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Rediscovering
Ferdinand Rebay
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The Portuguese
Clarinet School

Interview with
Ian Mitchell

ARTIST
RENZEL-MUELLER
L.I. CITY, N.Y.

U.S.

THE PORTUGUESE CLARINET SCHOOL: *Cultivating a New Tradition*

by Kristine J. Dizon

The Portuguese school of clarinet is derived from different traditions which collectively influenced contemporary clarinet performance, especially in the years after Portugal was closed off from the world during the Estado Novo dictatorship (1944-1974). During that time, Portugal's inhabitants were forbidden from traveling abroad, and it was also rare for foreigners to come to Portugal. After the Carnation Revolution in 1974, Portugal became a democracy, and outside influences combined with the efforts of Antonio Saiote and others to form a new tradition of clarinet playing in Portugal.

BEFORE AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Before the 1970s, no traditional school of clarinet playing existed except for the education students

would receive in the *bandas filharmónicas* and music schools in the villages. Wind bands represented the oldest existing musical tradition in Portugal. One of the first known wind bands was the Portuguese Royal Navy Band "Charamela," created in 1740. This is one of the earliest known instances of clarinet performance in an ensemble setting.

Before the Revolution, most of the music teachers were from military bands, teaching multiple instruments in the music schools. It was not uncommon for students to perform in an amateur band until they turned 18, then the military band, and perhaps continue their education at a conservatory.

Prior to Antonio Saiote, who revolutionized clarinet pedagogy in Portugal, there were few teachers who specialized in one instrument. [See *The*



One of the *bandas filharmónicas*, the Sociedade Humanitária dos Bombeiros Voluntários de Loures, performing during Carnival in 1971 to raise money to build a new fire station; second row, second from the left is António Saiote performing in the green uniform

Clarinet Vol. 41/2 for Nuno Pinto's profile of Saiote. *Ed.*] For example, Nuno Pinto's first teacher was not a clarinetist. In an interview, Pinto mentioned, "It was not uncommon to have teachers who taught multiple instruments. Saul Silva was my first teacher and he was an oboist."

The political situation after the Revolution played an important role in shaping the Portuguese clarinet school – which also explains why most of the developments occurred in the last thirty years. Saiote explained in an interview:

Before the Revolution, it was difficult for Portugal's inhabitants to travel abroad because of their economic circumstance. It was also rare for foreigners to come to Portugal. The country has a kind of fate; if you look at the map, you don't cross through Portugal. You come here or you don't. A place like Luxembourg or Belgium is close to every center in Europe, but we are really at the edge. Even instrumental performers at the highest level want to go abroad because of this feeling of isolation. That's one of the reasons why the Revolution was important. It opened the frontiers and people started to communicate.

This type of communication played an important role in how Saiote was able to incorporate the most important traditions from other schools of clarinet to create one unique to Portugal. When asked about his motivations for developing the Portuguese school of clarinet, Saiote remarked:

It was a reflection of when I was young and I heard very talented Portuguese players that were not able to perform to the best of their ability when it was time for an audition, concert or a competition. The Portuguese are not systematic by nature. We believe that if you are inspired, that good will come, and if you cannot perform at a high level, it means that you are not inspired. There was confusion with what it meant to have the technical skills, inspiration and assurance to perform well. I was fed up with that, you know? Without technical mastery, control, you can't give all of yourself. Technique is not the object, it's just the means that you have to make the best music, to be inspired.

Saiote noted that he synthesized teaching practices from a variety of schools

Clarinet performance and repertoire flourished after the Revolution, when Portugal was exposed to developing musical trends in Europe.

to develop a core curriculum now utilized throughout Portugal:

You always owe to someone. You never create something alone. Guy Deplus once said, "You have the chance to do one of the biggest things for your country. Since you don't have a tradition and you are here receiving a tradition, you can do even better." One of the problems with traditional schools is that you are not able to open your mind to such new things. Here in Portugal, we are not obliged to follow that, and we can take the best from the German, American, French and English traditions and build something else.

PORTUGUESE CLARINET REPERTOIRE

Portuguese repertoire for the clarinet was almost nonexistent before the Revolution, except for the works of José Avelino Canongia (1784-1842). He was the clarinet professor at the Conservatório Nacional de Lisboa and principal clarinet of the Teatro S. Carlos in Lisbon.¹ Canongia was a virtuoso clarinetist who

wrote four concertos for the clarinet: *Fantasia com Variações*, *Noturno*, *Introduction & Thème Varié* and *Variações em Sol*. Canongia's compositional style resembles the virtuosic style of Niccolò Paganini and Louis Spohr.²

Saiote played a prominent role in the development of Portuguese clarinet repertoire. According to Pinto, "his talent and virtuosity influenced the writing for the instrument."³ Saiote premiered many works by Portuguese composers. The following pieces were dedicated to him:

- Jorge Peixinho – *O Novo Canto da Sibila* (1981) for clarinet, piano and percussion
- Isabel Soveral – *Opium I* (1985) and *Opium II* (1986) for solo clarinet
- Paulo Brandão – *Música para o 1º Fausto* (1986) for solo clarinet; *Ne Vas Pas au Jardin des Fleures* (1986) for clarinet quartet
- Clotilde Rosa – *Divertimento* (1987) for solo clarinet
- Joly Braga Santos – *Improviso* (1988) for clarinet and piano
- António Pinho Vargas – *Três Fragmentos* (1985/1988) for solo clarinet
- Fernando Lapa – *Nem tudo ou nada* (2004) for clarinet and piano; *Incertos ventos* (2005) for clarinet and flute.⁴

Due to Saiote's influence as a clarinetist, many Portuguese composers began to write regularly for the clarinet. With the exception of Canongia, the Portuguese clarinet repertoire has significantly developed during the past thirty years as a result of Saiote's work.

Contemporary music ensembles that developed in the 1970s also played an important role in further expanding Portuguese repertoire for the clarinet, including the Grupo de Música Contemporânea de Lisboa (directed by Jorge Peixinho) and the Grupo Música Nova (directed by Cândido Lima). In 1978, Álvaro Salazar created the group Oficina Musical. In 2000, the Remix Ensemble was created and became the resident contemporary ensemble at Casa



Antonio Saiote

da Música. In 2001, António Pinho Vargas, Luís Tinoco, Carlos Caíres and José Júlio Lopes founded OrchestUtopica.⁵ These groups provided another medium for composers to write for the clarinet, furthering the development of the clarinet repertoire.

CLARINET PEDAGOGY IN PORTUGAL

There were several prominent clarinetists prior to and during the Revolution. Marcos Romão Junior dos Reis, a clarinetist, conductor and composer, was also Saiote's teacher. He was a clarinetist in the Portuguese Naval Band and received a Gulbenkian Scholarship to study in France. Later, Romão was appointed as the soloist of the Symphony Orchestra in Lisbon and professor at the Conservatório Nacional de Lisboa, where he was succeeded by Artur Moreira. Other notable clarinetists in the early 20th century include Lopes Fernandes of the Lisbon Opera and Américo Aguiar of the Radio Symphony Orchestra in Porto. According to Pinto, Fernandes, Romão, Moreira and Aguiar were virtuosic performers in their own right, but were not motivated to develop a school of clarinet performance unique to Portugal.

Clarinet performance and repertoire flourished after the Revolution, when there was more access to information outside of Portugal and the country was exposed to developing musical trends in Europe. Even though the clarinet had been used since the late 18th century in military bands, music programs in universities did not become prominent until the late 1980s with the development of regional institutions of higher education known as the *Superior* schools. Saiote's work throughout the past 30 years helped establish clarinet programs in Portugal where many of his former students teach.

Regarding his studies with Saiote, Pinto remarked:

I studied with Antonio during the first years when the Escola Superior de Música, Artes e Espectáculo opened in Porto in the early '90s. In the first years that he taught at the school, he brought knowledge combined with a serious work mentality and motivation to train world-class level musicians. That's what we are trying to spread to our students.



Escola Superior de Música, Artes e Espectáculo do Porto (ESMAE)



Nuno Pinto

As the demand for the clarinet grew, Nuno Pinto was hired as the second clarinet professor at the Escola Superior de Música, Artes e Espectáculo in 1997, where he is currently building upon Saiote's tradition. In addition to the Hanon scales Saiote brought to Portugal, Pinto includes studies influenced by Baermann, Taffanel, Clarke and the mechanization of quarter-tone scales. In this class, Pinto also creates different exercises in varying transpositions. Pinto mentioned, "These exercises are very difficult, but when you are able

to master them, especially with a lot of contemporary music you see nowadays, you can do anything with the clarinet."

For each weekly lesson, students are expected to learn two etudes and one piece. In addition, students attend scales class, class with piano, and collective lessons. Students go through every major and parallel minor key in the following patterns: normal, interrupted, double thirds, three exercises taken from Hanon, and arpeggios. The arpeggios include the normal form with three notes, groups of four and three, the first inversion and second inversion. Other patterns include adding the seventh, dominant and diminished within each tonality. Each week, more than 40 patterns are expected to be prepared, memorized and ready to perform. A student may be asked to play a pattern from this series of scales in front of all the students. In addition to these patterns, there is another set of scales, which include a variety of diminished and augmented intervals.

Students also have a separate class where they perform with piano in front of the teacher and peers. The purpose of this class is to allow the clarinetist to work on intonation, rhythmic accuracy and knowledge of the musical texture. Similar to the French school, collective lessons resemble a master class. When I asked Pinto about this, he mentioned, "There are ones that know that they have to play during the day, but I don't tell them when. When I was studying in



The Orquesta Internacional de Clarinetes Príncipe de Asturias in 2011 with the now King and Queen of Asturias; this photo was taken after their performance in the El Pardo Royal Palace at the Prince of Asturias Academy in celebration of Saiote's musical contributions

Paris with Michel Arrignon, I learned a lot from watching him work with other students." Observation plays a significant role in how students are able to learn from one another in this type of performance setting. The students also perform in the Orquesta Internacional de Clarinetes Príncipe de Asturias, a clarinet orchestra created and directed by Saiote.

Saiote described his work as follows: "It's like planting seeds. I wanted to first create and establish the program, and

then have a student of mine teach there to continue this tradition." He has taught a large number of students who are now international artists and professors in major universities in Portugal, including Nuno Pinto, Antonio Rosa, Victor Pereira, Luis Carvalho, Carlos Alves, João Pedro Santos, Nuno Silva, Luís Gomes, Rui Martins, Luis Silva, Francisco Ribeiro and Manuel Jerónimo, who all continue to develop the Portuguese tradition of clarinet playing. ❖

ENDNOTES

- 1 Luis Filipe Leal Carvalho, "José Avelino Canongia (1784-1842): Virtuoso e compositor" (Master diss., Universidade de Aveiro).
- 2 Nuno Fernandes Pinto, "A Influencia dos Clarinetistas no Desenvolvimento do Clarinete e Do Seu Repertorio" (Master diss., Universidade de Aveiro). 37.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.

ABOUT THE WRITER



Kristine Dizon is an international Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Human Sciences at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon as a recipient of a grant from the

Fundação para Ciencia de Tecnologia (Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology). In addition, Dizon received the J. William Fulbright Scholarship for research and postgraduate studies in clarinet and orchestral conducting at the Escola Superior de Música, Artes e Espectáculo with António Saiote. Dizon holds a master's degree in clarinet performance from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale and degrees in European history and music at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Her principal teachers include António Saiote, Victor Pereira, António Rosa and Eric Mandat.



left to right: Nuno Pinto (ESMAE), Carlos Alves (Solista A, Casa da Música), António Saiote (ESMAE), Nuno Silva (Solista A, Lisbon Metropolitan Symphony)