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## The Choral Music of Fernando Lopes-Graça

The music of Fernando Lopes-Graça (1906–1994) has a remarkably strong connection to the human voice. Many of his works are either primarily vocal, or exhibit the underlying influence of Portugal's rich folk music heritage, much of which is vocal in nature. Lopes-Graça's choral works span the better part of the twentieth century. From miniature choral settings of folk tunes to the monumental *Requiem pelas vítimas do fascismo em Portugal* (1979), Lopes-Graça's choral works display a mastery of the choral instrument in a wide variety of styles and settings. Lopes-Graça's work as a choral conductor is also notable: he was the founder and director of the *Coro da Academia de Amadores de Música* from 1945 to 1986.

The influence of Portuguese folk music is evident in much of Lopes-Graça's musical output, but it is perhaps most clearly seen in the over 200 choral settings that make up the *Canções Regionais Portuguesas* (1943–1988). These choral adaptations of Portuguese folk music display the influence of Hungarian composer Béla Bartók in their integration of authentic folk material with modernist compositional techniques. The folk sources for the pieces that make up the *Canções Regionais Portuguesas* come from all parts of Portugal and paint a vibrant picture of the people of Portugal through their songs.

The folk tune sources for the selections that make up the *Canções Regionais Portuguesas* come from various sources, not least of which are the field recordings made by Lopes-Graça and Corsican ethnomusicologist Michel Giacometti. Lopes-Graça adapted these source melodies with careful attention to the integrity of the original melody and rarely, if ever, made changes to them for the sake of his adaptations. He approached the folk melodies in much the same way that a jeweler approaches a gem, carefully placing it into a finely wrought setting so that it may be seen at its most expressive. The methods of adaptation range from homophonic treatments with hymn-like harmony, to polyphonic, with striking harmonies and highly chromatic melodic lines. All of the adaptations show vibrant rhythmic vitality and a harmonic sensibility help to the unify the large collection.

Lopes-Graça's other short works for choir include numerous sacred and secular motets and cantatas for unaccompanied choir. Lopes-Graça's vigorous and open opposition

to the Salazar regime is particularly clearly seen in the secular choral works of the *Canções heroicas*. The scenic-cantata *cum* opera *Dom Duardos e Flérida* (1964–69) also includes a sizable portion for choir.

Works for choir and orchestra are less numerous, but no less important. The *História tragíco-marítima* (1942–3, revised 1959) for baritone and orchestra includes a minor part for choir. In keeping with Lopes-Graça's wide use of texts from throughout Portugal's long history, the texts chosen for *História tragíco-marítima* are based on the poetry of Miguel Torga (1907–95). Written at a time when most "official" Portuguese music and art was nationalist in nature, the *História tragíco-marítima*'s dramatic and honest approach to the subject matter shows Lopes-Graça's confidence as a composer and political voice. The texture that Lopes-Graça creates with the addition of wordless women's choir to orchestra is reminiscent of Claude Debussy's similarly oceanic Nocturne, *Sirènes* (1897–9).

The *Requiem pelas vítimas do fascismo em Portugal* was commissioned at the time of Lopes-Graça's 70th birthday by the State Secretary of Culture in 1976. The work was completed in 1979, although the idea of making such a monument had been with Lopes-Graça since the 1950s. In the *Requiem* the influence of Portuguese folk music is evident in part through Lopes-Graça's use of the types of melodic parallelisms found in Portuguese folk music. Some of these same types of parallelisms are not only superficial evocations of early Roman Catholic sacred music, but are evidence of the lasting influence of the ancient musical forms which lie just beneath the surface of much of Portugal's authentic folk music. On the other hand, the *Requiem* is also replete with textures and melodic lines that show the strong influence of the modernist works of Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971). Another modernist feature is the haunting and intense choral *mormoroso* passage in which the choir plaintively speaks a portion of the *Kyrie* text. For Lopes-Graça, as for many of the great composers who came before him, the setting of the Latin Requiem Mass represents a defining creative statement. By incorporating elements of Portuguese traditional music and modernist techniques, Lopes-Graça synthesized a deep and penetrating memorial to the lives lost in Portugal under the Salazar regime.

Fernando Lopes-Graça's choral music shows his immense appreciation of the human voice and its expressive and technical capabilities. His choice of the finest texts from Portugal's great historic and contemporary literary voices underscores his commitment to the power of language; his choice to write extensively for chorus underscores his commitment to power of the human voice to speak that language openly in the face of oppression.