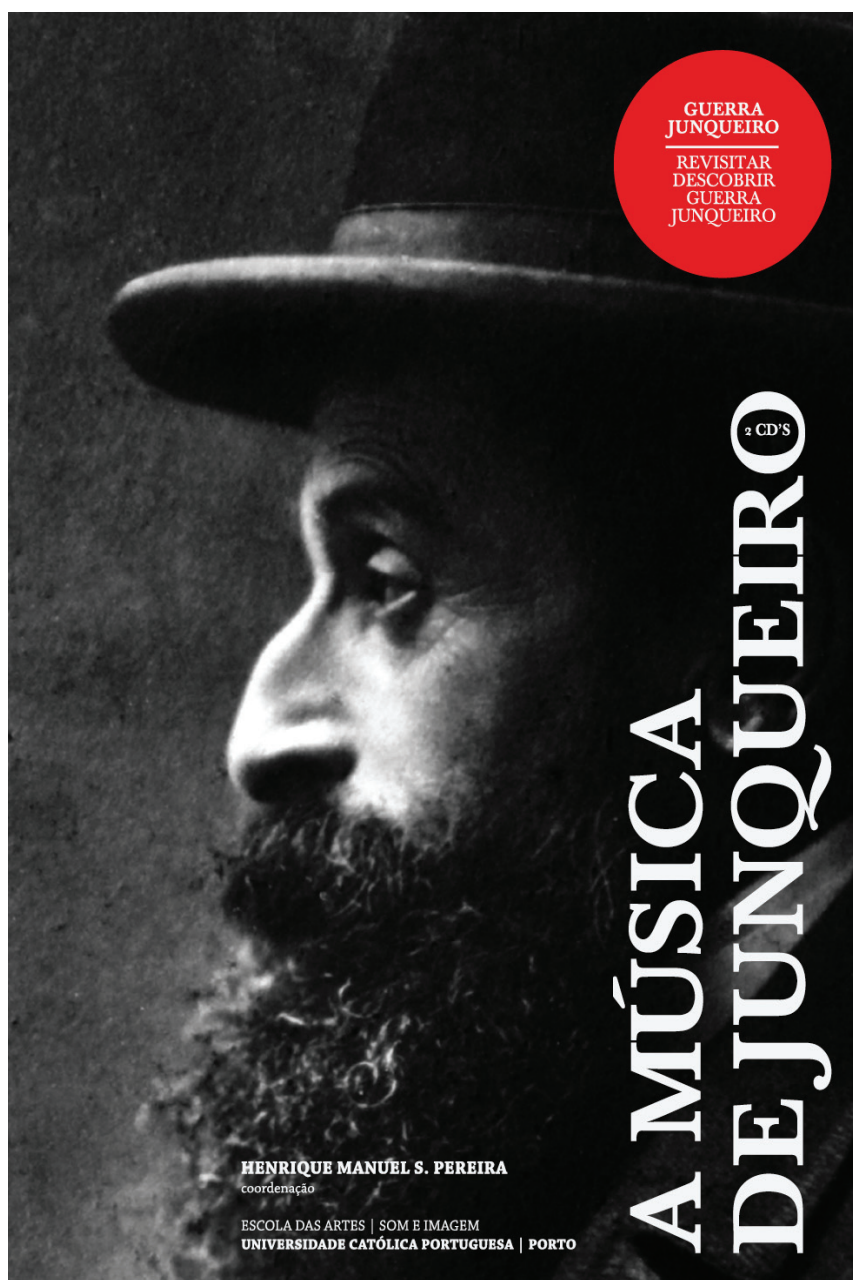


FROM SINGING
MATERIAL TO
INTANGIBLE POETRY:
THE MUSIC OF
JUNQUEIRO

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The poet lives by words as the musician by sounds. One or other of the threads with which both build, investigate, decipher and seek to express wonderment refers back to the order of the originary. In the beginning was what? The network of ancient cosmogonies and the imbricate lexical and semantic web of documents and sources that give shape to our concepts bear witness to the universal operative power of both sound and syllables. The word is the purest symbol of the manifestation of being, of the being that thinks himself and expresses himself or the being that is known of, and communicated by another. Expressing the person, the word is part of its dynamism. Even if by analogy, does the same claim not apply to music?

Who can tell of the secret ritual in which verse is born, or map the constellation of ideas, or the tumultuous swarms of syllables and sounds that are born in the orchestration of a poem? But if sound seems to precede the word, as the emotions precede the words, let us ask the same question about music or any other form of Art and its creators. Everything happens in that elusive, secret territory of artistic creation, in that enthusiastic game of matches and mismatches with reality.

Nothing authorises us to say that Guerra Junqueiro (1850-1923) knew music or was able to read music beyond the most elementary level - even though, from a certain point he lived in a house inhabited by music. Both his daughters played piano and the youngest, Julia, excelled at the violin, to the point that, for example, in a public concert in 1898, she played the allegro from Mozart's 3rd Quintet with Gilhermina Suggia on cello; and even if he openly, to write some poetry, sought inspiration in certain pieces by Beethoven, which reminded him of those "immortal melodic souls of great epic tales that have died...".

However, music also allows empirical achievements in which the artist fully complies with the rules (in the case of solfège or harmony and even coun-

terpoint) without even knowing that he is doing it. But, though Teixeira de Pascoaes considers him the "supreme musician," this is not exactly what The Music of Junqueiro is about. Not even, in the conventional sense of the term, about an anthology, since that implies choosing according to certain criteria. The Music of Junqueiro fits into the broader scope of *Revisiting/ Discovering Guerra Junqueiro*, a project of the School of Arts, Sound and Image at the Catholic University of Porto. It could be said that, like much of what came after it, it was born unexpectedly, i.e. without being intended or contemplated at the start. So what was this start? Only the idea of making a documentary, *Nom-de-guerre, The Journey of Junqueiro*, in which, using the voice of the Poet as much as possible, what was sought was a portrait that took into account the multiple facets of this polyhedral persona: thinker, farmer, politician and diplomat, scientist and prominent art collector and thinker. Recourse would be made to published and unpublished documents, the testimony of scholars and admirers of Junqueiro, his works and thoughts. But what support for this product would be given by music? Without this representing per se a difficulty, we wanted to go further: that music was not mere illustration or gap-filling, even though beautiful and effective, but another form of the Poet expressing himself.

The work of Guerra Junqueiro was done and driven by an essential musicality, which is one of the most compelling and commanding aspects of its majestic language, somewhere between sarcastic, epic, lyrical and religious.

Words, like music, are liable to various modulations; they are, or can be, singing material. Guerra Junqueiro knew it and demanded that it was so: what "doesn't have music... is useless!", what "doesn't sing, doesn't vibrate, is no good!". Based on this evaluation criterion, the verse of Junqueiro's work is stretched, loiters, stops, dances or sets off running like giddily rolling waves. Rich rhymes, vocal strata,

ostensive use of metaphor, visually and aurally expressive images, pauses that are eloquent silences, sequences, reiterative structures, synaesthetic and onomatopoeic processes, a vast range of nuances, of technical-compositional, rhetorical-stylistic, ideothematic aspects, interwoven in a harmonious, seamless music, concur both for the modulation of what is the music of Junqueiro, and for direct communication with the reader or listener, easily consigning the verses to memory.

This will help to understand that from the point of view of response, Guerra Junqueiro has been a unique case in Portuguese literary history. No other poet, whatever the period being analysed, attained such popularity. The effectiveness of the poetry-reader communication meant a mighty power of persuasion, able to seduce, charm, convince of its truth. This happened in a society marked by a high level of illiteracy in which music was the fundamental language and collective means of communicating feelings and meanings. Many, not knowing how to read, learned by ear and recited by rote extensive compositions of Guerra Junqueiro (such as *O Melro*, from *A Lágrima*) or even entire books. And if knowing by heart implies an appropriation and has something of possession, it is also knowledge of the heart. It would, therefore, be useless and demeaning to ascribe his seduction to specific audiences. The work of the Poet served audiences differentiated by taste, social status, culture and political persuasion.

That said, and accepting as unquestionable that there is a characteristically Junqueirian music, a music, therefore, of Junqueiro, it is not surprising that many musical composers, in different styles, geographies, times and generations, have found a source of inspiration in his work, so one can speak of a music for Junqueiro. We know it today, because prior to the Music of Junqueiro only half a dozen musical compositions written using verses by Guerra Junqueiro were known.

How would we know if there were others? And, in the likely event that there were, how would we undertake this research without a bibliography to guide us? It was, therefore, as you can imagine: a thorough investigation, using various conventional and unsuspected sources, to discover them, and another study, just as – or more – difficult, combined with good fortune, to locate and access the scores.

After this archaeological process, which managed to find thirty-seven compositions, a number that testifies to the extraordinary reception that the work of the Poet had, the overwhelming majority of which are now unknown and unpublished – writing for the voice, soloist and piano, a capella choir and choir accompanied by piano predominate in a collection of Portuguese and Brazilian compositions – the question arose: why not revisit Guerra Junqueiro with our contemporary sensibilities and language? From this jazz, pop, hip hop, electronic attires were born, as well as other less well defined styles.

The Music of Junqueiro (which, in the end, is the music of and the music for Junqueiro) covers nine books of poetry by the Poet from *Freixo de Espada à Cinta: A Morte de D. João* (1874), *A Musa em Férias* (1879), *A Lágrima* (1888), *A Marcha do Ódio* (1890), *Finis Patriae* (1891), *Os Simples* (1892), *Oração ao Pão* (1902), *Oração à Luz* (1904), *Poesias Dispersas* (1920). These represent a survey of forty-four poems by Guerra Junqueiro set to music, amongst which are two symphonic poems, and cover a time-span which goes at least from the 1880s to 2009. In a range of composers and compositions of inevitably uneven quality, here are names such as Luís Freitas-Branco, Óscar da Silva, Cláudio Carneiro, Fernando Lopes-Graça, J. Viana da Mota, Barroso Neto, António Fragoso, Berta Alves de Sousa, Tomás Borba, etc.

The original aim grew, therefore, independently of the documentary, establishing a criss-cross of several artistic codes and, within each code, different forms of expression, made into a

book with double CD, comprising forty tracks lasting more than two and a half hours, which feature critics, artists, composers, performers and readers. The impossibility of accessing scores, and the restrictions of means required for their performance, made it unfeasible to record all the works surveyed.

Presented in the form of a narrated concert, that would result in a DVD, The Music of Junqueiro attracted three hundred emerging and well-established people, of several generations, from within and outside the School of Arts of the Portuguese Catholic University in Porto, with varied but converging contributions, in extraordinary and enthusiastic synergy.

The collection of syllables and musical notes assembled perhaps concur for a fuller historical intelligibility and critique of the personality of Guerra Junqueiro and will open, perhaps – if viewed from the perspective of the thematic source of our literature (its poets, composers and musical performers) – to the vast field of musical research that is glimpsed in it. All the more so because a consensus tends to become established on the claim that poetry is “the greatest intellectual creation of the Portuguese” and because if there is poetry that is mythographically identified with its language, of which it is the original matrix, that poetry is Portuguese. As is known, especially in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, the fraternal co-existence between poetry and music wove a web of fruitful relationships.

It is not, however, about re-establishing the prestige of Guerra Junqueiro, since this task would be impossible and an improbable anachronism, so intimate is the relation between text and society in the work of the Poet and so disproportionately resounding was his reception. The academic project, *Revisiting/Discovering Guerra Junqueiro*, is rather an attempt to rescue him from the fog of oblivion and from the cultural ambiguity in which troubled circumstances, orthodoxies and conflicting powers bound him,

freezing the reading and interpretation of his work and action.

The idea of The Music of Junqueiro has already surpassed the Portuguese borders. We know that, in Spain, around Curros Enríquez, and in Brazil, based on the work of Olavo Bilac, something similar, with recognised and expressed emulation, is in the making.