



José VIANNA da MOTTA

PIANO MUSIC

PORTUGUESE RHAPSODY NO. 4

BARCAROLA NO. 2, OP. 17

BARCAROLA NO. 1, OP. 1

FANTASIESTÜCK, OP. 2

SONATA IN D MAJOR

BALLADA, OP. 16

SERENATA, OP. 8

MÉDITATION

Luís Pipa

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDING

JOSÉ VIANNA DA MOTTA: PIANO MUSIC

by Malcolm MacDonald

The development of concert music in Portugal has sometimes hung by a slender thread, preserved and developed single-handedly, it might seem, by a sole exceptionally gifted individual. An example was João Domingos Bomtempo (1775–1842), who in the age of Beethoven contrived, through his piano concertos, sonatas, symphonies and major choral works (such as the 1818 *Requiem in C minor dedicated to the Memory of Camões*), to transform the long-prevailing situation where opera had dominated Portuguese musical life, and aroused a new appetite for orchestral, chamber and sacred music. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries José Vianna da Motta¹ found himself performing a similarly vital role.

During his long career Vianna da Motta was probably the most distinguished Portuguese musician in Europe, if not the world. Born in 1868 on the island of São Tomé off the coast of what is now Gabon, the son of an amateur musician and pharmacist, he moved to Portugal with his parents at the age of two and soon manifested extraordinary musical gifts. Thus he studied at the Lisbon Conservatoire between 1875 (that is, he entered it at the age of seven) and 1881. He then moved to Berlin on a scholarship provided by the King of Portugal, the German-born Fernando II, where he studied at the Scharwenka Institute with the pianist-composer brothers Xaver and Philipp Scharwenka. Subsequently he became a private pupil of Karl Schöffler and from 1885 attended Franz Liszt's master-classes in Weimar, an experience he treasured all his life. From 1887 da Motta worked for two years with Hans von Bülow in Frankfurt. He lived in Berlin until the outbreak of World War I, principally teaching piano and composing, but toured widely as pianist and conductor in Europe (including, naturally, Portugal) and the USA,

¹ Vianna da Motta made a point of using the old spelling of his name, with double 'n' and double 't', which modern Portuguese usage had dropped to a single 'n' and 't' (as Viana da Mota). Both spellings are found today.



José Vianna da Motta

performing with some of the most celebrated artists of the time, including Sarasate, Casals, Ysaÿe and Busoni.

In Berlin, the Portuguese virtuoso became one of Busoni's closest friends and collaborators. They often played two-piano recitals together, and as early as 1898 they collaborated on the ground-breaking volume of *Orgelchoralvorspiele von Johann Sebastian Bach* (which would be reissued as part of the monumental 'Bach-Busoni' edition in 1916). Vianna da Motta was also one of the editors of Busoni's monumental Liszt Complete Edition, and during World War I shared his Swiss exile in Geneva, directing the piano

master-class at the Geneva Conservatoire. In 1917 he returned to Portugal, where at the age of 50 he was chosen to become head of the Conservatoire in Lisbon. They kept in touch; it was Vianna da Motta who gave the world premiere of Busoni's fearsome Bach-based *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue* in 1921.

As director of the Lisbon Conservatoire, he implemented far-reaching educational reforms, occupying the post until his retirement at the age of 70. He was also conductor of the Lisbon Symphony Orchestra and established the Lisbon Concert Society. An acknowledged authority on Bach and Beethoven, he performed a cycle of the complete 32 piano sonatas of Beethoven in Lisbon in 1927. Da Motta gave his last public recital in 1945, and died in Lisbon in 1948, aged 80.

As a composer Vianna da Motta was not prolific, but his works were significant for the development of music in Portugal. Drawing on the innovations of Liszt and Wagner, as well as the Russian nationalist composers, he applied these both to Portuguese cultural themes and folk motifs. There is an early Piano Concerto (1887), composed when he was nineteen, and a more substantial *Fantasia Dramática* for piano and orchestra of 1893, but the bulk of his mature work comprises solo-piano and chamber music, as well as numerous songs, and his masterpiece is probably the Symphony *A Pátria* ('The Fatherland', worked on between 1895 and 1908), eventually published in Brazil, a monumental work of approximately 50 minutes' duration inspired by verses of Portugal's national poet, Camões. He also composed symphonic poems and a choral work based on Camões's epic, *Os Lusíadas*.

Malcolm MacDonald (b. 1948) was the author of *The Symphonies of Havergal Brian* (three volumes, Kahn & Averill, London, 1974, 1978 and 1983) and the editor of the first two volumes of *Havergal Brian on Music* (Toccata Press, London, 1985 and 2009). His other writings included books on *Brahms, Foulds, Schoenberg, Ronald Stevenson and Edgard Varèse*. He died in May 2014.

VIANNA DA MOTTA: AN INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEY THROUGH HIS PIANO MUSIC

by Luís Pipa

José Vianna da Motta started composing very early in his life. Between the ages of seven and fourteen he wrote numerous pieces, mostly for solo piano: little waltzes, marches and polkas, but also fantasies and variations, largely dedicated to his family, friends and patrons, in which the young boy's pianistic progress became increasingly evident. As he matured as a musician, he eventually set aside his youthful essays, which amounted to more than fifty opus numbers, and started a new catalogue of his works, beginning with the 1884 *Barcarola* for piano. By that time, da Motta was already in his third year of studies at the Scharwenka Conservatoire in Berlin, and the influence of the musical life and culture of the city is most evident in the growth of the sixteen-year-old's musical language. The *Barcarola*, Op. 1 [1], is an elegant piece, its manner slightly reminiscent of Chopin's delicate phrasing. The generally melancholic character of the piece is occasionally disturbed by passionate outbursts that never really reach a true climax. This restraint is characteristic of Vianna da Motta's personality, both as composer and interpreter, and it is remarkable that it can be distinguished so early in his life. The melancholic atmosphere is replicated in the end by the long fading of the initial theme, resting on a sorrowful A minor chord, *pianissimo*. Indeed, it is significant that, out of all the works in this album, only the finale of the Sonata ends in an unreservedly brilliant manner.

That same year, 1884, produced the more extended *Fantasiestück*, Op. 2 [2], in which the contrasts between expressive moments and bravura passages evoke the worlds of both Schumann and Liszt. The piece begins with a quiet two-part melody accompanied by a fluent sequence of continuous notes in the left hand, with major-minor mode switches, concluding in a dramatic recitative that marks the transition

to a new section of a more fragmented and agitated character. The section develops into a roaring sequence of octaves and broken chords, melting into a meditative coda that again merges into a quieter recapitulation of the first section, in accordance with da Motta's indication *più piano e più lento della prima volta*. It is probably fair to assume that his teacher, Xaver Scharwenka, himself an accomplished composer, will have kept a close eye on the progression of these two works, and his advice must have exerted some sort of influence on his young piano student – even if, in his diary, da Motta specifically commented on, and then ignored, Scharwenka's suggestions that he should add a trio section to the *Barcarola* and an introduction to the *Fantasiestück*.

In 1885 da Motta composed his **Sonata in D major**, a large-scale work in three movements, which would come to be his only piano sonata. By now, one can trace a foretaste of his later interest in Portuguese popular musical traditions, especially in the opening themes of the first and last movements of this exciting work, one which poses both technical and musical challenges. In the first movement, *Allegro ma non troppo* [3], there are subtle reminiscences of Beethoven, a composer he particularly admired and whose works he would come to master like few others. These allusions can be heard, for example, in the pedal notes supporting the chordal melody at the beginning of the first movement, which evoke the tranquil atmosphere of the initial moments of the 'Pastorale' Sonata, Op. 28, also in D major. The second movement is a long *Adagio molto tranquillo* [4], where da Motta generates long singing lines, exploring at the same time the deepest resonances of the instrument in a serene, but always engaging, atmosphere. The *Allegro scherzando* finale [5] is the liveliest of the three movements; here the joyfulness of youth and sheer enjoyment of the piano are evident in the combination of gracious themes with moments of instrumental virtuosity, the latter always at the service of an elevated musical purpose. Da Motta went to Liszt's Weimar classes in the summer of that year and played, amongst works by Mozart, Weber, Chopin and, of course, Liszt, his own *Barcarola* and *Fantasiestück*. There is no account that he played the Sonata, although it is clear from his own annotations that he had already completed it by then.

Vienna da Motta's interest in writing more overtly nationalist music began in the early 1890s, when he was in his early twenties. The first of his five *Portuguese Rhapsodies*

(the idea clearly suggested by Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*) was written in 1891, using popular motifs, but he also started to write original pieces of national character with motifs of his own invention, although, as he wrote in a letter to his pupil Fernando Lopes-Graça, 'many believed them to be popular'.¹ The *Rhapsodia portuguesa No. 4* [6], from 1894, uses two Portuguese folk-themes: 'Ai que Lindos Amores que eu Tenho' ('Oh, Such Beautiful Loves I Have'), from Elvas (by the Spanish border, 200 kilometres east of Lisbon), and 'Ao Menino Deus' ('To the Child God'), from the eighteenth century. The score bears the title *Oração da tarde*, with a French translation added for clarity: *Prière du Soir*. It is an evocative piece with bell-sounding arpeggiated chords over tender melodies, developing into a middle section of increasingly dramatic textures that gradually return to the initial meditative atmosphere, ending in a mystical chordal sequence with the suggestive indication *quasi organo lontano*. One can almost sense the spiritual presence of Liszt in these final moments, which are reminiscent of the magical dying resonances of the B minor Sonata.

The character of the *Serenata, Op. 8* [7], written in 1893, is unmistakably nationalist. A popular tone is felt from the very first notes of the introduction, with the recurrent tonic-dominant movements in the major key and the characteristic syncopations of the rhythmic patterns, both typical features of the Portuguese folk-music tradition. As in the *Rhapsody*, there is also a middle section, this time with a quieter atmosphere, although it retains its popular charm. The transition to the recapitulation of the first section is effected in a most subtle and elegant manner, and the preparation of the concluding moments of the piece reveals the degree of sophistication that da Motta had attained by this time.

Regarded by its composer as his best piano work, the 1905 *Ballada, Op. 16* [8], takes the form of variations. As with the *Portuguese Rhapsody No. 4*, it uses two popular themes, 'Tricana d'Aldeia' ('Village Country Girl') for the variations, and an *Ave Maria* ('*con l'espressione di pace e umiltà*') for the substantial, contrasting coda. The theme

¹ Letter written in 1933 to his former pupil Fernando Lopes-Graça, published in Fernando Lopes-Graça, 'Viana da Mota. Subsídios para uma Biografia incluindo 22 Cartas ao Autor', *Opúsculos*, No. 3, Editorial Caminho, Lisbon, 1984, p. 63.

is solemn and dramatic, built on deep chords that slowly develop into a sequence of variations, which evolve from passages of much depth to ones of extreme bravura. Vianna da Motta explores all the textures of the instrument, and the assumption of a Lisztian pianistic heritage is sensed throughout. The piece ends on a mystical note with the *Ave Maria*, a moment of deep inner contemplation, much in the way of the *Rhapsody*, only in a far more extended manner. It is curious to notice that the *Ballada* and the *Rhapsody*, though using real Portuguese folk-themes, assume a more central-European musical idiom than the *Serenata*, built on da Motta's own themes of national character.

The *Barcarola, Op. 17* [9], also from 1905, evokes da Motta's more youthful days through the Chopinesque atmosphere of the 1884 *Barcarola*, despite the gap of 21 years between the two works. But this later barcarolle is rather more highly developed than the first, presenting a mature style in which the nationalist interest of the composer, who was now 37, can be felt, even if only occasionally. The technical challenges are considerable, and the formal and harmonic structures point to the heightened inventiveness of da Motta's musical language, not least in the affirmatively abrupt dynamic contrasts and decisive interruptions of the expectations he creates in more than a few structural sequences.

The last piece Vianna da Motta wrote for the piano was a *Méditation*, in 1933 [10]. It was published that year in the Christmas edition of the periodical *O Comércio do Porto Ilustrado*. Together with the *Portuguese Rhapsody* No. 4 and the D major Sonata, it belongs to a significant group of works with no opus number. It is unique in his piano output in its divergence from his earlier language onto a path closer to the soundworld of some of the Russian late-nineteenth-century composers such as Skryabin, whom he confessed to admire. The piece begins with slow, aching nostalgic chords supporting a sorrowful melody, leading to a middle section with restless echoing eruptions; the return to the initial mournful atmosphere ends in deep, inner angst. After a period of nearly fifteen years without writing for his beloved instrument, the great pianist and composer, already in his mid-sixties, felt increasingly disappointed with the incomprehension of many of his peers and contemporaries. Many people in Portugal regarded his performing

style as too cold and calculating, a criticism which hurt him deeply. Moreover, the most important of the reforms he had carried out in the Lisbon Conservatoire in 1919 were overturned by a new reform in 1930. The quotation on the first page of the score from Dante's *Inferno* – 'Nessun maggior dolore / Che ricordarse del tempo felice / Nella miseria' – is revealing of his emotional state, and, out of his lamentation, emerges a work of striking depth and beauty which, astonishingly, has never been recorded before.

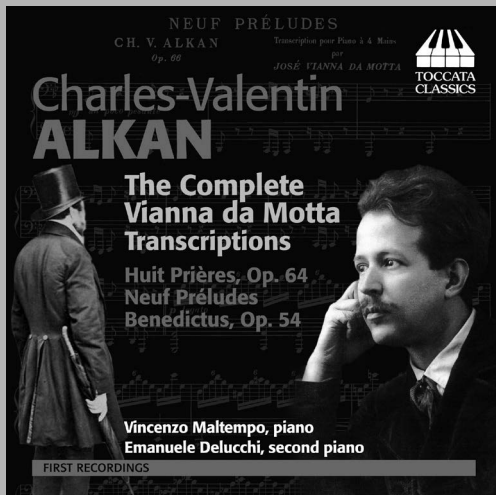
Born in Figueira da Foz, Portugal, **Luís Pipa** studied in the Conservatoires of Braga and Porto and the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts of Vienna, later obtaining the degrees of Master of Music in Performance Studies and PhD in Performance from the Universities of Reading and Leeds in the United Kingdom. He is currently professor of piano and chamber music at the University of Minho, near Porto, and the president of the Portuguese branch of the European Piano Teachers' Association.

As a pianist he has premiered numerous works, with a repertoire reaching from the Baroque to the contemporary. He has also himself composed some pieces for piano and chamber music, as well as a number of songs. He is regularly invited abroad to give master-classes and to serve as a juror of different musical competitions.

He has recorded for several labels, with music from Bach to the twentieth century. A review in the *Piano Journal* describes his album *Portugal* (published by *Diário de Notícias*) as 'remarkable and original', stating that Pipa's *Suite Portugal* will leave its mark on future Portuguese music anthologies, and defining him as 'a pianist of great depth, power and poise'. His future projects include a recording of the complete Mozart piano sonatas.



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—Adrian Corleonis, *Fanfare*



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JOSÉ VIANNA DA MOTTA Piano Music

❶ <i>Barcarola No. 1, Op. 1</i> (1884)	3:54
❷ <i>Fantasiestück, Op. 2</i> (1884)	9:00
Piano Sonata in D major (1885)	26:37
❸ I <i>Allegro ma non troppo</i>	11:53
❹ II <i>Adagio molto tranquillo</i>	9:31
❺ III <i>Allegro scherzando</i>	5:11
❻ <i>Rhapsodia portuguesa No. 4, Oração da tarde</i> (1894)	8:21
❼ <i>Serenata, Op. 8</i> (1893)	7:09
❽ <i>Ballada, Op. 16</i> (1905)	10:04
❾ <i>Barcarola No. 2, Op. 17</i> (1905)	5:04
❿ <i>Méditation</i> (1933)*	4:30

Luís Pipa, piano

TT 74:40

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