

se poderá fazer do grupo de solistas Kumi Arata, Monique Simon, Christopher Josey e Christian Treguier, demasiado díspares nas características vocais e na postura interpretativa. O recurso a vozes brancas por Schneebeli contribui decisivamente para a frescura tímbrica da sua gravação, sublinhada por uma correcta espacialização das fontes sonoras. Um marcado contraste de ambiência é proporcionado pela gravação dos Segréis de Lisboa, cuja falta de perspectiva acústica resulta, por um lado, das características inerentes ao espaço físico onde foi realizada e, por outro lado, do posicionamento demasiado próximo dos microfones em relação aos intérpretes. A participação do violoncelo no grupo de baixo contínuo dos Segréis de Lisboa confere recorte à região grave das texturas, uma qualidade menos visível na interpretação de Schneebeli, povoada não raras vezes por sonoridades confusas motivadas pela ausência deste instrumento. No domínio árido da discografia dedicada à nossa música sacra setecentista, estas são duas gravações de referência.

RUI CABRAL

A survey of recordings of music by Joly Braga Santos

Três esboços sinfónicos, op. 34; Elegia a Vianna da Motta, op. 14; Variações sinfónicas sobre um tema alentejano, op. 18, Orquestra Sinfónica da RDP, dir. Álvaro Cassuto, SP 4055 (rec. 1978)

Sinfonietta para orquestra de arcos, op. 35; Concerto em ré para orquestra de arcos, op. 17, Orquestra Filarmónica de Budapeste, dir. András Kórody, CD 870017/PS (rec. 1986)

Divertimento n.º 1, op. 32; Concerto para violeta e orquestra, op. 31, Ana Bela Chaves, Orquestra Filarmónica de

Budapeste, dir. János Sándor, CD 870008/PS (rec. 1981)

Sinfonia n.º 1 em ré menor, op. 8; Abertura sinfónica n.º 3, op. 20, Orquestra Sinfónica Nacional Húngara, dir. Mátyas Antal, SP 4048 (rec. 1989)

Sinfonia n.º 3 em dó, op. 15, Orquestra Sinfónica de Londres, dir. Álvaro Cassuto, CD 870022/PS (rec. 1986)

Sinfonia n.º 4 em mi menor, op. 16, Coro da Filarmónica "George Enescu", Orquestra Sinfónica da Radiotelevisão Romena, dir. Silva Pereira, SP 4057 (rec. 1978)

Sinfonia n.º 5, op. 39 "Virtus Lusitaniae", Orquestra Sinfónica da ENR, dir. Silva Pereira, SP 4043 (rec. 1968)

Joly Braga Santos occupies an ambiguous position in Portuguese music of the 20th century. On the one hand, he is widely revered as a fine composer and teacher; on the other, his music is unfrequently played and the works which do appear in concert programmes and on recordings represent but a small proportion of his output. Many composers are in a much worse position, of course, but the stature of Braga Santos's music is such that one can but lament the present paucity of performances and recordings.

There is also something transitional, even unstable, about his music which, I would argue, is a positive (and clearly very 20th century) quality and has to do with his continual search for the right musical language for his own need. If we compare him to other composers of his generation – a random list might include figures as diverse as Ligeti, Nono, Feldman, Berio, Kurtág, Robert Simpson, Peter Eben, Einojuhani Rautavaara, and, closer to home, Josep Casanovas, Ángel Cerdá and Josep Cercós – it becomes clear that this characteristic is quite general, though each of these composers has inevitably

approached the task in a remarkable and individual way.

The works of Braga Santos which have been recorded do, fortunately, allow us to glimpse the way in which his artistic vision matured (accomplished technique seems to have been ever present). The earliest work to be recorded on the seven discs of his music currently available is the First Symphony, dating from 1947. It is a *locus classicus* of the composer's early style, and its technical accomplishment is remarkable indeed given that he was twenty-three years of age when he wrote it. It is formally satisfying and the scoring is masterly, the string writing being particularly characteristic (of the openings of the first and third movements). The purity of the modal language of course suggests the inevitable comparisons with both Vaughan Williams and Holst, but as I have said elsewhere,¹ I believe that with the benefit of historical insight this need not be now viewed as a derogatory observation (particularly, in this case, in the work of the composer so young). Shostakovich also comes to mind occasionally, particularly in the last third of the first movement. If Braga Santos did not here make a decisive contribution to a "Latin symphonic style",² he did at least take a definite step away from a Germanic way of thinking, and even from the style of his teacher, Luís de Freitas Branco. The performance by the Hungarian State Orchestra is very fine: their rich string tone is particularly appropriate to much of the symphony, and they are positively boisterous in the high-spirited *Abertura Sinfónica n.º 3*, dating from seven years later.

The *Elegia a Vianna da Motta*, dating from the year after the First Symphony appears

on an anthology recorded by the RDP Symphony Orchestra under Álvaro Cassuto. This work is a miniature epic – it lasts just over 9 minutes – but has an extraordinarily impressive grandeur. It too suggests Vaughan Williams and, this time, Walton – but, suprisingly perhaps, one might at times just as easily think of Janáček or Martinu. In any case, all these influences (if such they be) are well absorbed – it is a very personal work. There is not enough gap between the end of the *Elegia* and the *Variações Sinfónicas* which follow it, and though the latter are well-played, as with the *Três esboços sinfónicos*, there is a boxiness to the acoustics (the disc is recorded in the Valentim de Carvalho studios) which works against the expansiveness of Braga Santos's writing. These two works (dating from 1951 and 1961 respectively) together with the *Elegia* make a good whistle-stop tour of the composer's shorter symphonic works, though the *Variações sinfónicas* seem rather slight in comparison with the other two. The *Três esboços* are one of his most brilliant conceptions, bright, biting, and very colourful, though this listener at any rate always feels let down by the Gallic final chord!

There is no recording yet of the Second Symphony, but the Third, dating from 1959 is available, also conducted by Cassuto, this time with the London Symphony Orchestra. This is a superb performance, and it benefits too from Tony Faulkner's characteristically brilliant sounding engineering. João Paes, in his notes to the recording speaks of a "dialectic between classicism and exoticism" and this is a very good way of characterising this work, and, indeed, Braga Santos's music in

¹ "Mensagens: Portuguese Music in the 20th Century" *Tempo*, 198, October 1996.

² See insert notes to this recording.

general. The second movement is perhaps one of his less inspired creations; it seems somewhat formulaic in its material, and lacks the necessary tension to drive it along. One wonders whether the composer here relies too much on the strings to carry the emotional weight. No such problems affect the impressive third and fourth movements: the "Tempo di scherzo" has a real generating energy, derived from simple but powerful material, and clothed in brilliant orchestral colours, and the orchestra really respond to this. The *finale*'s double fugue is a remarkable achievement; far from employing this merely as an academic device, Braga Santos manages to retain an exciting dance-like rhythmic impetus, with ever-changing instrumentation, while constructing a contrapuntal edifice of considerable complexity.

The inheritance of Freitas Branco is evident in the cyclical construction of the Fourth Symphony (1950), a work which wears the word "epic" on its sleeve from its powerful, immediately arresting opening, with its costumarily idiomatic string writing, as well as hints of Walton and, even, Sibelius in the brass and woodwind contributions. Some of the brass playing here is not entirely reliable, and the recording is certainly showing its age (it was recorded in 1978 in the Electrecord Studios in Bucharest). The beautiful *andante* fares better: the orchestra seems at its best in this kind of sustained melodic writing. I have always had doubts about the choral version of the *finale* to this symphony: the poem by Vasconcelos Soveral is quiet simply, dreadful and the musical rhetoric consequently rather misfires (also not helped here by the acoustics and the ragged choral singing, though it must be said that Rumanians cope very well with singing in Portuguese). One does not

need to invoke Beethoven or Mahler to find more successful attempts at choral symphonic movements – Manolis Kalomiris's *Symphony n.º 1, Levendia* (1918-20) is a good example. Having said all this, the melody is of the kind which stays in one's head for days...

The Concerto in D for string orchestra, from the year after the Fourth Symphony, is paired on another recording with the *Sinfonietta*, written in 1963. Again, the performances are excellent (the Budapest Philharmonic, under András Kórodin). The spry neo-classical (but modal) elegance of the concerto is excellently caught by the performers, as also in the almost Bartokian mystery of the *Sinfonietta*'s twisting, chromatic opening. This work moves quite far from conventional tonality, but one never loses sight of what a fundamentally melodic composer Braga Santos was, and one can hear his neo-classical grounding throughout, in the rhythmic structuring, the *ostinati*, and the throw-away ending to the first movement à la Poulenc. Bartók also hovers over the second movement (and Ligeti too, in the clusters at the end), but this splendid work, which deserves to be a tremendous success with orchestras internationally, remains a very individual achievement. The *Divertimento* from 1961 (coupled with the Viola Concerto from 1960) is also tonally very rich, but real chromaticism would only come with the *Três esboços* from later in the same year. It has a sweeping melodic style which sometimes brings Copland to mind: it sounds like a "sigh of relief" after the intensity of the dramatic Viola concerto, the intensity of whose writing suggests a symphony *manquée* rather than a concerto. There is virtuosity here (and deftly handled in this recording), but it is not of an obvious kind; the

orchestra is far more than a mere accompaniment, engaging as it does in symphonic dialogue with the soloist, and frequently carrying the weight of the argument.

The Fifth Symphony (1965-66), which won the UNESCO International Composers' Rostrum Prize in 1969, and recorded on this disc – which has aged remarkable well – by the ENR Symphony Orchestra one year before that, is a magnificent work. As with many of Braga Santos's other works, the opening immediately catches one's attention, though the floating chromaticism presents a sound world quite different from that of the Fourth Symphony of sixteen years before. Here the timbric experiments of the *Três esboços* have been fully digested, and the instrumental colour is now audibly a structural element, development being accomplished by means of free variations. In spite of the *ostinati* which link the work to the composer's previous music, he never so much as hints at such composers as Vaughan Williams and Walton. Indeed, it is difficult to find any parallels for it, though the closing section of the first movement may suggest contemporary Finnish composers such as Sallinen or Rautavaara (especially the latter's opera *Thomas*). The justly renowned second movement, "Zavala (Scherzo)", reimagining the sound of

marimba-playing in Mozambique is another example of Braga Santos's pleasure in sound for its own sake, and the sheer skill with which he manipulates the instrumental resources at his disposal is breathtaking. After the brooding third movement, the major code which finishes the energetic *finale* is a real shock, even thirty-one years after the symphony was completed: a tribute both to Braga Santos's staying power and to his sense of humour (which is evident in several of the works on these recordings). One may hope that a projected complete recording by the Orquestra Sinfónica Portuguesa of all the symphonies for the Marco Polo label may help to bring Joly Braga Santos's music to greater recognition and thereby encourage performances outside (and even inside) Portugal, but there are still enormous gaps to be filled. His operas *Viver ou morrer* (1952) and *Trilogia das barcas* (1970) cry out for revival and recording, as do the Concerto for piano (1973) and the Double Concerto for violin and cello (1966), to name but four of his large-scale works. Only when this happens will we have a more representative picture of one of the most significant voices in Portuguese music: and not only of the 20th century.

IVAN MOODY

