|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **About you** | **[Salutation]** | Paulo | [Middle name] | Costa Lima |
| [Enter your biography] | | | |
| Brazilian Academy of Music | National Council of Research CNPq | Federal University of Bahia | | | |

|  |
| --- |
| **Your article** |
| Widmer, Ernst (1927-1990) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Ernst Widmer considered himself a Brazilian citizen, a Brazilian composer who was born and educated in Switzerland but who bloomed in the tropics. Actually, the theme of the cultural crossing was of great importance for the elaboration of his way of thinking and of composing. He dedicated almost all his entire life to the School of Music of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), where he taught between 1956 and 1987. During that period, he had a decisive role in turning Salvador into one of the most important centers of contemporary music in Brazil. In particular, he was in charge of the formation of composers, making this activity the basis for his intense artistic performance, which resulted in the composition of about two hundred opuses and thirty-one awards. He exerted great influence on his students and several of them became well known composers, and he also gave extreme value to singularity as a pedagogical parameter, having inspired the creation of the Group of Composers from Bahia in 1966, which manifest of just one line rejected as a principle any declared principles. After his retirement in 1987, he renewed his ties with his native city in Switzerland, debuting several of his pieces and participating in the creation of the *Ernst Widmer Gesellschaft* dedicated to promoting his music. |
| Ernst Widmer considered himself a Brazilian citizen, a Brazilian composer who was born and educated in Switzerland but who bloomed in the tropics. Actually, the theme of the cultural crossing was of great importance for the elaboration of his way of thinking and of composing. He dedicated almost all his entire life to the School of Music of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), where he taught between 1956 and 1987. During that period, he had a decisive role in turning Salvador into one of the most important centers of contemporary music in Brazil. In particular, he was in charge of the formation of composers, making this activity the basis for his intense artistic performance, which resulted in the composition of about two hundred opuses and thirty-one awards. He exerted great influence on his students and several of them became well known composers, and he also gave extreme value to singularity as a pedagogical parameter, having inspired the creation of the Group of Composers from Bahia in 1966, which manifest of just one line rejected as a principle any declared principles. After his retirement in 1987, he renewed his ties with his native city in Switzerland, debuting several of his pieces and participating in the creation of the *Ernst Widmer Gesellschaft* dedicated to promoting his music.  He studied at the Zurich Conservatory with Burkhard, Frey and Hoerler, graduating in composition, piano and musical education in 1950. Burkhard’s refusal to think only about contemporary times had a strong impact on Widmer, making him fascinated by the great lines of musical elaboration along the centuries, exactly as it was illustrated in his writings about the diversity of cadences, the false relationships and the dialectic game between “bordão” and “bordadura” He dealt with all these themes less as a musicologist than as a composer, registering creation possibilities, opening the way for a series of musical experiments willing to treat with equal interest archaic themes and contemporary ones, as if progressive and regressive phases were inherent to the act of composing.  From 1956 on, after some professional experience as a private teacher and chorus maestro, he moved to Salvador answering an invitation from Hans Joachim Koellreutter, the director of the *Seminários Livres de Música* of the Federal University of Bahia (Free Music Seminars). He worked at first as a theory teacher and maestro of the *Madrigal* (1958-1967), taking the group to an important tour in the United States in 1965. When Koellreutter left Bahia, Widmer took up the teaching of composition (1963) and the academic leadership, having been Director of the School of Music and Scenic Arts several times (1963-65, 1967-69, 1976-80), Extension Coordinator of UFBA (1980-84) and member of the Culture Council of the State of Bahia.  It is possible to visualize a synthesis of Ernst Widmer’s creation processes taking into consideration the two principles enunciated by he himself in 1988: the laws of *organicity* and *relativity*. The former regards the logic of the organic growth of ideas, always fertilized by criticism. The latter is based on the relativity of things, on the admission that it is useless to choose between “this or that”, cultivating therefore the possibility of inclusiveness — “this and that”. Organicity and relativity survive as far-reaching directions of synthesis, starting from an internal movement of complementarity and sometimes even of contradiction or antagonism. It is not difficult to relate this way of thinking to the composer’s trajectory, in the modulation between Germanic culture and the Brazilian one. However, this form of behaving must not be confounded with eclecticism, as it has been described some times, because it does not mean accommodating distinct things in the same discourse, but systematizing possible dialogues among distinct perspectives, sometimes incompatible; therefore the interest for the idea of paradox and for something that Widmer usually referred as heterodoxy.  A good example of this distinction can be found in the adoption of octatonic strategies, a compositional choice that became very frequent in his last decade of creation, as for example, in the Sonata “*Monte Pascoal” op. 122* for piano solo (1980) In this opus, the sonata form is reinterpreted starting from the structural possibilities offered by the combination of octatonic scales as a reference plan, generating motivic-melodic and harmonic solutions, which are able to establish contrasting tonal areas and other indicators of form.  Conceived as a means of increasing flexibility, the octatonic strategies developed by Widmer operate a dynamic interaction between the most explicit level of choices – the surface – and the level of the principles and anticipations elaborated as a support for these choices – the structure. Thus, many distinct contexts can be evoked and juxtaposed in dialogue – Northeastern traditions, romanticism and post-romanticism, nationalism, free atonality, strict serialism, indeterminacy, clusters – without losing the sense of internal coherence. This great challenge of building a systematic basis capable of allowing for an unusual diversity, leads us to a significant interpretation between the act of composing as an elaboration of references and composing as experimentation with sonorities, between reference and absolute music.  From the point of view of Brazilian modernism, Widmer’s ideas dialogue with the anthropophagic notion proposed by Oswald Andrade, but taking Bahia as a reference scenario, as a differentiated cultural place, where mixture and hybrid aspects were the norm for many centuries. This tension between multiple perspectives that, in spite of differences, maintain a bind of organization, can very well be understood as a reflex of Bahia’s cultural environment, and at the same time as the result of a cultural interpretation elaborated by a foreigner’s vision, one who gradually becomes a native. And it is just this radical interpretation between cultural experience and composing strategies that permits to assert the central role of culture, of cultural crossing, in Widmer’s work. Creative Construction Directions One can identify in his opus several directions of creative construction and a permanent search for sophistication and subtlety, involving pitch structure, rhythmic mobility, but also the conceptions of form and orchestration. Some of these directions, which, by the way, are not stagnant, include: 1) motivic, serial and octatonic constructions; 2) referentialism; 3) experimentation with sonority and new notations. All of them of innovative character, stressing the value of composing as a field of experimentation.  The organic growth of musical ideas has a significant impact on the organization of pitch, both in motivic formations and in serial or octatonic strategies, as mentioned above. The processes of melodic and motivic elaboration are supported by the relatively constant use of themes constructed over cells of the type (014 minor third plus major second) and (025 minor third plus major second), It is in general, through these units and sets derived from there, that many works are structured, and the octatonic phase (basically the last decade of his life) being a clear development of this process, since the octatonic scale can be counted as one of the complex sets derived from the two cells.  These procedures, which were present in Widmer’s production since the fifties gave origin to a range of distinct formats along the decades, in tonal, modal, free atonal, serial or octatonic environments. Serial structures assemblages can be easily found, for example, in such opuses like *Sinopse* *op.64* (1970) that already starts from the aggregate, *Trégua* *op. 93* for flute (1976), *Vértice* *op. 112* for piano solo (1978), *Ignis* op. 102 for mixed ensembles, with its game of series in a mirror, *Sertania* *op. 138*, in the third movement, as part of the octatonic process or in *Cosmofonia II op. 162* for cello solo (1987). What one can see is a plasticity of the procedures that go from the work with small sets to the work with octatonic or serial strategies, thus confirming the interest for the interplay between organicity and inclusiveness or relativity. Actually, the choice of proper sets, scales or series is less important than the procedures in which they are involved and that sustain them.  The awareness of the close relationship between composition and culture is part of Widmer’s work, and illustrates the importance of using references as part of the process of composing. The presence of materials arising from Brazilian cultures constituted one of those strategies, although there is constant care in placing these materials in perspective, preventing that they function as a mere celebration of nationalism. Such is the case of his first systematic incursion in this direction, the *Divertimento II (Côco) op.22* (1961) for mixed ensemble, written even before he began teaching composition, and that, in a certain way, anticipates the ideal of the “Grupo de Compositores da Bahia”. And also the Cinco *Quidlibets op. 42* for *coro a cappella* (1966), which presents material from the Brazilian folklore and reaches the perspective of detachment through the strategies characteristic of this composition gender. Or during his full maturity his first symphony *Sertania (Sinfonia do Sertão) op. 138*, which builds a complex sonorous kaleidoscopic, taking the hero from the northeast (“o vaqueiro”) as a conducting line. The piece also worked as a sound track for the cartoon *Boi Aruá* by moviemaker Chico Liberato. The *Sinfonia II op. 139* is dedicated to the melodic and cultural richness of the margins of the São Francisco River. On the other hand, *Sinfonia III op. 145* (1984) draws snow peaks around Swiss lakes. The composer transports to his own native land the look of strangeness and cultural bewilderment that he exercised in Brazil.  It would also be possible to indicate a group of opuses where the cultural chock itself assumes the main scene, transforms itself in the conducting line of the compositional narrative. This is the case of the piece *Die vier Jahrestraumzeitem op. 129* (1981) for two flutes and string orchestra, that takes up the difference and even inconsistency of seasons between north and south as a reference narrative. They are seasons of life and seasons of dream, in full paradox. For the composer spring means awakening and sorrow, summer zenith and warm rain, fall, maturity and impetus, and winter, reflection and sunny snowy hillsides. Also in *Utopia op. 142* for mixed ensemble (1983), the encounter of vanguard sonorities and sonorities from Africa is celebrated, especially through the use of the “xêquêrê”, reaching one of the highest points of his creative capacity. Following this line of elaboration, we come to the piece *De canto em canto II – Possível resposta op. 169* (1988), which pictures the encounter of a symphonic orchestra with the “Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi”, (one of the most famous afro-descendent Carnival groups from Bahia). It is certainly a possible answer to Charles Ives’s unanswered question, and Widmer’s proposal is that Ives’s metaphysics should meet with the trumpets and the African rhythms from Bahia, something that maybe could be described as a dialogue between Descartes and Xangô.  The work in the referential line includes dialogues with elements from the past of occidental music, and it is worth remembering the *Relax-Requiem op. 100* (1978) that revolves around one of J.S. Bach’s chorales, *Variações sobre 2 danças de H. Neusidler op. 98* (1976), both for mixed ensemble, of *Trilemma op. 80* (1973) for vocal sextet and with references taken from Palestrina’s music, besides the opuses from the beginning of his production, the *Homage to F. Martin, Bartok and Stravinsky op. 18 and 18a* for oboe and orchestra both in 1959.  The vast production of opuses in constant interweaving with literature is also extraordinary. Exponents of modernistic Brazilian poetry received differentiated attention, like Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Jorge de Lima, Oswald de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto and Bahia-born Antonio Brasileiro. Almost half of Widmer’s opuses are of compositions about poetic or religious texts. Also in this direction, we should mention his experiences with music theater, and with the handling of scenic constructions. The play *Dois retratos op. 133* (1982) for soprano and four percussionists and text from Gregório de Mattos, a Bahian poet from the seventeenth century, represents one of Widmer’s brilliant moments, where humor, logics and sonorous impact play roles of great importance.  The sixties watched a decisive rapprochement between Widmer’s music and experimentation horizons with timbres and textures besides new forms of notation. In the beginning of the decade, the opus for coro a cappela *A-v-e M-a-r-i-a op. 34* explores the fragmentation of the text and the world of sonorities thus created in spite of the apparent harmonic immobility. Béhague (1979) registers the important role of the new timbre combinations (generally in chromatic clusters) in the opus *Sinopse op. 64* for orchestra, chorus and soloists (1970). In *Rumos op. 72* (1972) the use of instruments created by composer Walter Smetak guarantees a special colorfulness amidst the symphonic orchestra. The pieces Pulsars op. 62 for mixed ensemble (1969) and *Quasars op. 69* for orchestra (1970) also reflect this orientation, besides the *Quarteto III op. 78* (Convergence) of 1973. Also from this time, the beginning of a new significant approach regarding the indetermination procedures and random processes. In *Rondo Móbile* (1968) for piano solo, the interpreter can choose the sequence of internal sections. In *Suave mari magno … op 97* (1975) the timbre exploration of the piano heads for the construction of a specific graph and for a greater participation of the interpreter. *Pulsars op. 62* (1969) alternates the use of graphic and traditional notation. Ernst Widmer’s WritingsFrom the sixties on, when he elaborated his first thesis —dedicated to the interaction of drones and neighbor-notes as formative elements of the western tradition (“Bordão e Bordadura” , Widmer 1971a), —he begins publishing a series of papers and books on several areas of music creation. He writes about the teaching of music in conservatories (1971), about contemporary music didactics, about graphs and new notations (1972), the problems of cultural propagation (1979), esthetics (1981b), criticism and creativity (1981), about Dorival Caymmi (1994) and Walter Smetak (1984), about the Brazilian composers’ situation (1985), about the marginalia of the Western music in the last millennium III (1988a) and about the formation of contemporary composers (1988). It is a frame of thought that dialogues both with the practice of composing and the formation process in composition. |
| Further reading:  (Béhague)  (Ferreira, Migliavacca and Milanesi)  (Grove)  (Lima, Ernst Widmer e o ensino de composição musical na Bahia)  (Lima, Reflexões sobre o Campo do Conhecimento Composicional)  (Lima and Martins, Entre superfície e estrutura: As estratégias octatônicas de Ernst Widmer)  (Nogueira)  (Universidade Federal de Bahia (UFBA))  (Universidade Federal de Bahia (UFBA))  (Widmer, Anton Walter Smetak)  (Widmer, Cláusulas e Cadências)  (Widmer, Crítica e Criatividade em 6 Movimentos)  (Widmer, Entroncamentos SONoros: Ensaio a uma didática da música contemporânea)  (Widmer, O ensino da música nos conservatórios)  (Widmer, Perspectivas Didáticas da Atual Grafia Musical na Composição e na Prática Interpretativa – Grafia e Prática Sonora)  (Widmer, Problemas da difusão cultural)  (Widmer, Skizze eines Selbstporträts unter verschiedenen Gesichtspunkten)  (Widmer, Tema e Variações)  (Widmer, Tentativa de refletir e denunciar sobre 12 maneiras equivocadas de encarar-se arte... )  (Widmer, Travos e Favos) |