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| Gilberto Ambrósio Garcia Mendes was born in Santos (São Paulo state), on 13 October 1922. Despite his unorthodox musical career — he did not start to study music until the age of nineteen, and worked in a bank until his retirement in 1975 — has achieved widespread recognition as one of the leading contemporary Brazilian composers. He is a local pioneer in the fields of chance, *concrète*, microtonal music, mixed media, and musical action.  Professor, lecturer, and contributor to many newspapers and magazines, Mendes is the founder and director of the Festival Música Nova de Santos (Santos New Music Festival), the oldest concert series of its kind in Latin America (1962). As a scholar, he has served as Visiting Professor and University Artist at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (1978–1979), and as Tinker Visiting Professor and Composer in Residence at the University of Texas at Austin (1983). In 1994, the Universidade de São Paulo granted him a Ph.D. in Music. He has since retired, but remains on the faculty as Honours Professor for Graduate Studies.  Compositions by Gilberto Mendes have been performed at main musical events in Brazil and abroad, such as the Festival de América y España (Spain), the Autumn of Warsaw (Poland), the Festival International des Musiques Experimentales de Bourges (France), the Darmstadt Festival (Germany), the Nutida Musik (Sweden), the International Festival of Patras (Greece), the Inter-American Music Festival (Washington, D.C.), the New World Festival of Arts (Miami), and the Sonidos de América (Carnegie Hall, New York).  Mendes first musical studies began as a hobby, when he enrolled at the Conservatório Musical de Santos. The institution was then owned by the great Brazilian pianist Antonieta Rudge (1885–1974), who accepted him as a pupil. Mendes was not, however, enthusiastic about his studies until 1944, when he undertook a more profound study of harmony with Savino de Benedicts (1883–1971) — a conservative but highly competent instructor. It was during this time that Mendes decided to become a composer, and his initial efforts to write music date back to these years.  His first works primarily consist of short piano pieces (the earliest surviving production is a *Prelúdio* of 1945) and songs that demonstrate the classical and romantic influences combined, at times, with Brazilian folk music elements. Although Benedicts tried to give Mendes some orientation on those attempts, he did not not approve the harmonic liberties taken by Mendes — especially the flattened chromaticisms often employed by his student influenced by American popular music (especially big bands) played on the radio. Because of this disagreement, Gilberto Mendes opted to become an autodidact; the only education that he acquired during those years came from his readings of theoretical books, and from a careful study of Benedicts’ scores.  The cinema was another important influence for Mendes, which not only inspired him through its music, but also provided him with a personal mythology that he would adopt almost as a religion. Despite the fact that the composer lacked direct contact with musical folklore during his upbringing, nationalism also inspired his works, prompted primarily by his involvement with the Communist Party during the 1950s.  Around this time, Mendes attempted to study with leading nationalist composer Mozart Camargo Guarnieri (1907–1993). After this unsuccessful attempt, Mendes approached Cláudio Santoro (1919–1989). Their contact was brief, and consisted of five lessons in which they discussed ideological aspects of musical aesthetics rather than compositional techniques. Despite this, most of Mendes pieces from the period are characterized by a relaxed approach to nationalism, reflecting the influences of composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959), and Ernesto Nazareth (1863–1934) opposed to the preaching of Camargo Guarnieri and his disciples.  After Santoro’s departure to Europe, in 1956 Gilberto Mendes became involved with a group of musicians who gathered around George Olivier Toni (b. 1926). Toni (also a communist) freed Mendes from his ideological concerns, and introduced him to avant-garde techniques. Works from this period include the *Peças para Piano* nos. 14–16 and *6 Peças para Piano Solo*, from which no. 5 was Mendes’ first twelve-tone composition.  In 1959, during a trip to Europe, Mendes became aware of the new trends in composition, discovering the music of Karlhienz Stockhausen (1928–2007). Upon his return to Brazil, Mendes immersed himself — along with his fellow composers Willy Corrêa de Oliveira (b. 1938) and Rogério Duprat (1932–2006) — in a study of Integral Serialism that would result in the works *Cantata sobre a Fala Inicial do Romanceiro da Incofidência* (now *Cavalo azul,* 1961), *Música para 12 Instrumentos* (1961), and *Música para Piano nº 1* (1962).  In 1962 Mendes and his colleagues went to the Summer Course of Darmstadt, where they expected to receive classes on Integral Serialism with Stockhausen. Much to their surprise, they found an environment that had been shaken four years earlier by a series of lectures by John Cage (1912–1992), whereupon the American composer defended the use of chance and the indeterminacy of music making. That shock was a turning point for the Brazilian composers who either abandoned art music altogether (in the cases of Rogério Duprat and Damiano Cozella [b. 1929]), or opened themselves to experimentalism (as happened with Willy Corrêa de Oliveira and Mendes himself).  Upon their return to Brazil, the composers, then a part of the Grupo Música Nova, published a manifesto in the literary magazine *Invenção*. The Manifesto Música Nova advocated for the artist’s total immersion into the contemporary world, proposing a balance between a formalist approach to music making and political messaging. During this period, Mendes collaborated closely with avant-garde poets of Poesia Concreta, a partnership resulting in his most experimental and celebrated compositions: the choral works. Until then, Mendes’ pieces were virtually unknown to but select colleagues. His presence in Brazilian musical scene during this phase of experimentalism would associate his name, for years to come, with scandal and controversy.  An exemplary work from this period is *Motet em Ré Menor* (also known as *Beba Coca-Cola* [Drink Coca-Cola], 1966). Based on a poem by Décio Pignatari (b. 1927), the piece’s intrinsic humour conceals a sarcastic criticism of American imperialism through the manipulation of its main icon. In the poem, Pignatari develops the initial advertisement phrase through six lines, and in the final iteration of the advertisement, the phrase is transformed into the word *cloaca* (which translates both as *sewer* and *rectum*). Mendes’ setting features a similar approach, and he combined a dense contrapunctual texture, permeated with microtonal intervals, with moments of a more direct engagement with the public, especially after the intended burp (by as many singers as possible) that punctuates the beginning of the *coda*. Prior to the last measure, the conductor faces the audience, and when applause starts, the choir bursts into a protest-like declamation of the word *cloaca*, which is also seen in posters waved by the singers.  Direct communication with the audience is characteristic of other works from the period, such as *Cidade* (1964), *Vai e Vem* (1969), and *Asthmatour* (1971) for choir, and *Santos Football Music* (1969) for orchestra, tapes of soccer game broadcasts, and audience participation.  In 1975, Mendes’ career veered from his combative period of experimentalism. In that year, he finally retired from his bank job, and a growth in productivity was immediately apparent. Pieces from that period — such as *Motetos à Feição de Lobo de Mesquita* (1975) for baritone, oboe, violoncello, and harpsichord — feature an increased importance of the instrumental parts, contrasting with the vocal prominence of the previous works. In 1978, a residency in the United States — where he taught composition for the academic year at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee — enhanced Mendes’ interest for instrumental music.  In fact, the composer’s immersion into a culture that he had so much admired, through popular music and movies, would have a direct impact in his subsequent works, such as *Qualquer Música* (1980) for chamber ensemble, and *Saudades do Parque Balneário Hotel* (1980) for alto saxophone and piano. This latter piece also has an autobiographical character — the hotel, destroyed to make way for a shopping mall, was one of the places where Mendes heard popular music during the 1940s — that would become a specific feature of many of his mature works. In them, he turned to his personal mythology — formed mainly by stars of Hollywood musicals and artists linked with German Expressionism — in search of inspiration and musical material. Another typical trend of mature compositions, like *Saudades do Parque Balneário Hotel*, is the use of musical quotations.  In 1981, after a gap of twenty years, Mendes returned to the piano as a creative medium with the *Concerto para Piano e Orquestra*, the first mature instrumental work to summon the attention of the critics to his stylistic shift. The reactions to the piece varied from cautionary newspaper critiques to enthusiastic commentaries.  In the spring of 1983 the composer returned to the United States, as Tinker Visiting Professor at the University of Texas at Austin. During that period he continued to write pieces influenced by jazz, but also started to reevaluate his early works, especially the piano pieces. An example is *Recado a Schumann* (1983), a work composed in Austin, on a theme composed many decades earlier.  Upon his return to Brazil, Mendes would receive many commissions to write choral and instrumental pieces. The country’s process of redemocratization that started in 1984 prompted him to write some works politically charged — such as *Vila Socó Meu Amor* (1984), *Mamãe Eu Quero Votar* (1984), *Vão Entregar as Estatais!...* (1985), and *1º de Maio* (1986) for choir, and *O Último Tango em Vila Parisi* (1987) for orchestra — although most of his instrumental pieces continue to reflect his dialogue with his own past — such as *Ulisses em Copacabana Surfando com James Joyce e Dorothy Lamour* (1986) for chamber ensemble and *Um Estudo? Eisler e Webern Caminham nos Mares do Sul...* (1989).  During the last decades, Mendes has enjoyed a revision by Brazilian critics and musicologists, who now openly regard him as a leading figure among contemporary composers. As a result of this new status, many of his early works are being revived in concerts and also through recordings. Also, he has been receiving commissions more often and his creative output has experienced a dramatic increase in quantity.  In his present works, Gilberto Mendes has achieved the mastery of many techniques he has been employing since his youth — such as the use of pervasive repetition and musical quotation — combined with an attempt to reconcile the tonal and atonal musical universes, which is responsible for the unique sound of his pieces. |
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