

JOSE VIANNA DA MOTTA

David C F Wright

It may be true to say that very few Portuguese composers are well known and such is the case of Jose Vianna de Motta. He was born on St Thomas Island on 22 April 1868 and became a fine pianist, teacher and composer.

His father was an amateur musician and owned a pharmacy. The family moved to mainland Portugal when Jose was a year old. He showed an early talent for music and attended the Lisbon Conservatory and, in 1881, at the age of thirteen, gave his first public recital which was a great success resulting in royal patronage with financial support to go to Berlin and the Scharwenka Conservatory studying piano with Xavier Scharwenka and composition with his brother, Philippe. Jose was there from 1882 to 1914 and during this time as a concert pianist toured Europe and had two visits to the Americas in 1892-3 and 1899. These tours were highly successful particularly in Brazil and Argentina.

He was fortunate to meet Liszt in Weimar in July 1885, while he was on an extended European tour, and had tuition with him which was inspiring. One tends to forget how magnificent a teacher Liszt was. At this time, he met many famous musicians such as Ysaye and Emil von Sauer. In 1887, he had some lessons with Hans von Bulow and Eugene d'Albert was a fellow pupil. On a trip to London in 1903, he played some Alkan. He performed all 32 of Beethoven's sonatas regularly and such performances were always admired. He was a tremendous pianist.

He formed a friendship with the Italian composer Busoni who was a very difficult, pompous and a self-opinionated man who felt he could 'improve' standard works and so made many transcriptions particularly of Bach. Piano fantasies on operas may be quite acceptable but to rehash established works seems to be both conceited and unnecessary. I belong to the old school that wants to hear what Bach wrote, not what others have written based on Bach. I cannot see the logic in transcribing a Bach solo violin piece for piano.

Da Motta became Director of Piano Studies at the Geneva Conservatory in 1914 and, in 1917, settled in Lisbon, where, two years later, he was appointed Director of the Nation Conservatory.

In 1927, he represented the Beethoven centenary in Vienna and his contribution was to perform all of his sonatas.

He does not deserve to be overlooked or forgotten.

He died in Lisbon on 31 May 1948.

In 1951, the Vianna Da Motta Piano Competition was founded in Lisbon.

LIST OF WORKS

Piano Solo

- Barcarola, Op. 1/1
- Barcarola, Op. 1/2
- Fantasiestücke, Op. 2
- 3 Scenas Portugezas, Op. 9/1: Cantiga d' Amor
- 3 Scenas Portugezas, Op. 9/2: Chula
- 3 Scenas Portugezas, Op. 9/3: Valsa Caprichosa
- Vito, Op. 11
- Adeus, minha terra, Op. 15/2

Ballada, Op. 16
Barcarola 2, Op. 17
3 Improvisos, Op. 18
Piano Sonata in D Major
Cenas portuguesas
'Invocation of the Lusiads' for piano solo
Romance
Two Romances
Dramatic Fantasy
Five Portuguese Rhapsodies
Waltz
Serenada
Capriccio
Meditação

Chamber music

Violin and Piano
Violin Sonata
Piano Trio
Piano Trio
String Quartet
String Quartet in C Minor
String Quartet
Andante for String Quartet
Variações for String Quartet
Cenas nas Montanhas for String Quartet

Other

Violin Sonata (with Piano four-hands)
Orchestral
Symphonies
Symphony 'A Pátria', Op. 13
Symphonic Poems
Dona Inês de Castro Overture
Die Lusiaden for Orchestra and Chorus
Piano and Orchestra
Piano Concerto in A Minor
Fantasia Dramatica for Piano and Orchestra
Choral Music
Os Lusiadas' for Piano and Choir
Ave Maria for Female choir and string orchestra

Lieder

Op. 3
Das Bächlein
Frühlingsregen (Ludwig August Frankl)
Sonntag (Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff)
Op. 4
Wiegenlied (Wilhelm Raabe)
Op. 5
Gefunden (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)
Entschluß (Ludwig Uhland)
Gute Nacht (Adele Schaeffer)

Tanzlied (Wilhelm Müller)
Hier an der Bergeshalde (Theodor Storm)

Op. 8
Im Volkston (Wilhelm Raabe)
Über den Wolken (Wilhelm Raabe)
Die Jungfrau im Walde (Wilhelm Raabe)
In der Dämmerung (Wilhelm Raabe)

Op. 10
Abschied (Peter Cornelius)
Guter Rat (Peter Cornelius)
Erfüllung (Peter Cornelius)
Ländlicher Reigen (Peter Cornelius)

Op. 13
Danke! (Peter Cornelius)
Umflort, Gehüllt in Trauern (Peter Cornelius)
Laß Mich Deine Augen Fragen (Peter Cornelius)

Op. 15
Johannistag (Wilhelm Raabe)
Das Lied von Falkensteiner (Wilhelm Raabe)
Eine Briefelein (Wilhelm Raabe)
Monikas Traum (Wilhelm Raabe)

Die Spröde (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)
Olhos Negros (Almeida Garrett)
A Estrela (Almeida Garrett)
Cancão Perdida (Guerra Junqueiro)
Lavadeira e Caçador (João de Deus)
A Luz (João de Deus)
Cantar dos Búzios (Afonso Lopes Vieira)
Verdes São as Hortas (Luís de Camões)

This article was originally drafted in 1988

(769)

© Copyright David C F Wright DMus 2014 – This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, quoted, reproduced, downloaded or altered in any way whatsoever nor stored in any retrieval system. Failure to comply is in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.