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BRAZIL

Rebirth of an orchestra as civic beacon

São Paulo Symphony

By Norman Gall

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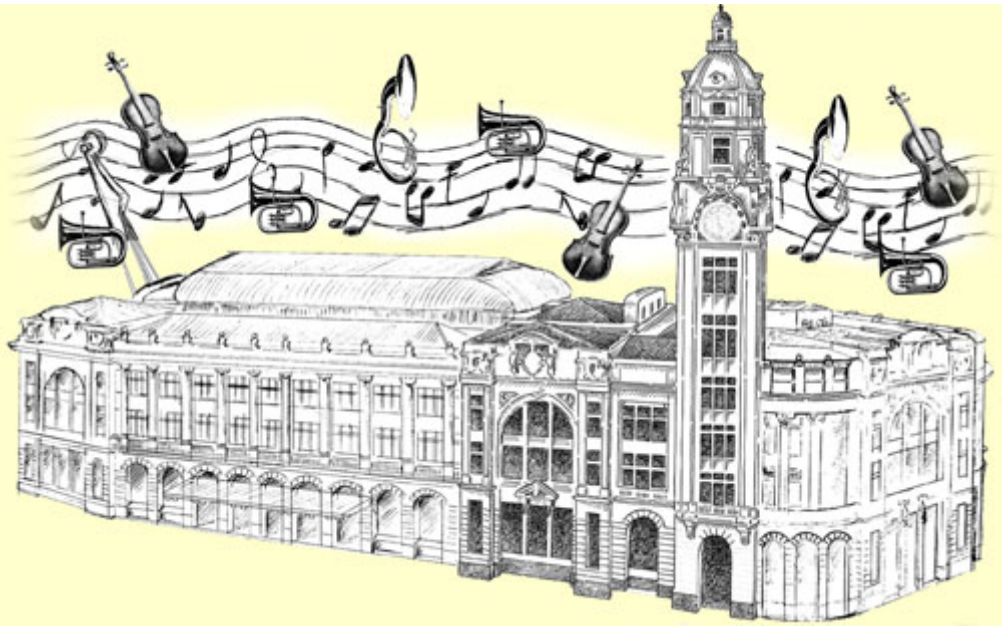


Over the past three years the São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra (Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo – OSESP) has become a world-class ensemble in one of the most surprising recoveries in the recent annals of classical music. The changes were sudden and dramatic. Precarious rehearsal and performance conditions, improvised in rundown movie houses, schools and auditoriums, were exchanged for the splendor of the new Sala São Paulo, a remodeled railroad station with luxurious marble décor and excellent acoustics, located in the city's deteriorated central district. The musicians' pay was tripled, giving them secure and demanding full-time jobs. The public began to fill the Sala São Paulo for regular concerts Thursday nights and Saturday afternoons, attracted by high quality music at low prices. The orchestra is performing this year in a season of 39 concert programs planned long in advance, blending the best Brazilian music with traditional and contemporary repertoire, often in imaginative ways. A new Music Documentation Center restores and publishes important but neglected Brazilian compositions. A new OSESP Academy of Music will occupy an adjacent antique building, also being restored, that used to house the DOPS (Department of Political and Social Order), the dreaded political police of Brazil's latest military regime (1964-85). There the orchestra's first chairs will train a new generation of musicians to staff the Symphony in the future. The orchestra has just signed a contract with Columbia Artists Management for tours of the United States in 2001, Europe in 2002 and Asia in 2003. At a time when sales of recorded classical music worldwide are falling, with famous orchestras such as those of Boston, Philadelphia and Cleveland losing their recording contracts, the São Paulo Symphony has signed contracts to record compact disks of Brazilian music for Sony and BIS, the prestigious Swedish label.

The Symphony's rebirth emerges as a beacon of light in a vast and mismanaged metropolis of 17 million people, its colossal vitality burdened by huge problems of scale as well as by 11,500 murders, 10,000 armed robberies on city buses and several political scandals during 1999. In the book commemorating the opening of the Sala São Paulo in July 1999, the orchestra's 53 year-old music director, John Neschling, credited Governor Mário Covas of São Paulo State with a "generosity hard to find in political life" in his financial support of the Symphony's rebirth. In the same book, Covas wrote that São Paulo's government is taking "a most important and definitive step to establish a policy of rehabilitation of urban spaces through culture." But a struggle lies ahead to create the political stability and institutional density needed to achieve the orchestra's long-term goals.

The 2000 concert season opened in March with a performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis,* a powerful enlargement of the baroque Catholic mass, charged with suffering and serenity, one of the most demanding works ever written. In *Doctor Faustus,* Thomas Mann wrote that in composing the *Missa Solemnis* Beethoven was engaged in "a life-and-death struggle with the opposing hosts of counterpoint" to create "the majestic fugues in the Gloria and Credo in evidence at last that in the struggle with this angel [as with Jacob in the Bible] the great wrestler had conquered, even though hereafter he halted on his thigh." Leading this difficult masterpiece with astonishing skill and maturity was Roberto Minczuk, the Symphony's associate conductor, a 33 year-old scion of Ukrainian migrants to Brazil whose father was a sergeant-musician in the band of the São Paulo Military Police.

Highlights of the São Paulo Symphony's 2000 season embrace performances of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem,* Haydn's *The Seasons,* Mahler's 3rd, 4th and 6th Symphonies, Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra* and Beethoven's 1st, 4th and 9th Symphonies. "We're now a world-class orchestra," Neschling boasted after leading an all-Beethoven concert in April. "Today we're among the 50 top orchestras in the world. But I want more: we must become, within five years, one of the world's top 10."

The New Maestros

The São Paulo Symphony's initial success gives Brazil a chance to overcome its long history of producing brilliant individuals and weak institutions. In the 20th Century, institutional weaknesses deprived Brazil's best musicians of a chance to develop their talents in their own country. Among the outstanding Brazilian musicians who, like Neschling, spent most of their careers outside Brazil are the Metropolitan Opera soprano Bidu Sayão; pianists Magdalena Tagliaferro, Guiomar Novaes, Nelson Freire and Arnaldo Cohen; cellists Aldo Parisot and Antonio Meneses and Eleazar de Carvalho, assistant conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitsky before becoming music director of the São Paulo Symphony in 1973.Son of wartime Jewish refugees to Brazil, from the Vienna family of composer Arnold Schönberg, Neschling had frustrating experiences in the 1980s directing precarious municipal orchestras in his native Rio de Janeiro and in São Paulo. "I left as soon as I saw that these orchestras had no future as they were being run," he said. Neschling since has joined the new breed of jet age conductors, serving simultaneously as music director of two or more orchestras on two or more continents and appearing as guest conductor of other orchestras to fill out their schedules. At the top of the league, this is a hot job market, with major orchestras in New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Boston, Cincinnati

and Atlanta all looking for new music directors earlier this year. Both Neschling and Minczuk seem to fit the profile advocated by Anthony Tommasini, music critic of *The New York Times,* for whom "a music director in a big city should also be a dynamic artistic leader, someone who can forge ties with other performing and educational institutions, someone on close terms with living composers, an adventurous musician who treats performing new music not as some weighty obligation but as a bracing activity, a natural part of what musicians do."

Neschling now lives in Switzerland, where he is artistic director of the Staattheater of St. Gallen. He regularly conducts the orchestras of the Teatro São Carlos of Lisbon, Teatro Massimo of Palermo and the Staatsoper of Vienna. His symphonic and operatic conducting has taken him to London, Milan, Rome, Genoa, Verona, Florence, Bordeaux, Prague, Bonn, Berlin, Hamburg and Washington, as well as to Beijing and Shanghai, as the first Latin American conductor to perform in China. Neschling has written the scores for classic Brazilian films such as *Pixote, Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Lúcio Flávio* and exudes enthusiasm for Brazil's Green Party and its leftist Workers Party (PT). He now spends roughly 16 weeks yearly in Brazil, leading the São Paulo Symphony in 12 programs.

The international career of Roberto Minczuk, the associate conductor, also has taken off. A French horn soloist at age 13 with the orchestra of São Paulo's Municipal Theater, Minczuk won a scholarship at New York's Juilliard School of Music at age 14. Six years later he was invited to join the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig, East Germany, by Kurt Masur, now music director of the New York Philharmonic. "In 1987, when I was graduating from Juilliard, I auditioned for Masur in Carnegie Hall and went to Leipzig, a dark, depressing city of 450,000 people whose great attraction was music," Minczuk said. The Gewandhaus (in German, House of Textiles) grew out of the old merchant city's Collegium Musicum, founded in 1723, which Bach directed in coffee-house concerts during the last two decades of his life. "At St. Thomas's church, where Bach was cantor for 27 years, the Gewandhaus played Bach cantatas every Sunday," Minczuk added. "I stayed in Leipzig for two years, where I was very lonely, yearning to return to Brazil after being away for eight years. Leipzig had big music publishers, whose scores in communist times were very cheap. I came back to São Paulo with 200 kilos of scores in my baggage." Masur later appointed Minczuk as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic, a post he still holds. Meanwhile, Minczuk's busy life as a guest conductor leads him in 2000-2001 to perform in Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Denver, St. Paul, Charlotte, Los Angeles and in New York's Lincoln Center directing the Juilliard Orchestra. Minczuk also conducts nine programs this year for the São Paulo Symphony and serves as music director of the municipal orchestra of Riberão Preto in the interior of São Paulo State.

The architect of the Symphony's rebirth is Neschling, an abrasive and exacting musical entrepreneur who quickly set new standards for the orchestra. The Symphony's rebirth began in 1996, when São Paulo's Secretary of Culture, Marcos Mendonça, phoned Neschling in Rio to offer him the artistic direction of the orchestra, which had practically gone to pieces. Mendonça wanted Neschling because he wanted a big name to lead the orchestra and Neschling had just conducted Brazil's most famous opera, Carlos Gomes's *O Guarany* in Washington with Plácido Domingo as the lead tenor. A few months earlier Eleazar de Carvalho, who led the orchestra for 23 years, died after a long struggle with cancer. By then its 91 musicians were adrift on waning expectations, as decades of chronic inflation eroded their salaries and professional standards, forcing them to make ends meet with odd jobs, giving private lessons and playing at weddings and bar mitzvahs.

The Lean Years

Low salaries, equal to those of night watchmen and janitors, led to a shortage of string players and to staffing the orchestra with part-timers and free-lancers. The orchestra had no office, phone or secretary. Only 100 or 200 listeners attended its sporadic concerts. Musicians were so poor that they could not afford to replace strings or reeds for their instruments, the prices of which were inflated by savage import duties. A set of double bass

or cello concert strings could cost a musician's monthly salary. Study materials, methods or concert scores were and are totally unavailable, only to be obtained from publishers abroad at very high prices. To defend themselves from the risks of inactivity, musicians did and still do all sorts of tricks to get what they need. Photocopying of scores sometimes became illegible after several generations of successive backstreet reproduction. It still is impossible to buy scores even for the elementary training of musicians. So much pirated copying contributed to the extinction of the few music stores in the major cities that sold them.

Founded in 1953, the indigent Symphony twice before was forced to suspend its concerts. In 1996 it looked as if it was going under for a third time. Neschling had faced a similar situation in 1983 when he quit the direction of the orchestra of São Paulo's Municipal Theater after a fight with management. "The previous [municipal] government made commitments that it could not honor," he said at the time. "No solid program can advance without adequate resources. We inherited majestic plans that we had to abandon because they were financially impossible."

In 1996 Neschling responded coolly to the proposal that he take over the São Paulo Symphony. Rather than go to São Paulo at Mendonça's invitation to discuss the offer, Neschling told the Secretary to come to Rio instead. Mendonça flew to Rio, where Neschling told him: "I don't need the orchestra. The orchestra needs me." His toughness was expressed in his demands: (1) construction of a permanent concert hall, (2) tripling of the musicians' pay and (3) upgrading, by public competition, of the orchestra's personnel, weeding out its less competent members and hiring foreign musicians on an international pay scale.

Mendonça wrote it all down and started trying to meet Neschling's demands. A few months later Mendonça arranged a meeting with Governor Mário Covas, a remote and dour polician known as a shrewed negotiator. São Paulo State was virtually bankrupt in the worst fiscal crisis in its history, renegotiating $6 billion in annual interest payments on which it had defaulted. When Covas found Neschling's conditions "too dear," Neschling repeated the magic words: "I don't need the orchestra. The orchestra needs me." The state government, transferring its railroads to federal authorities to settle its debts, already had decided to keep the beautiful old Julio Prestes railroad station for cultural uses. When the new concert hall opened, Covas announced that "culture-related options would replace the old premise that only huge and costly infrastructure projects could change the face of a neighborhood. The old center of São Paulo, deteriorated and almost destroyed by decades of abandon, demands this kind of solution."

So concert-goers filling the 1,509 seats of the new Sala São Paulo arrive by car, driving through the degraded neighborhood of the old bus terminal, parking in well-protected underground facilities and driving home through the red light district without any contact with the underclass. Conversion of the old railway station into a concert hall cost roughly $30 million, a tiny sum compared with the billions of dollars wasted in the past on corruption-plagued public works that never were completed. "I didn't know how to design a concert hall," said Nelson Dupré, the architect charged with remodeling the station. "Nobody in Brazil knew. At the same time we had to preserve a historic building protected by law. Most Brazilian construction companies want to extract big money from public works and don't care about finishing the job. The struggle earned me some ulcers, but we learned quickly and finished on budget and on time." Neschling added: "The orchestra creates some 300 jobs and a better image of São Paulo at the cost of one meter of one of São Paulo's expensive traffic tunnels".

Civic Beacon

The Symphony and the Sala São Paulo create a civic beacon for this immense metropolis, spread over 8,000 square kilometers, spanning islands of excellence and sprawling disorder, generating a gross domestic product of $131 billion, one-fourth of Brazil's total output, equivalent in GDP to one of the world's 30 biggest national economies. São Paulo's

excellence in engineering, finance, medicine, manufacturing, marketing, fashion and mass communications is undermined by demoralizing episodes of corruption, prison revolts, failing public health and education systems, armed robberies and murders at traffic lights. Even more shocking than Greater São Paulo's 11,500 homicides is its tolerance of homicides. Perhaps the political astuteness of Covas in backing the orchestra lies in the hope that it will provide a badly needed institutional success that may help to restore São Paulo's waning civic pride.

São Paulo still inspires a mixture of tenderness and indignation and even some hope. Despite institutional failures that truncate progress, major gains have been made in living standards since chronic inflation was halted in 1994. The new orchestra and other investments in culture should reinforce São Paulo's transition from an industrial to a service economy.

The new civic beacon is embodied in the inspired transformation of the Julio Prestes terminal of the old Sorocabana railroad into the Sala São Paulo. The terminal itself is a marker of the mutations in São Paulo's economy and society. According to the architect Alcino Izzo Junior: "An integral part of São Paulo's history, this beautiful station witnessed several changes in its surroundings. It saw a peaceful city enriched by coffee become 'the biggest industrial center of Latin America' and then coexist with the violent contrasts of a megalopolis always-changing and nearly out of control."

Incorporated in 1872 by a group of coffee planters, the Sorocabana eventually became São Paulo State's longest railroad line, reaching from the port of Santos to the borders with Paraná and Mato Grosso, opening new lands in what was to become one of the world's richest agricultural regions. Energized by land speculation and federal financial guarantees for railroads that absorbed one-third of Brazil's government budget by 1898, the Sorocabana depended on Brazil's disastrous support of world coffee prices that launched decades of chronic inflation. With freight rates kept low for political reasons, the deficit-ridden Sorocabana was nationalized in 1902, along with other railroads in an operation financed by foreign loans. The São Paulo state government bought it in 1907 and leased it in 1909 to a French-American group in exchange for funds for coffee subsidies. The state bought it back in 1919 in a controversial deal in which it was accused of paying 10 times its real value to benefit an important stockholder. Today the state runs what is left of the Sorocabana as a suburban line after transferring the rest of the railroad to the federal government in 1998 as part of a $50 billion debt bailout.

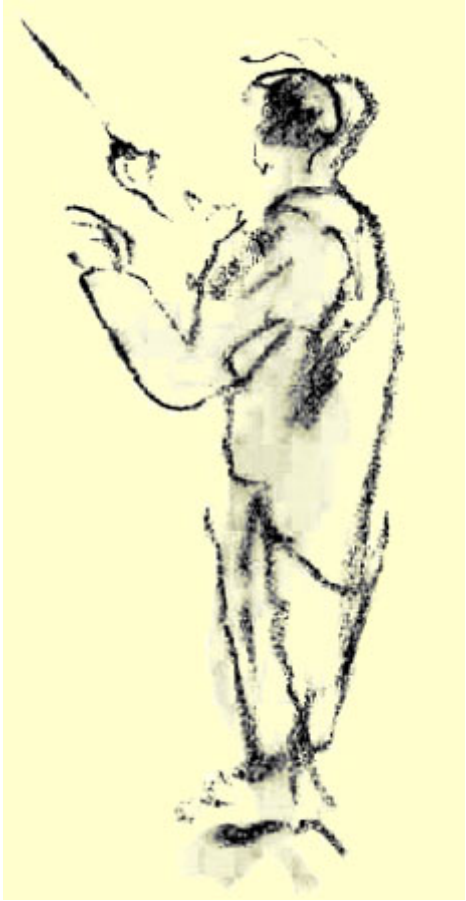
The Julio Prestes station, modeled on the grandeur of New York's Pennsylvania and Grand Central terminals, was named for a São Paulo governor, political boss of the violence-ridden Sorocabana region, whose run for the Presidency ended in a revolution that overthrew the landlord-dominated Old Republic (1889-1930). The station's Great Hall, with its palm trees and Corinthian columns of Italian marble enclosing an area of 10,600 square feet, was conceived as "the gateway to the city" and "the biggest room in Brazil." Its imposing tower, with a huge clock, is a landmark at the heart of the city's oceanic sprawl into seemingly endless suburbs of drab and daunting similarity.

Construction of the Julio Prestes station, financed with more foreign loans to the state government, began during the coffee boom of the mid-1920s and stopped with the 1929 Crash. After several starts and stops, and fights between the architect and the railroad over design changes, the station opened in 1938 without a permanent roof for the Great Hall, covered "temporarily" with a hangar-like ceiling of glass and steel. The Great Hall was used occasionally for receptions and concerts until it was discovered by Artec Consultants, the

New York acoustical engineering firm hired in 1996 by the state government to meet Neschling's demand for a new home for the Symphony. Its shoebox shape was ideal for symphonic performance. Artec's Russell Johnson found that "the volume and proportions of the patio were comparable to those of famous European concert halls, such as the Musikverein in Vienna."

There were technical problems. The first problem was to insulate the concert hall from the noise of suburban trains in the terminal by excavating the main floor to lay a new soundproof slab to absorb vibrations. The new balconies and boxes also were soundproofed. The ceiling was sheathed by 15 wooden panels to be raised or lowered individually to adapt acoustically to different kinds of performances. The seats on the main floor are removable so the space can be used for other functions. The upper floor railroad offices were converted into separate, soundproof rehearsal rooms, one for each group of instruments, along a quiet marble corridor, a kind of facility lacking in Philharmonic Hall at New York's Lincoln Center and many other major concert halls.

Old Gold, New Struggles



The main challenge for Brazilian music always has been continuity. Some of the best products of Brazil's musical past were forgotten and rediscovered only recently. In a Portuguese colony where printing presses and universities were banned, baroque/classical music, mainly church music, became a leading form of artistic expression and official patronage. In his *História da Música Brasileira* (1976), Bruno Kiefer explains the surge of musical creativity during the 18th Century gold rush in Minas Gerais in terms of "the large-scale presence of the mulatto as a free professional musician [with an] intense desire for ascendancy into ways of the dominant class." In the boom town of Ouro Preto, musicologists documented the presence of some 250 professional musicians in the 18th Century, mainly migrants from the coastal cities of Recife and Salvador, playing chamber music in wealthy homes as well as more abundantly preserved church music. São Paulo had its own *mestre de capela* [capellmeister], organizing church music, as early as 1649. Its musical success began in 1774 when the Portuguese composer André da Silva Gomes became *mestre de capela,* remaining there until his death in 1844 , at age 92. He left behind a wealth of liturgical scores, several of which were found in old archives and restored by the musicologist Régis Duprat. It is hard to imagine how splendid music such as Silva Gomes's *Mass for Eight Voices,* accompanied by organ, flutes and strings, could be produced in the mud-walled little church of the Sé, on a hill surrounded by swamps, for clusters of rustic worshipers, mainly women, children and old people, whose younger menfolk had left to join the traffic of the gold rush.

We cannot know how much of early Brazilian music has been lost. While musicologists estimate that only one-fifth of Johann Sebastian Bach's scores have survived from the 18th Century, losses from the same period are much greater in tropical cities such as Salvador and Olinda, where archives have been destroyed by heat, humidity and termites. In the 19th Century, most Brazilian classical composition lapsed into bad imitations of Italian opera. But a fusion of popular and formal culture developed, with slaves in Rio de Janeiro performing in symphony orchestras and church choirs. According to historian Mary Karasch:

The process of blending of African and European instruments and musical traditions began in part with these musicians, who played European compositions for the royal family in an evening concert and on the next day helped the brotherhood of Rosário celebrate a feast day in Afro-Cariocan style. Other bands of slaves paraded in the city with European instruments, or serenaded white customers with violins, while the customers had their hair cut. The streets of 19th Century Rio were truly a cacophony of musical traditions that eventually blended into a harmonious and unique Brazilian style, in part epitomized by the chôro *tradition with its lilting flute music superimposed on flutes and mandolins but based on a* batuque *beat of* reco-recos *(scrapers) and tambourines. Somewhere between the strolling street musicians who played European guitars and Africans who danced the* batuque *to drums, the two musical traditions came together, and the process of intermixture of instruments and musical traditions was well underway by the mid-19th Century.*

While popular music flourished and won international fame, Brazilian classical composers and orchestras struggled in the 20th Century with problems of continuity. Nevertheless, there were some success stories. Francisco Braga (1868-1945), whose*Variations on a Brazilian Theme* will be published soon by the São Paulo Symphony's Documentation Center, began studying music at the Asylum for Unfortunate Boys in Rio de Janeiro. In 1889 he won a scholarship to study in Paris, where he placed first in a competition to enter the Conservatory of Music. He stayed in Europe for a decade, performing, composing and becoming a disciple of Richard Wagner's music, before returning to Brazil in 1900 to teach, conduct and produce many chamber and orchestral works. In 1920 Richard Strauss conducted Braga's tone poem *Marabá* in Rio de Janeiro.

Another success story was that of Radamés Gnattali (1906-88), whose excellent Viola Concerto was performed by the Symphony in April 2000. Gnattali began his career playing in movie theaters and dance halls in his native Porto Alegre and in Rio de Janeiro. Later he combined his prolific classical composition with elements of *chôro* and *samba* while orchestrating for Victor Records and conducting the Radio Nacional orchestra, as well as writing scores for some of Brazil's most famous soap operas. Although his work was performed and recorded by leading orchestras in Europe and the United States, Gnattali spent most of his career in Brazil, unlike many other leading Brazilian musicians.

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959), the giant of 20th Century Brazilian music, played cello in movie houses and cabarets as a young composer while coming under the influence of the street music of Rio de Janeiro, especially the *chôro,* which he developed into a classical form. His travels in the backlands of Brazil taught him an affinity for popular music that stands out among his 2,000 works, which include operas, ballets, chamber music and a vast output for solo guitar. A cycle of CDs recording all 11 of Villa-Lobos's symphonies was begun in 1997 as a joint project of the Pacific Symphony of California and the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Stuttgart, frustrated only by the inability of musicologists to locate the score of his 5th Symphony.

Despite these individual success stories, the institutional foundations of Brazilian classical music remain shaky. The Brazilian Symphony Orchestra of Rio de Janeiro, the country's oldest, suffers chronic penury, often unable to pay musicians' salaries for months at a time. Nevertheless, musicians seem never to give up. There are said to be 153 orchestral and choral conductors active in São Paulo State alone. Luís Antônio Giron, music critic of São Paulo's *Gazeta Mercantil,* observes that "in Brazil one is impressed by the existence of at least 100 groups –symphonic and chamber ensembles, professional and academic. These numbers alone would make Brazil one of the world's great symphonic powers. But nothing seems to work well, with one or another exception. Orchestras cannot establish themselves and produce high-quality music in a nation known for its musicality….They suffer from chronic deficiencies: low budgets and salaries; lack of private sector interest in sponsoring public musical institutions; lack of instruments and space for rehearsals and performances; lack of good string players. Dozens of musicians, conductors and managers of Brazil's principal orchestras, interviewed for this article, complain that they are subject to the

changing moods of politicians. Any change of the party in power can destroy a project and a dream."

As Giron notes, there are exceptions. One is the Symphony Orchestra of Ribeirão Preto, a city of 500,000 people at the hub of rich agrobusiness country in the interior of São Paulo State, led by the same Roberto Minczuk who conducted the São Paulo Symphony's powerful performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in March. The Ribeirão Preto orchestra gives 50 high-quality concerts a year while relying on government support for less than 20% of its $300,000 annual budget. Other successful orchestras, such as those in Campinas and Santo André, depend almost wholly on municipal funds to stay alive. The Campinas Municipal Symphony Orchestra, for instance, now in its 25th year, proselytized from its birth. Musicians who played in the Orchestra's first year of existence, in 1975, recall that duos, trios, quartets, quintets and other chamber groups were created inside the orchestra to create a public in the city. They played in family homes, squares, halls and public schools to create an audience for the orchestra. In its 12 years of life the Santo André orchestra, in the huge ABC industrial suburb of São Paulo, has held open rehearsals for more than 10,000 children, involving itself with the surrounding communities and even managing to stage an opera or two. For these and other smaller orchestras, the São Paulo Symphony has set a new standard. "Before this we looked upon European orchestras as our model," says Antônio Carlos Neves Pinto, the young conductor of the incipient São Caetano Symphony. "Now Neschling has brought our model closer to home."

The New Orchestra

Rebirth of the orchestra has meant, among other things, mobilizing musical talents from outside Brazil, especially those of Brazilian artists working abroad. One of these is Ricardo Bologna, a 29 year-old Brazilian percussionist who lived for six years in Geneva before auditioning for the orchestra, which he joined in June 1999, one month before the opening of Sala São Paulo. "In Switzerland, where I was studying, I earned about $2,000 per month and had to make ends meet as a free-lancer," Bologna says. "Here I earn $3,000 per month. I have stability for at least 12 months and it's musically interesting." In fact, there is stability *ma non troppo* [not too much] with the orchestra. Work contracts are renewed every 12 months and musicians have few acquired rights. The orchestra, now on the government payroll, has been trying to form a private non-profit corporation to receive funds under a state government contract that would cover musicians' salaries.

The labor market for musicians enables the orchestra to exact high standards in its recruiting, with foreigners, mostly Russians and Rumanians, now occupying one-fifth of its places. "All the world's major orchestras are melting pots," Neschling said. "All have musicians from several countries." In April, 11 foreign players came to São Paulo at their own expense to audition. None met the exacting standards of a jury composed of the orchestra's conductors and first chairs. Roman Mekinulov, the orchestra's burly 27 year-old first cellist, migrated to New York from St. Petersburg in 1985 with his parents and earned two degrees from Juilliard before working as a substitute at the New York Philharmonic. Responding to an ad in the *International Musician,* he auditioned in New York for the São Paulo Symphony in 1997. "This is a young orchestra, with strengths and weaknesses of a

young orchestra," Mekinulov says. "It has lots of energy and enthusiasm but needs more experience. Neschling is a great motivator."

While the Symphony has improved greatly, it still has a mountain to climb. The main failings of Brazilian orchestras, insufficient rehearsals and inability to hire musicians full-time, have been overcome, enabling the Symphony to reach levels of professionalism and quality never before seen in Brazil. It is fast overcoming the deficiencies in string instruments common among Brazilian ensembles. Its routines show an intense and ambitious work ethic. Like major American and European orchestras, the São Paulo Symphony prepares for each concert with five regular rehearsals and one general rehearsal. Rehearsals run from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays there are double rehearsals, from 9:30 a.m. to noon and from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The São Paulo Symphony asks to be judged by the highest standards. At its peaks it can reach great heights but when it plays in the foothills of its potential it still has some distance to sustain the even quality of leading orchestras. Neschling and Minczuk are right: the Symphony needs at least five more years to establish itself among the world's best.

"Before Neschling, the orchestra was mainly an aging band of low-paid public employees of humble origins, many with only a primary or secondary education, some of whom were self-taught musicians who had difficulty reading a score," says Marcelo Lopes, a 35 year-old trumpeter who is president of the Musicians' Association. A 16-year veteran of the orchestra, Lopes also is a practicing lawyer and an economics graduate of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation. "By 1996, before the reorganization, I was ready to quit music and take a job at the Central Bank. Now the orchestra is much younger and nearly all of us have a university education. We constantly are being reevaluated and know that we must take risks. The Symphony must leave the public sector so we can raise money more easily to ensure the orchestra's survival."

The reorganization of the São Paulo Symphony in 1997 was somewhat kinder to musicians than the merger of the New York Philharmonic with the New York Symphony in 1928, when all musicians in both orchestras were fired before some were taken into the new band. Of the 66 permanent members of the old São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra, 43 refused to audition for Neschling in order to keep their jobs when the orchestra was reorganized. As public employees, they were shifted to the Sinfonia Cultura of the state's TV Cultura educational station, specializing in Brazilian music. One who auditioned successfully was flutist Marcelo Barbosa, 32, who joined the Symphony in 1994 and lived intensely the precarious conditions of the recent past. "Maestro Eleazar de Carvalho never had political backing and never could create stable conditions for his musicians," Barbosa says as he watches some of his colleagues play ping pong in the musicians' room. "We couldn't dream of our working conditions now. The right scores are always on the music stand for rehearsals, always with sharp pencils for annotations. Seven employees now staff the archives. The season is planned well in advance. I know today what we're going to play in November, and in what hall and at what hour. Improvisation has been banned from our daily lives."

One of the new Music Documentation Center's main tasks is to rent scores from foreign publishers, one of the trials facing an orchestra on the musical world's periphery. "We must order scores six months in advance and never are sure that they'll arrive on time to give to the musicians 15 days before the first rehearsal," says Maria Elisa Pasqualini, who runs the Center. "We pay $2,000 for each performance of a score. Individual parts often are missing. We need time to erase the bowing marks made by orchestras that previously rented the score. We deal with 30 publishers, whose scores are subject to shipping and customs delays. One publisher, Boosey & Hawkes of London, only rents through an agent in Argentina who forwards the scores to us."

The Documentation Center, already with an archive worth $1 million, restores and publishes neglected Brazilian musical scores, including the rich literature from the 18th Century. Among 22 works already published are Edino Krieger's *Passacaglia for the New*

Millennium (1999), commissioned by the orchestra; Gilberto Mendes' *Issa Overture* (1998) and Mario Ficarelli's *Symphony Nº 3* (1993), as well as the anonymous 16th Century *Recitative and Aria*, considered the oldest Brazilian composition. Eight works to be issued during 2000-01 include Henrique Oswald's *Symphony* and Paulo Costa Lima's *Serenata Concertante*, Father José Maurício Nunes Garcia's (1767-1830) *Zemira* and *Tercio* by Emerico Lobo de Mesquita, a mulatto composer from 18th Century Minas Gerais.

"As long as the orchestra maintains its quality, nobody will dare touch me," Neschling says. "Quality guarantees stability." However, the Symphony cannot afford to relax its efforts to overcome Brazil's institutional weaknesses and the ups and downs of São Paulo politics. Continuity in the Symphony's rebirth, and in its striving for improvement, depends on sustained political and private support.

We may usefully compare the financial base and pay scale of the São Paulo Symphony with five diverse orchestras: the Berlin, London and New York Philharmonics and two in São Paulo State, in the smaller cities of Campinas and Ribeirão Preto. Some of these figures reveal major differences in these orchestras' autonomy. The New York Philharmonic is the most independent, since only $200,000 out of a $50 million annual budget comes from government. The rest comes from the box office, recording contracts, tours and, most of all, tax-deductible contributions from people and corporations. For London's Royal Philharmonic, government support is less than 10% of its $6.3 million annual budget. On the other hand, the Berlin Philharmonic, receives government support for half of its $25 million budget in Europe's tradition of generous public subsidies for its many orchestras and opera houses.

The orchestra least dependent on government support, the New York Philharmonic, pays the highest wages, averaging $10,000 per month. But its musicians also are the hardest-working: 200 concerts a year, against 150 for the Royal Philharmonic and 130 for the Berlin Philharmonic. Brazilian orchestras do not exceed 90 concerts yearly. Are our orchestras, as expensive cultural assets, underutilized? The São Paulo Symphony's budget is more than the London Philharmonic's, suggesting that the basic issue today is not to get more money but to diversify the orchestra's sources of financing. Thus fund-raising and marketing becomes critical for long-term sustainability.

A cruel irony of Brazil's cultural life is that some rich Brazilians are patrons of the New York Philharmonic, New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Salzburg Festival in Austria and Harvard and Oxford universities while neglecting to support Brazilian institutions. Meanwhile, multinational corporations spend huge sums in bringing foreign orchestras to Brazil. In recent years Citibank brought the New York Philharmonic, Siemens brought the Berlin Philharmonic and Philips brought the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. These companies and individuals are important potential sources of support for São Paulo's orchestra. The raising of $15 million in 2000 from private sources for São Paulo's grand exposition commemorating the 500th anniversary of Brazil's discovery by the Portuguese shows that major funding can be mobilized for cultural enterprises.

"We realistically cannot expect to be free of government support," says Cláudia Toni, the orchestra's efficient executive director. Toni earned her wings as a cultural bureaucrat at the University of São Paulo (USP) and at concert and cultural societies before joining the

Symphony in 1998 to head a staff of 13 people. "The Brazilian Symphony Orchestra of Rio is indigent because it always relied on private support. What we can do is get more private support to reduce our dependence on politics." A fund-raiser working on commission obtained a $2 million donation from Terra, the Internet service provider owned by Telefónica of Spain, which in 1998 won an auction to privatize São Paulo's phone company. Terra's donation increased the Symphony's budget by more than one-third and enabled the orchestra to invest more heavily in hiring conductors and soloists and in promotion and advertising. But the orchestra is yet to arrange comparable sponsorship for the 2001 season, which will open with Neschling conducting Bach's B-minor Mass.

Neschling announces his idea of the four pillars sustaining the orchestra at every concert in the Sala São Paulo: audiences, tours, recordings and private sponsorship. "You must fill the hall every week," Neschling cries out from the podium. The Symphony developed a new formula for season subscriptions, which never before were promoted since the orchestra's creation in 1953. A subscription to nine of the 39 season concerts for $50, as cheap as movie tickets, with pensioners paying half-price. Season subscribers were given a double CD with a live recording of Neschling conducting Gustav Mahler's *Second Symphony —Resurrection* in the July 1999 inaugural concert of the Sala São Paulo. With this strategy, 2,274 subscriptions were sold, a number never before reached for a local concert series. São Paulo concert societies promoting performances by famous international artists never sold so many subscriptions. "We want to sell 3,000 subscriptions for the 2001 season," Toni says. "Each subscriber will get two CDs: One of Neschling's Beethoven concert and another of Brazilian music," Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Choros 10 – The Discovery of Brazil*, and Mozart Camargo Guarnieri's *Sinfoniano Nº 2*, led by Minczuk.

Another pillar sustaining the São Paulo Symphony's rebirth is recorded music. CDs and the Internet have changed the classical music business. High-cost American orchestras, like those of Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Cleveland, have priced themselves out of the recording industry. High-quality classical CDs have become a commodity, with excellent low-cost orchestras, like those of Eastern Europe and São Paulo, now enjoying a comparative advantage worldwide. Negotiators for big orchestras and opera houses, musicians' unions and Internet companies are struggling with legal and technical difficulties in paying royalties to performers for live and recorded music downloaded from the Internet. CDs also have returned chamber music to its birthplace, the private home, where it can be enjoyed in comfort and intimacy and where listeners can choose music on the spot without having to buy tickets in advance and march off to a concert hall. CDs give a special advantage to the São Paulo Symphony, which can build its own quality brand in the potentially big Brazilian market, through record clubs and other new distribution channels, and supply Brazilian classical music to an international market saturated with the traditional repertoire. However, symphonic music in the concert hall, in contrast to chamber music, has a civic function. The civic function of music is virtually as old as human society itself. From the earliest times, according to historian William McNeill, a member of the Fernand Braudel Institute of World Economics:

...large bands, sustained by the emotional side-effects of voicing and dance, were capable of cooperating more effectually. Indeed, those who engaged in such exercises had such great advantages that only bands that learned to dance and make sounds together were able to survive. Rhythmically voiced sound and dance thus became a distinguishing human trait since the members of no other species ever spontaneously invented this way to express themselves and strengthen social bonds in doing so.

Symphony orchestras are an urban phenomenon, civic icons that help to shape and preserve the identity of their communities. Symphony orchestras flourished first in Europe in the 18th Century, when urbanization was accelerating. Earlier, in the 13th Century, wandering musicians began to settle in merchant towns that were gaining strength, performing at civic, religious and private festivities. Johann Sebastian Bach spent most of his life (1685-1750) as a municipal employee, whose job was to create, organize and direct music for church and civic occasions.

"Go where the people are"

If the São Paulo Symphony is to succeed, it must consolidate its civic function, reaching out to new audiences or, as the popular singer Milton Nascimento used to say, "go where the people are." Going where the people are means reaching out to the wild boroughs of the immensity of Greater São Paulo, to the millions of decent people hungering for more civilized forms of life. It means reaching out to people like Maria Marciana do Nascimento, a 50 year-old client of the Casa Beth Lobo, a shelter for battered women in the violence-ridden suburb of Diadema, who wrote to Claudia Toni, the Symphony's executive director, after attending one of its concerts as a guest of the orchestra:

I shared in the Great Event that is the São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra. I found it Divine, a Marvelous Sensation of Plenitude. There is no better thing for mental therapy, giving joy to the Soul and the Spirit. In my opinion this event should be repeated with more frequency so that we, who participate in the Group of Reflection of the Casa Beth Lobo, can again share in this moment of Beauty and Plenitude.

The Symphony thus faces two challenges to ensure its further development and survival. First, it must go where the money is, seeking substantial private donations in a city notoriously weak in civic leadership. It cannot afford the risks of amateurism in fund-raising. It must build its own professional fund-raising staff to work systematically to secure a five-year budget to free the orchestra of total dependence on the whims of politicians and to guarantee the quality and stability of its artistry. The media could help by recognizing the orchestra as an important civic asset, reviewing its concerts regularly and generating the kind of intelligent public criticism that all artists need. A major step is being taken, after long delays, to form a new Association of Friends of the Orchestra, announced for January 2001, a non-profit corporation that would receive government funds to pay musicians' salaries and organize leading citizens to mobilize private support. But some doubt remains whether this deadline will be met.

"We started working on this in 1997," said Dalmo Nogueira do Valle, an assistant to Governor Covas influential in reorganizing the orchestra, whose wife is a well-known harpsichordist. "But the workings of government are slow. It became less important after Covas won the 1998 election and the orchestra has been doing so well." This relaxed attitude may reflect the limited horizons of politicians whose vision does not extend beyond their own term of office. The new "social organization" should be headed by a civic leader with year-round responsibilities who enjoys respect and extensive contacts among politicians and the business community. Yet Neschling fears, mistakenly I believe, that civic leadership of the business and fund-raising needs of the Symphony inevitably would undermine his artistic authority. Many of the orchestra's musicians fear that the Symphony's future may be at risk if the new "social organization" is not operating effectively under private sector leadership before Covas's term ends in 2002.

"This is my main worry," says Neschling. "It is not a question of survival, since we have achieved levels of quality that will be hard to destroy. But the lack of legal and administrative autonomy makes us waste too much time solving petty problems through bureaucratic rituals of the public sector. We cannot choose our own suppliers of services and materials because such contracts must go through public bidding, which is slow and does not always get us the best performance. Government rules limiting payment in foreign currency prevents us from freely hiring foreign soloists, conductors and other musicians. The government has a duty toward the orchestra and never can relax its commitment, but we also need support from Brazilian society as a whole. To mobilize private financial support, we need tax laws that encourage contributions."

The second challenge facing the orchestra is to go where the people are. This means generating a major staff assignment to community relations, building new audiences for the orchestra. Building new audiences means contacting schools, churches and community organizations among the 12 million people in São Paulo's vast periphery, inviting these

groups to concerts in the Sala São Paulo as guests of the orchestra and to organizing Symphony concerts in the periphery itself. Going where the people are will help to build political support for the orchestra to reinforce its stability. It also will reaffirm the common humanity of this great and diverse metropolis. The São Paulo Symphony is a magnificent institutional achievement in a city that hungers for success stories. It can play a major role in São Paulo's struggle for civilization.

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