

ลักษณะเฉพาะของดนตรีแบบบราซิลและแนวทางการประพันธ์บทเพลง

สำหรับเปียโน ของ ไฮเตอร์ วิลลา-โลบอส ใน Poema Singelo

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BRAZILIAN MUSIC AND THE PIANISTIC IDIOM OF HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS IN POEMA SINGELO

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้วิเคราะห์ลักษณะเฉพาะของดนตรีบราซิลและแนวทางการประพันธ์เปียโนของ ไฮเตอร์ วิลลา-โลบอส โดยมุ่งเน้นการศึกษาบทประพันธ์ โปเอมา ซิงเจโล (Poema Singelo, 1942) การวิเคราะห์นี้มีเป้าหมายเพื่อสำรวจว่า วิลลา-โลบอสได้นำองค์ประกอบของดนตรีบราซิลแบบดั้งเดิมมาผสมผสานเข้ากับการประพันธ์เปียโนอย่างไร โดยให้ความสำคัญกับแบบแผนการประพันธ์ จังหวะ และการเรียบเรียงเสียงประสานผ่านการตรวจสอบบทเพลงนี้อย่างละเอียด นอกจากนี้ งานวิจัยยังมุ่งให้ข้อมูลเชิงลึกเกี่ยวกับพัฒนาการเชิงสไตล์ของผู้ประพันธ์และความท้าทายทางเทคนิคที่สะท้อนผ่านบทเพลง

หัวข้อสำคัญของการศึกษาประกอบด้วย แนวทางอันสร้างสรรค์ในการจัดการเนื้อเสียง การใช้โครมาติกและการเดินคอร์ด ตลอดจนการปรับเปลี่ยนจังหวะเพื่อสะท้อนเอกลักษณ์ของดนตรีแบบบราซิลอย่างชัดเจน นอกจากนี้ งานวิจัยยังพิจารณาโครงสร้างของบทเพลงและวิธีที่องค์ประกอบดนตรีเหล่านี้มีปฏิสัมพันธ์กันเพื่อสร้างงานศิลปะที่สื่ออารมณ์และสอดคล้องประสานกันอย่างลงตัว

การศึกษานี้ยังเน้นถึงความท้าทายทางเทคนิคในบทเพลง Poema Singelo ซึ่งรวมไปถึงเนื้อเสียงที่มีความซับซ้อน ความแตกต่างของไดนามิกและการออกแบบทำนองที่แสดงออกอย่างลึกซึ้ง เพื่อแสดงถึงการผสมผสานระหว่าง การวิเคราะห์และการบรรเลงอย่างลงตัว โดยการวางบริบทของผลงานนี้ในกรอบของพัฒนาการด้านรูปแบบเฉพาะตัวของ วิลลา-โลบอส งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งหวังที่จะชี้ให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของบทเพลงนี้ในฐานะตัวแทนของอัจฉริยภาพทางการประพันธ์

ท้ายที่สุด การศึกษานี้มีเป้าหมายเพื่อเสริมสร้างความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับบทบาทของวิลลา-โลบอส ในการพัฒนา บทประพันธ์เปียโนเดี่ยวและผลลัพธ์ของการหลอมรวมอัตลักษณ์ดนตรีบราซิลเข้ากับดนตรีคลาสสิก

คำสำคัญ: แนวดนตรีแบบบราซิล/ วิลลา-โลบอส/ ภาษาดนตรีสมัยใหม่/ วัฒนธรรมบราซิล

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Abstract

This study examines the distinctive characteristics of Brazilian music and the pianistic idiom of Heitor Villa-Lobos, focusing on his composition *Poema Singelo* (1942). The analysis explores how Villa-Lobos integrates elements of Brazilian musical tradition into his piano writing, emphasizing his unique approach to texture, rhythm, and harmonic language. Through a detailed examination of the piece, the research aims to provide insights into the composer's stylistic development and the technical demands presented by his piano compositions.

Key areas of exploration include Villa-Lobos's innovative approach to texture, his use of chromaticism and harmonic progression, and his manipulation of rhythm to evoke a distinctly Brazilian sound. The study also considers the piece's structural organization and how these musical elements interact to create an expressive and cohesive artistic statement.

Additionally, this research highlights the technical demands of *Poema Singelo*, including its intricate textural layering, contrasting dynamic nuances, and expressive melodic shaping, illustrating the synergy between analysis and performance. By contextualizing the work within Villa-Lobos's broader stylistic development, the study seeks to illuminate its significance as a microcosm of his compositional genius.

Ultimately, this investigation aims to enhance understanding of Villa-Lobos's contribution to the solo piano repertoire and its lasting impact on the integration of Brazilian musical identity into classical music.

Keywords: Brazilian musical style/ Villa-Lobos/ Modern musical language/ Brazilian culture

I. Introduction

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) is a seminal figure in Brazilian music, renowned for blending indigenous folk traditions with European classical forms. Composed in 1942, *Poema Singelo* (Simple Song) is a single-movement piano composition that exemplifies Villa-Lobos's ability to craft music that is both accessible and emotionally profound. (Carlos Ribeiro, 1987)

The piece is distinguished by its lyrical, melodious qualities, and research indicates the use of characteristic elements of Brazilian music, including modal scales and syncopated rhythms. (Souza Lima, 1965) *Poema Singelo* emerges from a period when Heitor Villa-Lobos was at the zenith of his creative output. This was a time marked by significant global upheaval due to World War II and a period of cultural transformation in Brazil, during which Villa-Lobos was instrumental in shaping the nation's musical identity. The title, *Poema Singelo* (Simple Song), suggests that the work was conceived as an accessible and expressive composition, possibly intended for pedagogical or recreational purposes. This simplicity, however, does not preclude its artistic depth, reflecting Villa-Lobos's ability to balance technical clarity with profound musicality.

The statement of the problem

Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Poema Singelo* stands as a significant yet underexplored work in the composer's extensive repertoire, offering a unique perspective on his approach to piano composition. Despite its brevity, the piece encapsulates Villa-Lobos's ability to synthesize Brazilian musical idioms with European classical traditions, reflecting both his nationalistic ideals and his innovative compositional techniques. This duality makes *Poema Singelo* a compelling subject for scholarly inquiry, as it bridges cultural and stylistic paradigms within the solo piano repertoire.

Moreover, the technical demands of *Poema Singelo* highlight a distinctive interplay between analytical understanding and performance interpretation. The work's intricate textural layering, chromatic harmonies, and expressive melodic lines require not only a refined pianistic technique but also a deep comprehension of its structural and stylistic elements.

Analyzing these aspects provides valuable insights into the synergy of Villa-Lobos's compositional language and its practical realization at the keyboard, underscoring the broader implications of merging theoretical analysis with artistic performance in musicological research.

Piano practice and interpretation involve a complex interaction of technical, cognitive, and affective components that collectively shape musical performance. These processes engage advanced technical skills across multiple levels and require a thorough understanding of musical structure through analytical frameworks. The effective cultivation of musical values depends on the integration of cognitive domains - such as theoretical knowledge and analytical expertise - with affective aspects, including emotional expression and the development of aesthetic sensitivity. Despite the acknowledged complexity of these interactions, the underlying mechanisms that contribute to advanced piano performance remain insufficiently organized and explored.

Research Objective

This research seeks to establish the appropriate framework for examining *Poema Singelo's* (1942) complex musical and technical characteristics. Moreover, it aims to support piano students, educators, and performers in understanding the work's compositional language and recognizing its contributions to pianistic interpretation.

This study also seeks to address the need for a systematic approach to piano practice and interpretation, aiming to clarify how the synergy of technical mastery, musical analysis, and aesthetic development can enhance performance outcomes. By investigating these interconnected elements, the research aspires to provide a structured pathway toward achieving higher levels of pianistic excellence.

II. Literature Review

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959): Biographical Overview

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959), widely regarded as one of Brazil's most influential composers, is renowned for his prolific and stylistically diverse output that merges elements of Brazilian folk music with European classical traditions. Among his extensive catalog, which includes over 2,000 works encompassing symphonies, concertos, chamber music, and solo piano compositions, *Poema Singelo* stands out as a piano miniature that, despite being less frequently examined than his larger-scale works such as the *Bachianas Brasileiras*, reveals his capacity to compose music that is both accessible and artistically nuanced. (Peppercorn, 1996)

Poema Singelo by Heitor Villa-Lobos occupies a distinctive place in his oeuvre, reflecting his synthesis of Brazilian musical idioms with European classical traditions. Composed in 1942, the work

was premiered by the composer himself during his lifetime, highlighting its intimate and personal nature. While documentation of other specific pianists who performed or recorded the piece during Villa-Lobos's era is scarce, its delicate lyricism and pianistic refinement made it a valued addition to the repertoire of artists acquainted with his works.

The first edition of *Poema Singelo* was published by Consolidated Music Publishers in New York in 1948, underscoring Villa-Lobos's international recognition at the time. The piece's melodic and harmonic language reveals the influence of traditional Brazilian musical elements, particularly the *modinhas* (a genre of sentimental Brazilian song) and the rhythmic subtleties of *choro* (a traditional Brazilian instrumental music genre that emerged in the late 19th century), which Villa-Lobos often drew upon to evoke a sense of national identity. These influences are woven into the fabric of *Poema Singelo*, infusing the work with a nostalgic yet sophisticated character that aligns with Villa-Lobos's broader artistic vision.

Villa-Lobos's formative years were deeply immersed in music, beginning with cello studies and early compositional efforts. His encounters with the rich musical traditions of Brazil, particularly from the Amazon and Northeastern regions, played a significant role in shaping his distinctive voice, which he later enriched through engagement with European composers such as Debussy and Stravinsky. In this context, *Poema Singelo* offers valuable insight into Villa-Lobos's compositional language and his approach to creating expressive, pianistically effective music within a concise format.

Research Methodology

This study employs a compositional analysis of Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Poema Singelo* (1942), emphasizing its rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic structures to uncover how Brazilian folk music influences its design. As a single-movement work for solo piano, *Poema Singelo* exemplifies Villa-Lobos's ability to merge Brazilian musical traditions with European classical techniques.

Preliminary findings suggest that the piece incorporates modal scales and syncopated rhythmic patterns characteristic of Brazilian musical idioms, paralleling stylistic features observed in Villa-Lobos's *Chôros series*. (Behague, 1994)

The harmonic language of *Poema Singelo* is analyzed with particular attention to its use of modal scales and non-functional harmonic progressions, both of which are emblematic of Brazilian folk traditions. The piece frequently employs modes such as Dorian and Mixolydian, which are common in regional Brazilian music, to create a tonal palette evocative of folk styles.

Additionally, chromatic passing tones and unexpected harmonic shifts contribute to a sense of fluidity and improvisation, mirroring the harmonic practices found in samba and choro. These elements are studied in their role in establishing the piece's tonal character and how they contribute to the fusion of folkloric and classical tradition idioms within a pianistic context.

The melodic language is examined through its lyrical, cantabile quality and the incorporation of ornamentation and phrasing techniques reminiscent of *modinha*. The primary thematic material is characterized by stepwise motion interspersed with intervallic leaps, creating a dynamic interplay between tension and release. Syncopation and rhythmic flexibility, hallmarks of choro and samba (a Brazilian music and dance genre rooted in African and Afro-Brazilian traditions) are evident in the melodic contour, lending a distinctly Brazilian character to the work.

This methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the work's harmonic and melodic construction, emphasizing its significance within the solo piano repertoire and its reflection of Villa-Lobos's broader artistic objectives.

Analysis Overview

Poema Singelo (1942) is likely conceived as a single-movement piano work, opening with a gentle, lyrical melody in the right hand supported by simple chordal accompaniments in the left hand. The piece appears to be set in C major and 4/4 meter, establishing a straightforward tonal and rhythmic foundation that aligns with the composition's *singelo* (simple or sincere) character. (Souza Lima, 1965) The melodic material, potentially inspired by Brazilian folk songs, is primarily stepwise with occasional leaps, contributing to its song-like quality.

The structural framework of *Poema Singelo* resembles a modified rondo form, following an ABACA pattern that contributes to its rhapsodic and quasi-improvisational character. This formal design allows for recurring thematic material to be interspersed with contrasting episodes, enhancing the expressive range of the work.

The initial section presents the principal theme, which is subsequently contrasted by a middle section marked by increased rhythmic and harmonic complexity. This central passage introduces syncopated rhythms, chromatic passing tones, and subtle shifts in texture before returning to the opening material for thematic recapitulation and closure. The melodic language of *Poema Singelo* incorporates pentatonic and modal scales derived from indigenous Brazilian sources. Villa-Lobos frequently employs: 1) Descending melodic gestures that mirror indigenous vocal traditions; 2) Intervallic

patterns based on perfect fourths and fifths, reflecting pre-Columbian musical structures; 3) Melodic curves that avoid European-style sequential development in favor of circular, repetitive patterns.

The rhythmic foundation of *Poema Singelo* draws heavily from choro traditions, particularly in its treatment of syncopation. Choro, as an urban Brazilian genre, is characterized by virtuosic melodic lines over a rhythmic accompaniment that anticipates samba elements. The characteristic choro syncopation pattern - emphasizing weak beats and creating metric displacement - appears throughout the work in subtle transformations.

Villa-Lobos employs the typical choro technique of placing melodic accents on the off-beats while maintaining a steady pulse in the accompaniment. This creates the characteristic "swing" that distinguishes Brazilian popular music from European classical traditions. The syncopations are not merely ornamental but structural, affecting the harmonic rhythm and phrase construction.

Harmonically, the piece maintains a predominantly diatonic language, occasionally enriched by gentle dissonances that resolve with clarity and grace. These harmonic nuances, combined with rhythmic features such as syncopation and implied polyrhythms, contribute to the piece's distinctive Brazilian character. Such elements are emblematic of Villa-Lobos's compositional approach, wherein traditional folk idioms are reinterpreted through a classical lens to produce music that is both culturally rooted and stylistically refined.

Stylistically, the piece draws upon the waltz form, evident in its triple meter and dance-like rhythmic gestures. Throughout the composition, Villa-Lobos employs a variety of textures to articulate musical ideas and support structural contrasts. The recurring A sections - designated as A (mm. 1–32), A' (mm. 68–99), and A" (mm. 160–191) - feature a simple, lyrical melody that serves as the principal thematic material. This theme, characterized by its cantabile quality and diatonic clarity, reflects the expressive simplicity suggested by the title, *Poema Singelo*.

The texture in these sections is predominantly homophonic, featuring a right-hand melodic line supported by a left-hand accompaniment comprising bass notes and harmonized double-note figures. This texture 1 (see Figure 1) reinforces the lyrical nature of the theme while maintaining a sense of harmonic richness and rhythmic stability. The interplay between melody and accompaniment in these passages exemplifies Villa-Lobos's ability to balance simplicity and sophistication within a concise pianistic idiom.

Analysis of *Poema Singelo* (1942)

Section A (mm. 1-4, 11-14, and 27-29), recommended phrasing to the next 1st beat

The D predominated/the phrases that begin and end



Figure 1: Section A – Andantino, Texture 1, mm. 1-4
from *Poema Singelo* (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Phrasing is recommended toward the subsequent downbeat (first beat of the following measure) to enhance the musical line's natural flow and expressive continuity. This approach supports the underlying metric structure and aligns with the lyrical character of *Poema Singelo*, allowing the phrasing to guide the listener toward each successive point of arrival with clarity and musical intention.



Figure 2: Melody in D Aeolian Mode, mm. 8-14
from *Poema Singelo* (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

In measures 14–16, the texture, shaped by chords and octaves in the tenor, should be played *forte* with vigor, serving as a bridge to the melodic line.



Figure 3: Texture 2, In measures 14–16, the texture is characterized by chords and octaves
in the tenor register

from Poema Singelo (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Section B (mm. 33–67) introduces a contrasting texture that departs from the lyrical simplicity of Section A. The texture is constructed through the use of right-hand octave voicing in the upper register, underpinned by triplet motion in the inner (contralto) voice and a syncopated bass line. This layered texture creates rhythmic vitality and harmonic density, contributing to the increased complexity characteristic of the middle section in a ternary or rondo form.

The right-hand octaves are articulated with careful voicing, beginning at a soft dynamic level (*piano*) and gradually building through a *crescendo*, thereby shaping the musical phrase and highlighting the expressive contour of the melodic line. This dynamic progression, coupled with the interplay of rhythmic layers, underscores the expressive and structural function of Section B as a point of contrast and development within the broader formal design.



Figure 4: Section B – Motif, Texture 3, mm.33

from Poema Singelo (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Section B

In measures 41–43, Texture 4, characterized by the combination of low, sustained chords in the bass register with overlapping chords executed in a *trémolo* articulation in the upper register. This textural layering generates a sense of sonic expansion and dramatic intensity, contributing to the heightened expressive quality of the passage.

Functioning as a brief yet impactful virtuosic episode within the section, this passage demands a high level of technical command and expressive control. The pianist must deploy considerable strength and dexterity, utilizing the full dynamic and technical range of the instrument to project the brilliance and intensity inherent in the score. This moment serves not only as a showcase of pianistic virtuosity but also as a pivotal structural and emotional climax within the broader context of Section B.

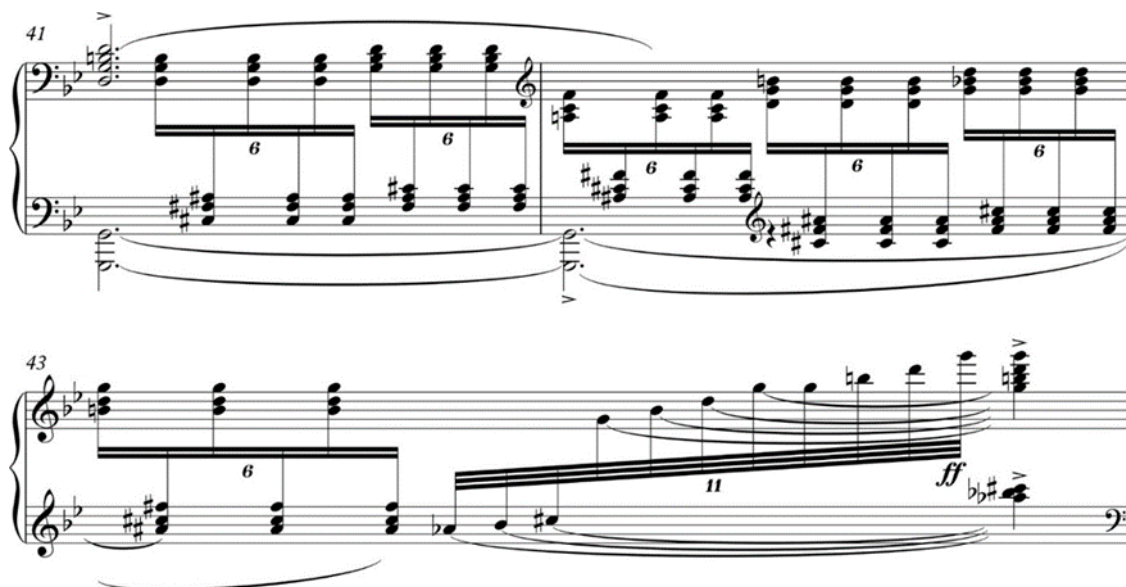


Figure 5: Texture 4 features low sustained bass chords combined with overlapping tremolo chords in the upper register, mm. 41-43
from Poema Singelo (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Section B (mm. 44–53) presents Texture 5, distinguished by a sustained bass foundation, harmonically rich chords in the tenor register, and a melodic line situated in the contralto range. This textural arrangement creates a dense, multi-layered soundscape that supports the passage's virtuosic character.

This section functions as an extension of the preceding climactic material, demanding a high degree of technical precision and expressive power from the performer. The right hand features

prominently articulated octaves, marked *fortissimo*, which require both strength and control to project with clarity over the complex harmonic background. The pianist is expected to employ full technical brilliance to realize the intensity and grandeur of this passage, reinforcing its role as a pivotal expressive high point within Section B.



Figure 6: Texture 5 combines a sustained bass, rich tenor chords, and a contralto-range melody, mm. 44-46 from Poema Singelo (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Section C – *Vivace* (mm. 100–110; 132–141) introduces Texture 6, defined by the use of double-note figures and a chromatic descending line executed in parallel motion. The articulation is marked by a distinct staccato touch, contributing to the lightness and agility characteristic of this *Vivace* section.

This texture enhances the rhythmic drive and energetic momentum of the passage, contrasting sharply with the more lyrical and sustained material found in earlier sections. The parallel chromaticism, coupled with the articulation of double notes, requires precise finger coordination and control, further emphasizing the virtuosic demands placed on the performer in this section. The interplay of articulation and motion in Texture 6 reinforces the dynamic and stylistic diversity within *Poema Singelo*, contributing to its overall structural and expressive complexity.



Figure 7: Texture 6 features double-note figures and a chromatic descending parallel motion, mm. 100-101 from Poema Singelo (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Section C – Texture 7 (mm. 110–118 and 141–149) is characterized by a distinct textural arrangement in which the upper voice features chromatic motion, while the lower register provides harmonic support through chordal structures and pedal tones. This combination of chromaticism in the melody and sustained harmonic underpinnings in the bass creates a rich, contrapuntal texture that enhances the expressive depth of the section.

The use of chromaticism in the upper voice introduces a sense of tension and fluidity, while the pedal and chordal foundation in the lower line anchors the texture, contributing to both harmonic stability and dynamic contrast. This textural configuration is central to the development of the section, adding complexity and color to the overall structure of *Poema Singelo*.



Figure 8: Texture 7 is marked by chromatic motion in the upper voice, m. 110
from Poema Singelo (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Section C – Texture 8 (mm. 120–131) is defined by the combination of harmonically rich chords and a melodic line. This texture blends the harmonic foundation provided by the chords with the linear movement of the melody, creating a balanced and expressive contrapuntal relationship. The interplay between these elements enhances the section's lyrical quality, contributing to its structural cohesion and emotional depth within the broader context of *Poema Singelo*.



Figure 9: Texture 8 combining of harmonically rich chords and a melodic line, mm.120-123
from Poema Singelo (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Texture 8 is characterized by the use of chords formed by diminished fifths and sevenths, which move in parallel motion. This distinctive harmonic structure introduces a sense of tension and dissonance, enhancing the textural complexity and expressive depth of the passage. The parallel movement of these diminished intervals creates an unusual, gripping sound that contributes to the overall emotional and harmonic progression of *Poema Singelo*.



Figure 10: Texture 8, Chords created by diminished 5th and 7th in parallel movements, m. 123
from *Poema Singelo* (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Section C – Texture 9 (mm. 151–156) is characterized by the use of double-note figures and a chromatic line in contrary motion. This textural configuration creates a dynamic interplay between the hands, with the chromatic motion in opposite directions enhancing the harmonic tension and rhythmic complexity. The *vivace* tempo must be maintained with a consistent rhythmic drive, ensuring that the passage retains its energetic and lively character throughout. This combination of contrapuntal movement and rhythmic precision contributes to the vibrant and virtuosic nature of the section.



Figure 11: Texture 9 features double-note figures and a chromatic contrary motion, mm. 151–156
from *Poema Singelo* (Villa-Lobos, 1943)

Summarized Analysis Table

Source: Author's analytical summary based on the piano score of *Poema Singelo* by Heitor Villa-Lobos (São Paulo: Irmãos Vitale, 1943).

Section	Measure	Texture	Description
A	mm. 1-32, mm. 68-99 and mm. 160-191	1	Simple and Lyrical melody/Theme
A	mm. 14-16	2	Characterized by chords and octaves
B	mm. 33-67	3	Octaves voicing by triplets motion in the upper register and syncopated bass line
B	mm. 41-43	4	Chords executed in a tremolo articulation
B	mm. 44-53	5	Combines a sustained bass, rich tenor chords, and a contralto-range melody
C	mm. 100-110 and mm. 132-141	6	Double-note figures and a chromatic descending parallel motion
C	mm. 110-118 and mm. 141-149	7	Marked by chromatic motion in the upper voice,
C	mm. 120-131	8	A combination of harmonically rich chords by diminished 5th and 7th in parallel movements, and a melodic line
C	mm. 151-156	9	Characterized by double-note figures and a chromatic contrary motion

Conclusion and Recommendations

Poema Singelo (1942) represents a significant artefact from a period when Heitor Villa-Lobos was at the height of his creative powers. Composed during a time of global conflict and cultural transformation in Brazil, the work encapsulates Villa-Lobos's pivotal role in defining the musical identity of his nation. While its title, *Poema Singelo* (*Simple Song*), implies accessibility and expressiveness, the piece transcends its apparent simplicity, offering a nuanced interplay of technical clarity and profound musicality. This duality underscores Villa-Lobos's mastery in crafting compositions that are both

pedagogically valuable and artistically rich, affirming his enduring influence on Brazilian and global musical traditions.

To enhance its implications for performance and education recommended the following points:

1 .Performance Implications: Highlight how the nuanced interplay of technical clarity and musicality in *Poema Singelo* requires pianists to balance precision with expressiveness focusing on dynamic control, phrasing, and mastering rhythmic subtleties to effectively convey the piece's emotional depth.

2. Educational Applications: Emphasize the pedagogical value of the piece for teaching Brazilian music idioms and advanced piano techniques. Educators are encouraged to use it as a case study to introduce students to Villa-Lobos's harmonic language, syncopation, and textural complexity.

3.Practice Strategies: Suggestions and detailed strategies for overcoming technical challenges, such as: practicing chromatic passages and textural layering slowly to achieve clarity, isolating the interplay between melody and accompaniment to ensure balance, and incorporating rhythm exercises to internalize syncopated patterns characteristic of Brazilian music.

These additions would provide practical insights for performers and educators, making the conclusion more actionable and comprehensive.

The piece stands as a testament to Villa-Lobos's ability to develop new formal structures appropriate to Brazilian musical expression while maintaining the sophistication expected of concert repertoire. Its integration of choro syncopations, indigenous melodic patterns, and modal harmonies creates a work that is simultaneously deeply Brazilian and universally accessible- achieving the nationalist ideal of creating art music that authentically reflects national character while speaking to international audiences.

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