

แนวทางการฝึกเปียโนอย่างเป็นระบบและอัตลักษณ์ดนตรีบราซิล
ในบทเพลง VALSA DA DOR (1932) โดย ไฮเตอร์ วิลลา-โลบอส
A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO PIANO PRACTICE AND
BRAZILIAN MUSICAL IDENTITY IN HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS'S VALSA DA DOR (1932)

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้เป็นการสำรวจบทเพลง "Valsa da Dor" ("Waltz of Sorrow") ประพันธ์ขึ้นสำหรับเปียโนเดี่ยวของ ไฮเตอร์ วิลลา-โลบอส ผลงานที่เปี่ยมด้วยความรู้สึกลึกซึ้งและตรึงใจชิ้นนี้ชี้ให้เห็นแนวทางเฉพาะตัวของนักประพันธ์ในการผสมผสานรูปแบบดนตรีพื้นบ้านบราซิลเข้ากับแนวทางดนตรีคลาสสิกของตะวันตก การศึกษานี้มุ่งเน้นการวิเคราะห์เชิงลึกเกี่ยวกับบริบททางประวัติศาสตร์ อิมพลี โครงสร้างเสียงประสาน และการสื่อสารทางอารมณ์ของบทเพลง ผ่านการตรวจสอบโน้ตเพลงอย่างละเอียด โดยการเน้นไปที่เทคนิคและความท้าทายของการแสดง งานวิจัยนี้เน้นย้ำถึงความสำคัญของ Valsa da Dor ในฐานะผลงานที่โดดเด่นในวงการดนตรีศิลปะบราซิล

ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยประกอบด้วยการสืบค้นทางประวัติศาสตร์ การวิเคราะห์โน้ตดนตรี และการศึกษาเชิงตีความเพื่อเสนอกรอบการทำความเข้าใจที่ครอบคลุมต่อผลงานชิ้นนี้ ทั้งนี้ แนวทางอันหลากหลายเหล่านี้มีเป้าหมายไม่เพียงเพื่อแสดงถึงเอกลักษณ์เฉพาะตัวของ Valsa da Dor เท่านั้น แต่ยังเพื่อสนับสนุนผู้แสดงผลงานและศึกษาบทเพลงดังกล่าว การศึกษานี้ได้เน้นย้ำถึงความสำคัญของบทประพันธ์ชิ้นนี้ในการพัฒนาความเข้าใจถึงมรดกทางศิลปะและรูปแบบการแสดงเปียโนในงานของเขาอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ : ภาษาดนตรีแบบบราซิล/ วิลลา-โลบอส/ วัฒนธรรมบราซิล

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Abstract

This research explores Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Valsa da Dor* (Waltz of Sorrow) which was composed for a solo piano. This poignant and introspective work highlights the composer's unique approach to blending Brazilian folk idioms with Western classical traditions. The study provides an in-depth analysis of the piece, focusing on its historical context, thematic material, harmonic language, and emotional narrative. By emphasizing the technical and expressive challenges inherent in its performance, the research underscores the significance of *Valsa da Dor* within the repertoire of Brazilian art music.

The research methodology combines historical inquiry, score analysis, and interpretative studies to offer a comprehensive framework for understanding this work. This multifaceted approach aims not only to uncover the layers of expression that characterize *Valsa da Dor* but also to support performers and educators in their engagement with this piece. The study highlights the importance of this composition in advancing the understanding of his artistic and pianistic legacy.

Keyword: Brazilian musical language/ Villa-Lobos/ Brazilian culture

I. Introduction

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959) is widely regarded as one of the most significant composers in Brazilian music history. His works bridge the gap between Brazilian folk music's rich traditions and Western classical music's structural complexities. Among his diverse output, *Valsa da Dor*, composed in 1932, is a deeply personal and evocative piece. The waltz's melancholic character, imbued with a sense of nostalgia and yearning, provides a window into the composer's emotional world. (Peppercorn, 1996)

This research seeks to analyze *Valsa da Dor* within its cultural and musical contexts. By examining the piece's historical background, musical structure, and interpretive challenges, we aim to provide insights into its enduring appeal and significance.

The Statement of the Problem

Piano practice and interpretation are multidimensional processes involving the interplay of technical, cognitive, and affective components. Advanced pianistic performance necessitates mastery across these domains, encompassing technical proficiency, analytical insight, and emotional engagement.

The cultivation of musical values requires an integration of theoretical understanding with emotional expression and aesthetic sensitivity. Despite the recognition of these complexities, the mechanisms underlying advanced piano performance are not comprehensively understood.

This research addresses the need for a systematic approach to piano practice and Villa-Lobos's interpretation of *Valsa da Dor* (1932). It examines how technical skill, analytical acumen, and aesthetic development interact to enhance performance. By providing a structured framework, it aspires to guide pianists toward achieving higher levels of artistry and expressiveness.

Research Objective

This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical evolution and musical characteristics of the Brazilian waltz, with a focus on Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Valsa da Dor* (1932). By establishing a systematic framework for analyzing the intricate musical and technical aspects of this significant work, the study seeks to offer valuable insights into its compositional language and interpretive achievements.

Specifically, it is designed to support piano students, educators, and performers in recognizing the artistic and cultural significance of the Brazilian waltz while fostering the development of advanced pianistic interpretation. Through this structured approach, the research aspires to elevate artistic and

expressive performance, contributing to a deeper appreciation of *Valsa da Dor* and its place within the broader Brazilian art music tradition.

II. Literature Review

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

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959) stands as a seminal figure in the history of Brazilian music, celebrated for his extensive and stylistically diverse body of work that seamlessly integrates Brazilian folk traditions with European classical influences. (Salles, 2009) His oeuvre, comprising over 2,000 compositions - including symphonies, concertos, chamber music, and solo piano works- demonstrates an extraordinary breadth of creativity. Among these, *Valsa da Dor* (1932), a piano miniature, emerges as a notable piece that, despite receiving less scholarly attention compared to larger works like the *Bachianas Brasileiras*, exemplifies Villa-Lobos's ability to craft music that is both artistically profound and widely accessible.

Villa-Lobos's early life and musical education were profoundly shaped by his studies in cello and his initial forays into composition. His deep engagement with Brazil's rich and varied musical traditions, particularly those of the Amazon and Northeastern regions, significantly influenced his unique compositional voice. This voice was further refined through exposure to European composers such as Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky. Within this framework, *Valsa da Dor* provides a compelling lens through which to explore Villa-Lobos's compositional ethos, showcasing his talent for creating music that is both expressively potent and pianistically idiomatic within a succinct structure.

Heitor Villa-Lobos's music has grown significantly over the decades, with scholars such as Gerard Béhague, Lisa Peppercorn, and Eero Tarasti offering extensive analyses of his works. Béhague's studies emphasize the synthesis of Brazilian folk elements and European techniques in Villa-Lobos's compositions, while Peppercorn highlights the emotional depth and autobiographical elements in his music. Tarasti's semiotic approach provides a framework for understanding the symbolic and narrative aspects of his works.

Valsa da Dor has often been overshadowed by Villa-Lobos's larger and more experimental compositions, such as the "Bachianas Brasileiras" and "Chôros" series. (Lima, 1965) However, it has been noted for its lyrical beauty and emotional intensity. Previous analyses have touched on its harmonic language and melodic contours, but a comprehensive exploration of its thematic development and interpretive possibilities remains relatively underexplored.

Research Methodology

This research employs a comprehensive and multi-faceted methodological framework to explore the intricate musical and technical characteristics of Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Valsa da Dor*. The methodology integrates various approaches to ensure a thorough examination and interpretation of the work, encompassing the following key components:

1. Analysis Overview and Analysis of Brazilian Musical Identity in *Valsa da Dor* (1932)

Primary and secondary sources, including Villa-Lobos's correspondence, biographical accounts, archival documents, and existing scholarly analyses, are critically reviewed. This phase situates *Valsa da Dor* within its socio-cultural, historical, and personal contexts, offering insights into the external and internal influences on the composer during the period of its creation.

2. Analytical Framework

A detailed score analysis is conducted, focusing on the harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, and structural elements of the composition. The study also examines Villa-Lobos's compositional techniques and their relationship to Brazilian and Western classical traditions. Emphasis is placed on identifying stylistic elements characteristic of the Brazilian waltz and their manifestation in *Valsa da Dor*.

3. Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Drawing on musicology, ethnomusicology, and cultural studies, the research incorporates broader interdisciplinary perspectives. The goal is to understand how *Valsa da Dor* reflects and contributes to the cultural identity of Brazilian art music and its resonance within global classical music traditions.

Through this comprehensive methodological approach, the research seeks to uncover the multifaceted layers of *Valsa da Dor*, providing a valuable resource for scholars, educators, and performers in understanding and appreciating this masterpiece.

Analysis Overview on *Valsa da Dor* (1932)

The *Valsa da Dor* conveys a rare synthesis of introspection, intimacy, and romanticism (including a dramatic undertone), elements seldom combined in Villa-Lobos's works for piano yet prominently featured in the oeuvre of Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), the master of pianistic idiom. In Chopin's compositions, poetic expression and meticulous craftsmanship allow the upper melodic lines to dominate the homophonic texture, creating, through the inherent potential of the keyboard, refined textures and resonances. (Ribeiro, 1987)

Chopin's fluid and lyrical melodies are occasionally interwoven with counterpoint and are frequently structured using recurring intervals, a characteristic observed, for instance, in Section A of the

Valsa da Dor. This combination of structural clarity and textural sophistication highlights the nuanced interplay between melody and harmonic support, embodying the expressive depth of the romantic idiom.

Analysis of Brazilian Musical Identity in *Valsa da Dor* (1932)

Valsa da Dor integrates elements of Brazilian musical identity by incorporating rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic features characteristic of Brazilian traditions. These elements complement the introspective and lyrical qualities that are also influenced by Chopin's romantic idiom, creating a distinctive synthesis that bridges European and Brazilian musical traditions.

1. Rhythmic Flexibility and Syncopation

The rhythmic structure of *Valsa da Dor* reflects the influence of Brazilian popular dances, such as the choro and *modinha* (a traditional Brazilian song genre that originated in the 18th century, influenced by European salon music and Portuguese romantic ballads).

While the waltz maintains its ternary foundation, Villa-Lobos incorporates subtle syncopations and rubato, echoing the expressive timing characteristic of Brazilian music. These rhythmic nuances contribute to the emotional narrative and enhance the dance-like qualities of the piece, distinguishing it from European waltzes.

2. Harmonic Language

Villa-Lobos employs chromaticism and modal shifts that are reminiscent of Brazilian folk harmonies. For instance, the use of unexpected modulations and pedal points mirrors the harmonic practices found in *serestas* (Brazilian serenades) and other traditional Brazilian forms. These harmonic choices imbue the piece with a sense of melancholy and longing, emotions central to both the romantic idiom and Brazilian cultural expression.

3. Melodic Ornamentation and Improvisatory Quality

The melodic lines in *Valsa da Dor* display a lyrical, song-like quality akin to Brazilian vocal traditions. This is achieved through ornamental flourishes, such as appoggiaturas and turns, which mimic the embellishments found in *choros* (a traditional Brazilian instrumental music genre that emerged in the late 19th century). The improvisatory character of these lines connects the work to the spirit of Brazilian street musicians, blending it seamlessly with the formal compositional techniques influenced by Chopin.

4. Integration of Folk Elements in the Texture

Villa-Lobos's use of ostinatos and repetitive harmonic patterns reflects the influence of Brazilian folk music. In *Valsa da Dor*, these elements often serve as a grounding foundation over which the melodic lines weave intricate narratives. This approach recalls the traditional instrumental practices of

viola *caipira* (a traditional Brazilian stringed instrument resembling a small guitar) players in rural Brazil, adapted for the piano's resonant capabilities.

5. Expressive Narrative with Brazilian Undertones

The dramatic shifts in dynamics and texture throughout *Valsa da Dor* align with the emotional intensity of Brazilian art forms, such as the theatricality of *modinhas* and the storytelling aspect of samba-canção (a lyrical and melodic genre of Brazilian popular music). Villa-Lobos's ability to convey a poignant narrative through these shifts adds a uniquely Brazilian dimension to the romantic framework borrowed from Chopin.

By integrating these elements of Brazilian musical identity, *Valsa da Dor* serves as a compelling example of Villa-Lobos's ability to blend local traditions with Western classical forms. The piece not only highlights his mastery of the piano but also asserts the distinctiveness of Brazilian art music within the broader classical repertoire.

Villa-Lobos's Structural Approach and Tonal Design

Villa-Lobos structured the work transparently as a Rondo, divided as follows: Introduction: mm. 1–3, Section A: mm. 4–13, Section B: mm. 14–29, Section A: mm. 30–39, Section C: mm. 40–47, and Section A: mm. 48–61, with an extended ending in mm. 60–61 (external expansion).

As mentioned above, the texture is predominantly homophonic, while the tonal organization is centered primarily on “E”. The principal tonal areas are E major in the Introduction, E minor in the Section A and its repetitions, A minor in Section B, and E major in Section C. The three-measure introduction in E major, descending in a “cascading” motion from the upper to the lower-middle register, contrasts with its associated section, as it does not exhibit the flowing lyricism, melancholy, and profound sadness that are unequivocal in Section A (See Fig. 1).

However, from measure 1 of the introduction, two key motives are derived: the descending fifth interval, which forms the melodic basis of Section A, and the rhythmic motive (rest-eighth note-eighth note), which underpins Section C. This intricate motivic development underscores Villa-Lobos's attention to both structural coherence and expressive depth.



Figure 1: mm. 1-3, Introduction: Texture 1

Source: “Valsa da Dor” is Éditions Max Eschig (1972)

In Section A, measure 4, the primary melodic line begins with an anacrusis starting in measure 3 on the note G. The presentation of the main melody occurs in the soprano voice, accompanied by a brief counterpoint in the alto voice.

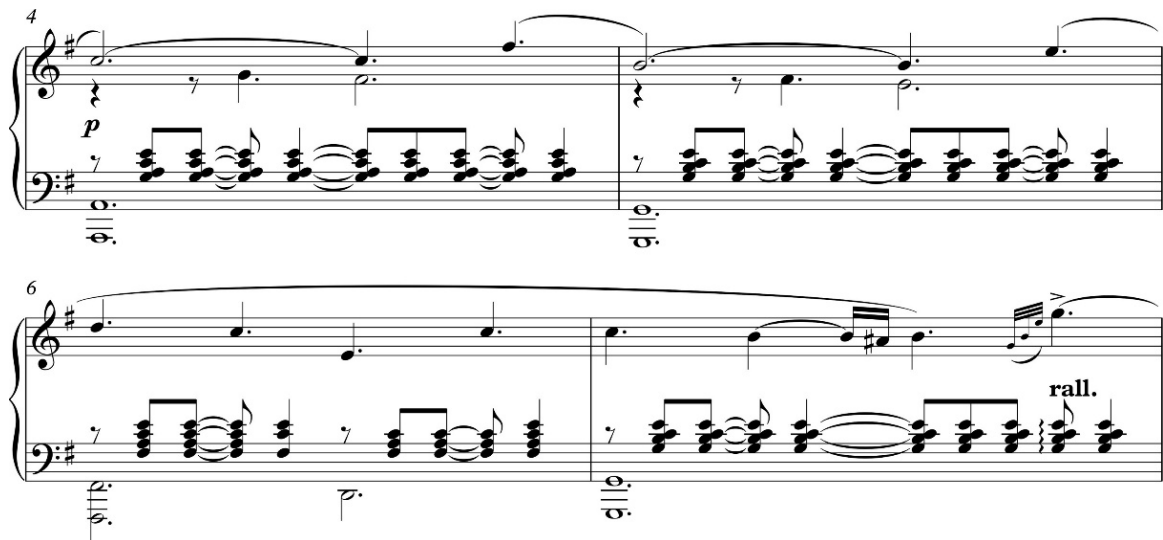


Figure 2: mm. 4-7, Texture 2

Source: “Valsa da Dor” is Éditions Max Eschig (1972)

A brief chromatic movement is introduced after Section A, between measures 10 and 13. This passage effectively concludes the section while preparing the anacrusis that leads into Section B.



Figure 3: The end of Section A, mm. 11-13

Source: “Valsa da Dor” is Éditions Max Eschig (1972)

Section B, mm. 14-29, exhibits the greatest density, turbulence, and drama of all the sections, with this character further emphasized by the tempo marking, *Allegro ansioso*. The main melody, which begins with an anacrusis in the final measure of Section A, as indicated in Figure 4, is characterized by stepwise motion.



Figure 4: Texture 3 Section B, mm. 14-16

Source: “Valsa da Dor” is Éditions Max Eschig (1972)

Section C, mm. 40-47, is characterized by repeated staccato chords and employs the same rhythmic pattern as the principal melody in Section A. This ostinato is utilized in Section 4 to accompany the melodic line. It features the same rhythmic design introduced in Section 1, suggesting it is derived from the material presented in the introduction.



Figure 5: Texture 4 Section C, m. 40

Source: “Valsa da Dor” is Éditions Max Eschig (1972)

The uniqueness of this work lies in the final measures of the last repetition of Section A, marked by an external expansion. As illustrated in Figure 6, beginning in measure 60, a leading-tone progression is introduced through chords transitioning from E minor to conclude in E major, performed *pianissimo*.



Figure 6: An external expansion characterized by a progression from E minor to E major.

Source: “Valsa da Dor” is Éditions Max Eschig (1972)

The piece is composed of two melodic motifs, one rhythmic motif, and three ostinato motifs, which appear in various transformations throughout the musical discourse. These elements are intricately interconnected, utilizing components of one motif to develop new elements for other sections, particularly in terms of rhythm. (Kiefer, 1981) The structure of the piece is organized through subdivisions into distinct parts, with a recapitulation of initial ideas interspersed among contrasting sections.

Conclusion

Despite the limited number of waltzes composed by Villa-Lobos, *Valsa da Dor* exemplifies his remarkable command of the genre's conventions and stylistic grammar. The piece demonstrates the composer's ability to integrate and repurpose musical material across its sections, showcasing his compositional ingenuity within the framework of a late 1940s work. While this waltz draws inspiration from early 20th-century French musical aesthetics and Chopinian Romanticism - marked by characteristics reminiscent of Frédéric Chopin's stylistic and expressive idiom - it would be reductive to classify Villa-Lobos as either a Romantic or Post-Romantic composer solely on this basis.

Villa-Lobos's compositional approach in *Valsa da Dor* is characterized by the deliberate use of a "least common denominator" technique, wherein core musical elements are decontextualized and transformed throughout the work. This approach, combined with a subtle amalgamation of Chopinian tonalities - as exemplified by the lyrical melancholy of Chopin's Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2, the harmonic sophistication of his Prelude in E Minor, Op. 28, No. 4, and the poignant expressiveness of the Mazurka in B Minor, Op. 33, No. 4 and the vibrant popular music culture of the early 20th century, reflects the composer's nuanced engagement with diverse musical traditions. These features, far from signaling artistic inferiority or regression, as posited by some critics, highlight Villa-Lobos's innovative spirit and adaptability.

Evaluating such claims about individual works or Villa-Lobos's oeuvre demands a rigorous, multi-faceted approach. Critiques must be underpinned by comprehensive technical analyses that account for the compositional intricacies of his music. Furthermore, they should integrate an appreciation for the aesthetic dimensions of his art, derived from an informed and empathetic engagement with the lived experience of his music. Historical and sociocultural contexts must also serve as indispensable frameworks for understanding and assessing Villa-Lobos's contributions to the musical canon. This holistic perspective allows for a balanced and objective appraisal of his legacy, unencumbered by normative biases.

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