his *December Poem*, the title of which is a reference to the dark atmosphere of this month of the year, his penchant for aggressive and dissonant harmonic textures in the *Festive March* and, finally, his concept for the development of larger musical structures in the only *Symphony* he composed.

The title of the *Rustic Suite* No. 1, composed in 1950, is misleading, suggesting that there is more than one suite of this kind. There are indeed another two, but neither of them is for orchestra; the second suite is for string quartet and the third suite for wind ensemble. Although the original title indicates that the work is based on traditional Portuguese songs, their identity or origin is not mentioned. They are clearly, however, from different regions of the country, as both their character as well as their orchestration allows us to conclude. Most of the six songs of this suite are preceded by a short introduction and followed by a coda, and many of them have orchestral interludes which separate repeated statements of the "song". Most of them are lively, except for the slow third and fifth songs (or movements).

Without going into details which would go far beyond the scope of these notes, it is enough to say that very rarely is the full orchestra used, most of the songs being treated as if they were of filigree texture. Yet the orchestra available is quite large, including two flutes (the second doubling on piccolo), pairs of oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, saxophone (only used in the sixth song), four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, three percussionists, harp and strings.

December Poem is a work of sombre mood, with a slow tempo throughout. It is probably the composer's most expressive and emotional work. Although his music was highly influenced by Portuguese folklore, contrary to what is to be heard in most of his works, not the slightest such trace can be found in this symphonic poem written in 1961. The work opens with a rhythmically articulated pedal point in the second violins, violas and horns, preceding a long lament played by the solo oboe. The

oboe solo line is then repeated by the first and second violins in octaves, with a counter-melody in the violas and cellos, while woodwind and harp play an accompanying figuration. At the end of this section the music intensifies and grows in volume, yet the sound subsides rapidly to allow the oboe solo to restate part of its melodic line, this time leading to a new section with the three horns in chords, alternating with the strings. Again the oboe solo reappears, yet here only for a few bars preceding a *crescendo* into a *fortissimo* for the full orchestra, the melodic solo line now entrusted to the trumpets and trombones, and echoed by the horns. A *diminuendo* leads to the coda, where the oboe solo reappears, its melodic line fragmented. The work ends in a *pianissimo*, as it had started. It is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, three horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, celesta, harp and strings.

The juxtaposition of the *Festive March* composed in 1954 with the *December Poem* is not accidental. Indeed, the purpose is to enhance the contrast between these two works. Paraphrasing Brahms's comment about his *Tragic* and *Academic Festival Overtures*, one could say of the two works by Lopes-Graça that "one of them cries, the other one laughs". The *Festive March* starts with an introductory fanfare, after which its main section is based on a motif presented in the low woodwind and strings. Although its title suggests a happy mood, its music, though highly lively and clearly extrovert, strikes me as being more aggressive than conciliatory as one might expect in the context of a festive occasion. This is actually not the result of the thematic material itself, but derives from Lopes-Graça's preference for highly dissonant harmonies. Indeed, his music is often misleading: its melodic material is usually quite direct and natural, but its integration into a strongly dissonant harmonic fabric makes it sometimes difficult to grasp on first hearing. The orchestration includes two flutes, piccolo, pairs of oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

Sinfonia per Orchestra is the original title of the only symphony by Lopes-Graça. Composed in 1944, it was

awarded the Círculo de Cultura Musical Prize in the same year, but its première was given only in 1953. In the context of the enormous number of compositions by the composer, his *Symphony* stands out as a homage to neo-classicism, very much in line with Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements*, although Lopes-Graça could not have known Stravinsky's work, composed as it was in 1945. Like Stravinsky's, Lopes-Graça's *Symphony* has only three movements. Although he was more inclined towards smaller forms, the *Symphony* occupies a unique position among his works, except for his four movement *Sinfonietta* which he composed in 1985 as a homage to Haydn.

The first movement of the *Symphony* is an *Allegro rapsodico*, and its title leads us to believe that in terms of form it is quite free. This, however, is not the case, since it is quite clear that the movement follows traditional sonata form (A - B - Development - A - B - Coda), and that the opening motif serves as the building block of the A section, a polyrhythmic 3/4 with a continuous eighth note (quaver) pulse, while the B section is clearly a melody inspired by Portuguese folk-music, presented by the oboe with the accompaniment of bassoon and horn. The development section starts after the B section and initially appears to be a fugue starting in the violas. Soon, however, the apparent fugue is interrupted by the grandiose statement of the second theme, now in the trombones, tuba and double basses. This subsides, giving way to a second section of the development, this time based on the first theme. This is followed by the recapitulation, in which the second theme (B) is used as a coda, ending with a short reminiscence of the first theme.

The second movement has the title *Intermezzo*, indicating that the composer considered his symphony's outer movements to be the main pillars of the work, separated by an *Allegretto, quasi andantino*, structurally and formally not quite as important as the movements which it separates. The structure of this movement is quite straightforward: a slow introduction in the oboe repeated in the horn a third lower, an A section rhythmically articulated (*Sempre molto staccato e ben*

ritmato), a melodic B section featuring the woodwind which builds up to a *fortissimo* middle section, followed by the A section and by the B section (now in the full orchestra), and ending with a coda based on the motif of the movement's introduction.

The third movement is, in a certain way, the most important one of this symphony. Its title *Passacaglia* reminds us of the fourth movement of Brahms's *Fourth Symphony*, a series of variations on an omnipresent theme. In contrast, however, with Brahms's *Passacaglia*, in which the theme is woven into the fabric of the musical development, Lopes-Graça uses his theme (based on Portuguese folk-music) to create different sections, each one with its own tempo. Thus the first statement of the theme is *Moderato*, with the theme in the cellos and double basses. The various sections can be identified as follows (the instruments featured indicated in parenthesis):

Più mosso (brass), *Allegro moderato* (double basses followed by wind/trumpet), *Poco meno, molto energico* (timpani followed by bass trombone, tuba, cellos and double basses *pizzicato*, again followed by trumpets), *Un poco agitato, con passione* (horn followed by cellos and double basses). A slow interlude separates the first series of variations from the next section *Un poco marziale* (full brass, followed by the trumpets), *Meno mosso, molto tranquillo* (trumpets), *Adagio non tanto* (bassoon, followed by double basses), *Sostenuto*

funebre (brass), *Vivo* (horn, trumpet, piccolo), *Con fuoco ed agitato* (double basses and bassoons followed by low brass), *Presto agitatissimo* (trumpets), *Meno mosso, piuttosto allegretto e grazioso* (horns followed by cellos and double basses, *pizzicato*) which leads into a tutti for the full orchestra which subsides into the coda, *Largo, molto tranquillo*.

This coda is, in a way, a new section although it is, as all the preceding ones, based on the *passacaglia* theme. It starts with a descending two-bar line in the cellos and double basses, *pianissimo*, continuously repeated and resembling the coda of the first movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, and the theme is presented first in the brass – not easily identified by the listener as the theme of the *passacaglia* owing to its tempo being extremely “stretched out”. It builds up to a *fortissimo*, which subsides into a *piano*, and the movement fades away with three sustained chords in the woodwind and brass over a sustained chord in the high violins and violas.

The orchestration is for three flutes (third flute doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons (third doubling contrabassoon), four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

Álvaro Cassuto

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Photo: Peter Devlin



The Royal Scottish National Orchestra is one of Europe's leading symphony orchestras. Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, the company became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950, and was awarded Royal Patronage in 1991. Throughout its proud history, the orchestra has played an important part in Scotland's musical life, including performing at the opening ceremony of the Scottish Parliament building in 2004. Many renowned conductors have contributed to its success, including Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Bryden Thomson, Conductor Laureate Neeme Järvi, Conductor Emeritus Walter Weller and Conductor Emeritus Alexander

Lazarev. Stéphane Denève, who became Music Director in September 2005, concludes his tenure at the end of the 2011-12 Season. This partnership has enjoyed great acclaim, at home and abroad, and has brought one of the most successful periods in the organisation's recent history. British-Canadian conductor Peter Oundjian will take over as RSNO Music Director in September 2012. The orchestra has a worldwide reputation for the quality of its recordings and has been nominated for eight GRAMMY® awards in the last eight years. Over 200 releases are available, including the complete symphonies of Sibelius (Gibson), Prokofiev (Järvi), Nielsen and Martinů (Thomson). The RSNO is one of Scotland's National Performing Companies, supported by the Scottish Government. For more information, please see www.rsno.org.uk.

Álvaro Cassuto



Álvaro Cassuto is Portugal's foremost conductor. He has been Music Director of the Portuguese National Radio Symphony Orchestra, the University of California Symphony Orchestra, the Rhode Island Philharmonic, the National Orchestra of New York, the Nova Filarmonia Portuguesa, the Portuguese Symphony Orchestra, the Israel Raanana Symphony Orchestra, the Algarve Orchestra, and the Lisbon Metropolitan Orchestra.

Born in Porto, he studied in Lisbon, and after establishing himself as one of the most promising young composers of the avant-garde of the early 1960s, he went on to study conducting with Herbert van Karajan in Berlin. After graduating in Law from the University of Lisbon in 1964, he obtained his conducting degree in Vienna.

A recipient of the Koussevitzky Prize among many other honours, he has enjoyed a career of high international acclaim. He has been a frequent guest of many leading orchestras, including the London Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic, the London Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and dozens of others across the world.

In 2009, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Cassuto's career, the President of Portugal bestowed on him the degree of Grand Officer of the Military Order of Sant'Iago da Espada.

He has an extensive discography with a variety of orchestras and for different labels, among which a highly successful ongoing series for Naxos dedicated to some of Portugal's most important composers.

Also available:



Joly
BRAGA SANTOS
Alfama

Symphonic Overture • Elegy
Variations • Three Symphonic Sketches
Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Álvaro Cassuto

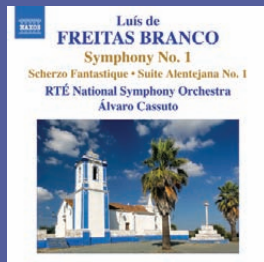


8.572815

THIS RECORDING IS SPONSORED BY:



Also available



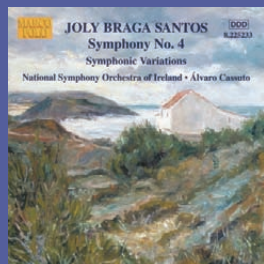
8.570765



8.572059



8.223879



8.225233

Fernando Lopes-Graça was one of the most prolific Portuguese composers of the 20th century. His use of Portuguese folk-music to forge a personal style is represented in the *Suite Rústica No. 1*. More sombre moods are expressed in the dark atmosphere of *December Poem*, which contrasts with the extrovert *Festival March*. Neo-classical in its extended structures and thematic development, Lopes-Graça's award-winning *Symphony* maintains an unmistakable connection with the colours and textures of his nation to create music of great expressive and dramatic depth.



**Fernando
LOPES-GRAÇA**
(1906-1994)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Suite Rústica No. 1 (1950) | 14:53 |
| 1 I. Andante con moto, ma semplice | 2:17 |
| 2 II. Non troppo vivo | 1:39 |
| 3 III. Andante | 3:48 |
| 4 IV. Un poco vivo, grazioso | 1:43 |
| 5 V. Lento, non troppo | 3:09 |
| 6 VI. Allegro moderato | 2:18 |
| 7 December Poem (1961) | 10:11 |
| 8 Festival March (1954) | 6:47 |
| Symphony for Orchestra (1944) | 34:39 |
| 9 I. Allegro rapsodico | 11:48 |
| 10 II. Intermezzo | 9:02 |
| 11 III. Passacaglia | 13:49 |

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Álvaro Cassuto

Recorded in the Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow, Scotland, on 26th and 27th July, 2011
 Produced and edited by Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.) • Engineer: Mike Clements
 Publishers: AvA Musical Editions, Lisbon (tracks 1-8); Sugarmusic, Milan (tracks 9-11)
 Booklet notes: Álvaro Cassuto

Cover photograph: Casa Verdades de Faria / Portuguese Music Museum, Cascais, Portugal
 (home to the musical estate of Fernando Lopes-Graça) by Carlos Sá



DDD

8.572892

Playing Time
66:30



www.naxos.com

© & © 2012 Naxos Rights International Ltd.
 Booklet notes in English
 Made in Germany