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Rhythms of Diplomacy: Listening to Pan-American Echoes in Guarnieri's Flute Improviso No. 2

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Resumo: Este artigo explora a interação do compositor Camargo Guarnieri com o pensamento Pan-Americanista no Brasil dos anos 1940 e seu impacto em suas composições, focando especialmente no Improviso No. 2 para flauta solo. Em meio aos ideais de unidade intercontinental, as conexões de Guarnieri com enviados culturais dos EUA, Carleton Sprague Smith e Aaron Copland, influenciaram suas obras. Examinando o Improviso No. 2 através da Teoria das Tópicas, o estudo revela os elementos rítmicos que refletem a imersão de Guarnieri no ambiente latino-americanista fomentado por seus contatos americanos. Fontes arquivísticas negligenciadas, incluindo relatórios e correspondências de Smith e Copland, enriquecem a análise, fornecendo insights sobre as escolhas musicais e experiências de Guarnieri no cenário de intercâmbio cultural. O artigo contribui para uma compreensão mais profunda da música de Guarnieri e suas conexões com os ideais Pan-Americanistas, lançando luz sobre um aspecto menos conhecido de sua produção composicional.

Palavras-chave: Camargo Guarnieri, Pan-Americanismo, Improviso No. 2, Teoria das Tópicas.

Abstract: This article delves into composer Camargo Guarnieri's interaction with Pan-Americanist thinking in 1940s Brazil and its impact on his compositions, particularly focusing on Improviso No. 2 for solo flute. Amid intercontinental unity ideals, Guarnieri's connections with U.S. cultural envoys Carleton Sprague Smith and Aaron Copland influenced his works. Examining Improviso No. 2 through Topic Theory, the study unveils the rhythmic elements reflecting Guarnieri's immersion in the Latin Americanist environment fostered by his American contacts. Overlooked archival sources, including Smith's and Copland's reports and correspondence, enrich the analysis, providing insights into Guarnieri's musical choices and experiences within the cultural exchange landscape. The article contributes to a deeper understanding of Guarnieri's music and its ties to Pan-Americanist ideals, shedding light on a lesser-known facet of his compositional output.

Keywords: Camargo Guarnieri, Pan-Americanism, Improviso No. 2, Topic Theory.

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Mário de Andrade, one of the strongest voices within Brazilian *Modernismo*, profoundly influenced composer Camargo Guarnieri's musical aesthetics.[1] Andrade saw in the young composer the successful convergence of two cornerstones of his modernist thinking: first, the renovation of compositional practices through the use of innovative musical techniques; and second, the incorporation of "native" elements that could reflect the alleged hybridity of Brazilian culture (CONTIER, 1994, p. 39–40). Guarnieri himself believed that a composer without strong nationalist roots could not be universally revered, therefore he advocated for musical works of folkloric tendencies. He believed a composer could only create authentic, meaningful music if their own culture could deeply penetrate their entire subconscious (SANTAROSA, 1965). While the authenticity of Brazilian music, as envisioned by Andrade and Guarnieri, is a complex and multifaceted concept, one can still explore their perspectives as an invitation to perceive their works through a broader lens. This involves considering the network of signifiers that, whether historically grounded or not, point to these so-called nationalist expressions. Much of the scholarship on Guarnieri's music has delved into this question. However, what if we approach some of his works through an alternative perspective? What if we could interpret them as an expression of *Latinidad*?

In the 1940's, Guarnieri witnessed a transformative Pan-Americanist era in Brazil—a time when the ideals of intercontinental unity and cultural exchange were fervently promoted during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency in the United States. Within this backdrop, Guarnieri's profound connection to the United States, one nurtured through significant encounters with envoys from Pan-American cultural organizations, crystalized. These emissaries were dispatched to Latin America's major music hubs to foster cultural exchange. Among these were flutist and cultural diplomat Carleton Sprague Smith (1905-1994) and composer Aaron Copland (1900-1990), both of whom developed enduring friendships with Guarnieri. Guarnieri's deep appreciation for his American acquaintances manifested through the dedication of several of his compositions, some of them now

[1] Numerous biographical sources on Guarnieri document the profound influence of Andrade's modernist ideology on the composer, a topic that has been extensively explored by authors like Silva (SILVA, 1999) and Tyrrell (TYRRELL, 2008). Guarnieri himself acknowledged Andrade as the source of his aesthetic orientation on multiple occasions. In a 1959 interview, he stated that he learned from Andrade how to challenge the established canons of traditional music schools. According to Guarnieri, Andrade was the greatest theorist of Brazilian music, and his influence was felt not only by him but by an entire generation of contemporary Brazilian musicians, including new composers who continue to be influenced directly or indirectly by Andrade's teachings (GUARNIERI, 2001a).

part of the standard Brazilian orchestral repertoire. Included are the *Abertura Concertante* (1942), dedicated to Aaron Copland, *Symphony No. 1* (1944), dedicated to Serge Koussevitzky, and *Symphony No. 4* (1963), dedicated to Leonard Bernstein. In the chamber music arena stand out *Encantamento* for violin and piano (1941), dedicated to Charles Seeger and several pieces involving the flute dedicated to Smith, the first of these being *Improviso No. 2* for solo flute (1942). Outshined by the more popular *Improviso No. 3*, this composition has yet to receive the attention it deserves, both on stage and within current scholarship. Beyond a mere historical account, however, the examination of Guarnieri's *Improviso No. 2* raises some meaningful questions for the understanding and interpretation of some of his music in context: What were the geopolitical circumstances within which Guarnieri found himself at the time? To what extent could these dynamics have impacted his artistic choices? Can it be argued that Guarnieri compromised his nationalist convictions to appeal to international audiences?

Grounded in the examination of Smith and Copland's own writings, as well as a cross examination of their correspondence, I will first contextualize their roles within U.S. Pan-American cultural endeavors, including their impressions of Guarnieri as a potential Pan-American ally. Subsequently, I discuss Guarnieri's own views on Pan-American relations, as well as the circumstances that conditioned his own participation in cultural exchanges with the U.S. Exploring this historical context allows us to grasp the musical landscape in which Guarnieri operated, providing insights into the interactions with his contemporaries. The third section of the article argues for an interpretation of Guarnieri's music as an expression of *Latinidad*. For this, and by considering ideas on Brazillianess in a Pan-American context, I analyze *Improviso No. 2* through the lens of Topic Theory. I particularly focus on the piece's rhythmic elements to argue for a reading in relation to the Latin American context in which he found himself immersed.

To this end, I focus on two primary sources that have been relatively overlooked: Smith's and Copland's reports of their tours through Latin America, currently housed in only a few U.S. collections. Moreover, I will delve into their correspondence with Guarnieri, providing insights into their interactions and shedding further light on the cultural and artistic dynamics of that era. By tapping into these rich resources, this archival research aims to present a nuanced understanding of the time and its impact on Guarnieri's musical choices, providing essential context for the analytical portion of this study.

1. Pan-American encounters

Under the looming threat of European fascism, the United States renewed their interest in previously conceived ideas on Pan-Americanism through the first decades of the twentieth century. These included a series of economic, political, and cultural policies that gained notoriety in the late 1800s.[2] With the advent of World War II and the advancement of German forces in Western Europe, Roosevelt's policies towards Latin America took on the role of counterbalancing the influence of the Axis powers in the region. In line with this objective, Roosevelt established in 1940 the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA). The cultural wings of the OIAA, along with the Pan-American Union, were assigned with the task of promoting a distinct Western Hemisphere identity. Their aim was to encourage Latin Americans to resist the influence of Paris, Vienna, or Berlin and instead embrace the alleged shared culture of the Americas.[3]

In this context, the Music Committees of institutions such as the OIAA and the Pan-American Union played a vital role in fostering cultural exchange between the United States and Latin America. Collaborating with various organizations, they approved composition contests and radio broadcasts, facilitated music education exchange projects, and promoted performances of modern art music by Latin American composers in the U.S. (HESS, 2014; PALOMINO, 2020, p. 174). Moreover, these institutions paved the way for tours and exchange visits for Latin American composers, performers, and musicologists, enabling them to meet influential cultural figures in the United States.

Smith was chief of the Music Division of the New York Public Library (NYPL) from 1931 to 1959 (SHEPARD, 2006, p. 621). Aaron Copland, on the other hand, was a renowned composer and conductor, often hailed as the "Dean of American Music." Their respective roles in the world of music and cultural institutions laid the groundwork for their involvement with the promotion of cultural Pan-Americanism. As members of the Music Committee of the OIAA, both were entrusted

[2] This was manifested in the Monroe Doctrine and Simon Bolívar's famous *Jamaica Letter*, which, despite their differing perspectives, sought to counter European involvement in the region. At the heart of Pan-Americanism lay the conviction that the nations of the Americas shared mutual interests and were united by their geographical proximity. For further exploration, consider John B. Lockey's "Pan-Americanism: Its Beginnings" (New York, 1920). This work offers valuable insights into Pan-Americanism, providing a thorough study of the movement from the era of independence to the culmination of the Panama Congress in 1826.

[3] For further information on American cultural diplomacy towards Latin America, see Carol A. Hess's "Representing the Good Neighbor - Music, Difference, and the Pan American Dream" (Oxford University Press, New York, 2013).

in 1940 and 1941, respectively, with tours to certain Latin American countries, taking an active part in American cultural diplomacy. It was during their respective tours that they both met Guarnieri.

Copland's interest for Latin America has been widely discussed by scholars.[4] He mentored several composers from the region, wrote articles on Latin American music, and composed works with Latin American themes, such as "El salón México (1936)," "Danzón Cubano" (1942), and "Three Latin-American Sketches" (1971). From 1932 to 1972, Copland visited Latin America eight times to encourage musical exchange between North and South America (HESS, 2023, cap. 3). Smith, on the other hand, was deemed by the OIAA a "recognized musicologist of wide interests and excellent preparation," and as the "*persona simpatica*" that he was, someone who would be able to "establish the best and most fruitful connections for the Committee in the countries he visits" (Report of the Committee, 1940, p. 8). [5] For the Committee, Carleton Sprague Smith's knowledge of musical life in the United States would also be an advantage in giving Latin Americans an introduction to US folk music, urban popular music, and "art" music (Report of the Committee, 1940, p. 8).[6] In 1940, there were few specialists in Latin American music in the United States, and, except for a few popular standards, very little information about U.S. music was shared with Latin American countries. Francisco Curt Lange from Uruguay had only recently established the *Instituto Americano de Musicologia* in Montevideo. Additionally, there were no proper systems in place for

[4] For further insights into Aaron Copland's engagement with Latin America and his cultural influence, readers may find Carol Hess's recently published book, "Aaron Copland in Latin America: Music and Cultural Politics" (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2023), particularly Chapter 3, "Copland as Good Neighbor," to be a valuable and informative resource.

[5] Smith's interest in Latin America is evidenced by his own publications. For Israel J. Katz, these writings, as well as those devoted to music librarianship, are based on first-hand experiences.(KUSS, 1991, p. xiv) Certainly, the Musical Tour through South America (1940) was the first of a series of writings by Smith on the Latin American topic, and all the subsequent publications in 1941 are noticeably based on it. However, although it definitively laid the groundwork for his own body of work on this subject, he was also familiar with the North American and even some South American literature on music and culture in the region by the time of his trip.(SMITH, 1940a, p. xviii, 69, 94) As I demonstrate in my dissertation, he was acquainted with Latin America at the time of the tour and already had his own ideas based on the literature with which he was familiar. (TALONE, 2023)

[6] However, it must be noted that overall, the OIAA music committee was not diverse in its musical backgrounds, likely causing popular music to be overlooked. This fact did not go unnoticed at the time, as evidenced by an editorial in the New York based Sunday Mirror in November, 1940. The author, under the pseudonym Candide, complained that the music committee was composed of one musicologist (Carleton Sprague Smith), the chair of the music department at Yale, the executive director of the Twentieth-Century Fund, one lofty composer (Aaron Copland), and one gentleman from the American Council of Learning Societies. "The fault that we find is simply this; get down to earth. You can't lick only human nature, Mr. Rockefeller. We wish you had appointed to your music committee only leaders of America's dance orchestras and perhaps made Bing Crosby and Ethel Merman co-chairman"(HESS, 2023, p. 36).

exchanging music information across the Western Hemisphere (SHEPARD, 2006, p. 639).

Smith and Copland meticulously documented their tours in Latin America. Smith's *Musical Tour Through South America*,[7] a 355-page mimeographed report issued after returning to New York in October, 1940, records his impressions on the musical life in the nine countries he visited.[8] Likewise, Copland's 1941 tour delved into a consideration of the state of music as a field in Latin American countries. He evaluated the conditions of the educational institutions and local governments in relation to musical exchange, and proposed key composers and academic personalities for such enterprises (TACUCHIAN, 1998, p. 129). The initial publication of Copland's tour overview, titled "The Composers of South America," appeared in the 1942 January-February issue of Modern Music, and it offers valuable insights into his encounters with composers and academic personalities in the region. Later, this significant piece found its place in "Copland on Music," a book published in 1960. Copland diligently maintained a handwritten report, his "South American Diary," spanning forty-five pages, which served as a wellspring of information for several passages in "The Composers of South America." Smith's and Copland's reports, as well as the latter's personal diary, explicitly showcase the Pan-American *soft-power* mission for which they were dispatched: to encourage inter-American exchange and counter European fascist influences.[9] Moreover, these records offer valuable insights of Brazil through their eyes as American envoys and detail their initial interactions with significant figures in the Brazilian musical scene such as Guarnieri.

[7] The choice of "South America" over "Latin America" in certain works reflects nuances outlined by Palomino. In the United States, the label "Latin American" is often linked to classical repertoires by Latin American composers, whereas touring U.S. artists may use it in a purely geographical sense. Even musical ethnographers studying indigenous music tend to prefer the more geographically specific term "South America." (PALOMINO, 2020, p. 14)

[8] These were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Copies of *Musical Tour Through South America* can be found on the shelves of at least six libraries in the United States, as well as on microfilm at the New York Public Library, where he worked as head of the Music Division.

[9] Joseph S. Nye defines power as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want." He coined the term "soft power" which, in international politics, refers to the ability to persuade and attract others, as opposed to using force or coercion (referred to as "hard power"). The soft power of a country depends on three main resources: its political values, its culture, and its foreign policies.(NYE, 2008, p. 94)

Guarnieri returned from Europe on December 2, 1939, a few months before Smith's tour in Brazil. Both met in Rio de Janeiro.[10] Smith had arrived in the city on June 28th, 1940, after visiting the city of Salvador. In the *Musical Tour,* he describes meeting numerous people during the first days in Rio de Janeiro, including Mário de Andrade and Heitor Villa-Lobos (SMITH, 1940a, p. 43).[11] He also commented on a concert of music from Brazil and the United States that took place on July 17 at the *Escola Nacional de Música*. There, he played compositions by Villa-Lobos, Quincy Porter, Aaron Copland, and Roy Harris (SMITH, 1940a, p. 46). Works by other composers, including Guarnieri, also made up a program that, according to Smith (1940a, p. 46), was applauded by about a thousand people and well received by critics. Published reviews confirm his impressions, and also reveal some details omitted in Smith's report: the concert was an homage to him, and Guarnieri, whose music was also featured in the concert, was present.[12] Although not mentioned in the *Musical Tour*, Guarnieri and Smith convened in Rio for a second tribute to the North American diplomat the day after the concert.[13] Smith (1940a, p. 46) was particularly impressed with this luncheon, as it

[10] Aside from the notes on Smith's *Musical Tour*, those tours were partially documented in local newspapers. These documents, as well as the letters that they exchanged, help determine when and where Guarnieri and Smith met. For instance, an article on Correio da Manhã reads: "Another tribute to Mr. Carleton Spraghe (sic) Smith - The Gymnasio Arte e Instrucção, which operates in Cascadura, offered to Mr. Carleton Spraghe Smith, director of the Music Division of the New York Public Library, with the collaboration of the choir and orchestra of said school, under the direction of maestro Domingos Raymundo, an interesting festival, of which the following program made part."("Mais uma homenagem ao Sr. Carleton Sprague Smith", 1940)

[11] Similarly, Copland describes having met with both figures several times between November 8 and November 26, 1941, and was surprised by Villa-Lobos's consistent rejection of the idea of bringing him to the United States, despite the "golden opportunity" it presented (COPLAND, 1941, n.p.).According to Copland, Villa-Lobos believed that there should be no governmental affiliation of any kind and that he wanted to come as an artist to be judged on his own merits, "quite aside from all considerations on Pan-Americanism" (COPLAND, 1941, n.p.). These discussions provide context for how Brazilian artists viewed Pan-Americanist policies, particularly those coming from the United States. While Guarnieri was not as established as Villa-Lobos and thus could not risk having his political beliefs affect his work opportunities, this episode played a role in shaping Guarnieri's political views towards a more favorable view of Pan-Americanism.

[12] One of these reviews read: "Rarely has a chamber music concert had the interest and originality of the one that took place the day before yesterday, at night, in the hall of the Escola Nacional de Música, in honor of Mr. Carleton Sprague Smith and with the collaboration of the honoree. This proves that the distinguished musician, in addition to having unusual culture and erudition, is also an artist" ("Concerto da Escola Nacional de Música em Homenagem ao Sr. Carleton Spraghe (sic) Smith", 1940)

[13] A photograph of the luncheon is on display at Museu Villa-Lobos ("1977.16A.036", 1940) and has been featured in Flávio Silva's publication (SILVA, 2001a, p. 355). However, the exact date and venue were not identified in either source. By scouring Jornal do Brasil's society pages, it is possible to determine that the reception was held at the Rio de Janeiro Jockey Club on July 18, 1940.("Homenagens", 1940) The picture reveals Mário de Andrade, Luis Heitor, and composers Lorenzo Fernandez, Brasílio Itiberê, Villa-Lobos, and João Itiberê da Cunha among the guests, with Smith seated in the center and Guarnieri standing fourth from the right.

showcased the "receptivity of Brazilians for an exchange" with Americans and their "desire to cooperate."

Smith's first impressions of Guarnieri appear manifested in his writing and correspondence.[14] In the *Musical Tour*, he named him along composer Francisco Mignone as one of São Paulo leading composers (SMITH, 1940a, p. 85–87). In his description, Smith does not reference Mignone's place of birth—he was, after all, from the capital, which might not have seemed exceptional. He did, however, remark that Guarnieri came from "the interior town of Tietê." With it, like his modernist mentors before, he emphasized Guarnieri's rural origin as a sign for an "authentic national identity."[15] In fact, Smith expressed his concerns over the possible influence of Parisian glamour over Guarnieri, although he also asserted, paraphrasing Andrade, that the composer "had the good fortune to grow up with *caipira*[16] folk music" and that was "influenced very little by foreign models" (SMITH, 1940a, p. 87).[17] Also in consonance with Mário de Andrade's expectations was Smith's faith in Guarnieri's talent, as he emphasizes the composer's promise as a leading national composer several times

[14] Smith left São Paulo for Buenos Aires on July 26,1940, but owing to bad weather, he was delayed for a few days in Curitiba, in the southern state of Paraná. A day after arriving in the Argentinian capital, Smith wrote a letter to Guarnieri, in Portuguese, emphasizing that it was an immense pleasure to have had the opportunity to meet him in Rio and São Paulo and to have had the opportunity to appreciate his music (SMITH, 1940b). He also asked Guarnieri to look for him if he went to New York, for they had great work ahead, that of "fighting the stupid people who say they don't appreciate music." Elizabeth Sprague Smith added a little handwritten note in which she also sends, in French, her best regards to Guarnieri and his wife (SMITH, 1940b). At the very least, these first written interactions demonstrate an already close affinity between the two.

[15] Although Guarnieri had a rudimentary musical and formal education, his first fifteen years in the small town of Tietê are regarded as decisive for his compositional personality. His isolation from the formal music world, and therefore from "outside influences," was seen as a blessing according to nationalist discourses of the time, and might have fascinated his mentors in the state capital. Sá Pereira, for instance, one of Guarnieri's first teachers in São Paulo, praised the fact that Guarnieri was composing valsinhas (little waltzes) in rural Tietê rather than studying music in Europe as a youngster. For him, it was because of the Tietê waltzes that he gradually became instilled with a "Brazilian feeling," in such a way that, when he later began his serious studies of composition, he was already "immunized against influences from foreign schools" (PEREIRA, 2001, p. 23) "At an age when others are still copying the classics or plagiarizing Debussy," he adds, "Guarnieri presents himself as the owner of a very personal compositional technique, characteristically national, putting down roots in the songs and dances of the people, eternal sources of artistic rejuvenation."(PEREIRA, 2001, p. 23)

[16] (Smith overlooked the fact that the caipiras, differently than White Brazilians of European descent, were the result of the intermingling of Portuguese and Amerindians, who were later joined by Blacks. See RIBEIRO, 2000; Later on in the Musical Tour, Smith defines caipira as such: "We hear a great deal of the Cariocas of Rio de Janeiro, but North Americans should also know about the 'Caipiras', the country folk of European descent... in the province of São Paulo. The Caipira has an interesting folklore, less extensive than that of Rio but much appreciated by connoisseurs. Mario de Andrade is an authority in this field." SMITH, 1940a, p. 82)

[17] (ANDRADE, 1940)

throughout the *Musical Tour*.[18]

Copland reported meeting Guarnieri in São Paulo on November 17, 1941. Like he did with various composers during the trip, they spent the day together and Guarnieri showed him many of his compositions (COPLAND, 1941, n.p.). He summarized his impressions of the Brazilian composer in The South American Composers,[19] but his diary also helps understand why he saw Guarnieri as a potential Pan-American ally:

> Of all the composers I have met in S. A., I should say that Guarnieri is first choice for a visit to the States. He is almost 35, in complete control of his talent, [illegible] the States, speaks French but no English, has a sympathetic personality, and his music is a real contribution that will be appreciated in the U.S.A (my second choice would be José Maria Castro—then Mignone). (COPLAND, 1941, n.p.).

Besides recognizing Guarnieri's skill and his predisposition towards collaboration with the United States, Copland's account of his days in Brazil, as detailed in his journal, raises a few questions. First, consider the way he constructs the discourse of Guarnieri tells us how Brazilian music was perceived by Americans at the height of the Pan-American project: "His gift [Guarnieri's] is more orderly than that of Villa-Lobos, without being less Brazilian. It has that typical trait of abundance—(Brazilian composers seem to have no musical inhibition)—the typical romantic bias, and the typical rhythms of the country" (COPLAND, 1941, n.p.). The idea that Brazilian music and culture was uninhibited was promoted in the very context of the Good Neighbor policy and fostered by both sides. This stereotype sprung from several sources. For instance, North American mass media promoted Carmen

[18] For instance, "Carlos Gomes is still a world figure and it is time for a new light to spring forth. Perhaps Camargo Guarnieri is the indicated person. His opera Malazarte, still awaiting a performance, is said to be an arresting work." (SMITH, 1940a, p. 52) There is no doubt that Guarnieri is one of the most profound and vital figures of the contemporary Brazilian scene and if he continues to write works of this strength, he may become the leader of this country (SMITH, 1940a, p. 87).

[19] "Camargo Guarnieri, who is now thirty-five, is in my opinion the most exciting 'unknown' talent in South America. His not inconsiderable body of works should be far better known than they are. Guarnieri is a real composer. He has everything it takes—a personality of his own, a finished technique, and a fecund imagination. His gift is more orderly than that of Villa-Lobos, though nonetheless Brazilian. Like other Brazilians, he has the typical abundance, the typical romantic leanings (sometimes, surprisingly enough, in the direction of Ernest Bloch), and the usual rhythmic intricacies. The thing I like best about his music is its healthy emotional expression—it is the honest statement on how one man feels. There is, on the other hand, nothing particularly original about his music in any one department. He knows how to shape a form, how to orchestrate well, how to lead a bass line effectively. The thing that attracts one most in Guarnieri's music is its warmth and imagination, which are touched by a sensibility that is profoundly Brazilian. At its finest his is the fresh and racy music of a 'new' continent." (COPLAND, 1960, p. 211)

Miranda's exaggerated attire and frantic snake-like motions while granting her the mantle of ambassador of Brazilian popular music culture in the United States. Orson Welles, considered to be among the most influential filmmakers of all time, portrayed Brazil as a nation of joyful people who liked to dance: most of the films set in Brazil had young women dancing samba and rumba, the latter a Cuban genre, in fact (TOTA, 2009, p. 74–75).

Brazilian politicians and intellectuals alike contributed to this representation by promoting the idea of "racial democracy," something that stood in sharp contrast to the *de jure* and *de facto* segregation that took place in parts of the United States. For instance, in his own "South American diary," *Music of Latin America*, Nicolas Slonimsky referenced Brazilian musicologist Luciano Gallet's (1893-1931) ideas concerning "the essence of Brazilian music." In the referenced excerpt, Gallet directly correlated the racial miscegenation in Brazilian culture with the exuberance of its music:[20]

> Brazilian music was born from the fusion of the elements of Portuguese Latin melos with African rhythms. The conjunction of these elements with the racial contribution of the Indian, the master of the continent, has originated the musical psychology of the people of Brazil. [...] This music, rich in flavor, exuberant in sentiment, and full of inner life, begins to attract the attention of foreign music scholars who are coming to Brazil to learn the new art (GALLET, 1934 apud SLONIMSKY, 1972, p. 117).

In a 1949 letter to Irving and Verna Fine, Copland indeed described Rio de Janeiro as a city without color lines: "The city is beautiful as ever. Streets are always full of people—no one ever seems to want to go home. Coffee every two hours till you are black in the face. A friendly, democratic feeling in the air that comes across because of the lack of color lines. Skins of all shades and faces of all shapes (COPLAND, 2006a, p. 183).

Guarnieri's encounters with Carleton Sprague Smith and Aaron Copland during the 1940s had profound implications. As the United States refocused on Pan-Americanism in the face of

[20] The myth of racial democracy translated into "exuberant music," however, was not confined to the academic sphere. Brazilian soprano Elsie Houston, whose "more erudite" sensuality was said to complement Carmen Miranda's stereotypical sensuality in representing the Latin woman in the United States, (TOTA, 2009, p. 63) claimed that Brazil's so-called absence of prejudice made it more advanced than the United States in musical and social terms: "We [Brazilians] were open to any form of influence. The absolute absence of color prejudice made the assimilation of black/African and Indian influences easy. Who here [in the United States], except George Gershwin, has shown in his work sensitivity for a real music? I am convinced that Brazilian music is contributing a great deal to music everywhere by mixing the classic tradition with the structure of the primitive rhythms of old Africa and Indian ritual" (TOTA, 2009, p. 63).

European fascism, Smith and Copland played pivotal roles in promoting cultural exchange between the United States and Latin America. Guarnieri's interaction with these influential figures exposed him to the ideals of inter-American cooperation and a shared Western Hemisphere identity. Smith's emphasis on Guarnieri's rural origins and authentic national identity echoed modernist sentiments and contributed to Guarnieri's perception as a representative of Brazilian culture. Copland's characterization of Brazilian music as uninhibited and abundant aligned with the Pan-American narrative, reinforcing the image of Latin America as a vibrant and culturally rich region. These encounters not only facilitated Guarnieri's exposure to American cultural diplomacy but also played a key role in shaping his identity as a Brazilian composer with transnational connections.

2. From Tietê to New York

Just as Arthur Rubinstein played a significant role in "discovering" Villa-Lobos, it was a French pianist, Alfred Cortot, who brought Guarnieri's talents to the attention of the Brazilian government (VERHAALEN, 2005, p. 17).[21] This not only confirms that the State's support for emerging Brazilian artists sometimes relied on renowned foreign figures 'discovering' them, but also highlights the inefficiencies of Brazilian cultural bureaucracy.[22] Guarnieri's trip to Paris between 1938-1939 faced numerous obstacles and delays, partly due to the negligence of Brazilian cultural administration.[23] His aspirations for international prestige had precedence within the Brazilian music scene at that time. The European experiences of Francisco Mignone (who had spent nine years in Europe between 1920 and 1929) and Villa-Lobos (who had made two trips to Europe primarily to showcase his music rather than to learn, as he liked to boast) (SILVA, 2001b, p. 74), had demonstrated how local recognition in Brazil often depended on European success. Guarnieri's determination to grow as an artist and explore the musical horizons beyond Brazil's borders is evident in his choices. However, his case required a compromise: he had to give up his stable positions as conductor of the

[21] Impressed with Guarnieri's music, Cortot wrote a letter to the governor of São Paulo, in 1936, requesting an artistic pension for Guarnieri to study in Europe (VERHAALEN, 2005, p. 16).

[22] In "Retóricas Burocráticas" ("Bureaucratic Rhetoric"), Maria Abreu elucidates the intricate bureaucratic avenues within the Department of Culture that the journey of Guarnieri to Paris had to navigate in order to come to fruition.(ABREU, 2001, p. 42–43)

[23] For a detailed account of Guarnieri's time in Europe and the financial difficulties that forced him to return, see SILVA, 2001b, p. 73–90.

Coral Paulistano and faculty member at the *Conservatório Dramático e Musical de São Paulo*, which ultimately left him unemployed upon his return (ABREU, 2001, p. 45).

The formal invitation for Guarnieri's inaugural visit to the United States was drafted on May 27, 1942, under the signature of L. S. Rowe, then Director of the Pan-American Union.[24] This invitation prompted significant reactions from music critics, who lamented the limited opportunities for Brazilian artists domestically. In an interview for one of these critics, Guarnieri addressed the challenging circumstances he was facing in Brazil, and the necessity to consider the offer due to the scarcity of local opportunities. For instance, despite his achievements, most of Guarnieri's income at the time came from occasionally conducting government-sponsored concerts and private lessons ("Ouvindo o compositor Camargo Guarnieri", 1942).

Thanks to the support of American emissaries such as Smith and Copland, Guarnieri left São Paulo for a sponsored visit in the United States on October 29, 1942 and did not return to Brazil until May 1943. However, the intervention of Luiz Heitor was also essential for the materialization of this journey (TALONE, 2023, p. 110–112). Additionally, Charles Seeger assumed a pivotal position in championing Guarnieri's endeavors in the United States. As per Tacuchian's study of the Pan-American Union archives (1998, p. 168–169), Seeger collaborated across various sectors to secure the necessary resources for Guarnieri's 1942 visit. Once in New York, Guarnieri dived into the city's vibrant music scene, experiencing the work of some of the best-rated conductors and orchestras of the region. In addition, not only was his music performed in various venues thanks to the advocacy of Smith and Copland, but he was sometimes featured as a performer. For instance, he collaborated in concert series at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), whose music committee was chaired by Smith. The series, entitled *Serenades*, was "devoted to rare music from Mozart to Stravinsky" ("Concert and Opera", 1943).[25] During this time, he also had his American conducting debut with the Boston Symphony orchestra, something that significantly impacted his professional

[24] However, Guarnieri was already aware of this invitation through a letter from Luiz Heitor. A scan of this letter is available in (FAVIANO, 2019).

[25] It was presented on five alternate Tuesdays nights, starting March 2, 1943, and featured compositions by Hindemith, Martinů, Arnell, Copland, Virgil Thomson, Theodore Chanler, Gustavo Pittaluga, and Marcelle de Manziarly ("Concert and Opera", 1943).

career.[26]

One of the most significant chamber music performances for Guarnieri at the time, however, was a concert of his music sponsored by the League of Composers at MoMA on March 7. It is possible that it was linked to Copland, who had served on the League's board of directors since 1932 ("Copland Timeline 1900 to 1990", [s.d.]).[27] In fact, in a letter to Marcelle de Manziarly on March 18 of that year, Copland wrote: "Isn't it wonderful about the success of Guarnieri's concert? It went far beyond my optimistic hopes" (COPLAND, 2006b). Although he could have been referring to one of Smith's Serenade concerts (considering that Manziarly was also featured in the series), this quote demonstrates Copland's continual support of the Brazilian composer during his time in the United States.

3. *Improviso No. 2*

It was during his time in the United States that Guarnieri composed *Improviso No. 2 for solo flute*, as evidenced by correspondence he exchanged with Mário de Andrade: "I wrote, on the 31st, a second *Improviso* for solo flute. It is good. You will like it, I am sure" (GUARNIERI, 1943). Although the dedication to Smith is well known, less so are the details of its premiere, performed by Smith himself (SILVA, 2001a, p. 541).[28] An article at the *Correio da Manhã* suggests that the Brazilian premiere of the piece took place in a radiophonic concert promoted by Koellreutter's *Musica Viva* group in May 1944. The piece was likely played by Koellreutter in a concert in which Curt Lange, then director of the inter-American Institute of Musicology, participated as speaker (GIÃO, 1944).

Improviso No. 2 (1942) is the second of three *Improvisations* Guarnieri composed for flute solo. Those were only published as a set by Rongwen Music, New York in 1958, with *Improviso no. 1* and

[26] The two performances of Guarnieri's *Abertura Concertante* took place at the Boston Symphony Hall on March 26 and 27 of that 1942. Local newspapers announced the concert—which included two pieces by American composers: the premiere of William Schuman's *Secular Cantata No. 2: A Free Song*, and Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait*—as evidence of the "growing and powerful friendship between the Americans." ("Brazilian Composer Coming to Symphony", 1943)

[27] The League's interest in Latin American music can be traced back to that year when they program a concert featuring the works of Allende, Caturla, Chávez, Gonzáles, Ponce, and Villa-Lobos (BAUER; REIS, 1948, p. 3).

[28] Smith also premiered the Improviso No. 3 (1947), dedicated to Alfério Mignone, and performed it as an encore in his recitals (SILVA, 2001a, p. 541; SMITH et al., 1967).

Improviso No. 3 written in 1941 and 1949, respectively. Guarnieri likely drew inspiration for this series from Hans Joachim Koellreutter—his friend at the time—who had composed an *Improviso e Estudo para Flauta* in Amazonas in 1938 (KOELLREUTTER, 1938). In 1941, Guarnieri published an open letter to Koellreutter praising his chamber music, particularly *Improviso e Estudo*:

> Now a confession: every time I read or I hear an atonal piece, a problem arises for me, that of beauty. I have never been able, despite my frank sympathy for atonalism, without, however, practicing it systematically, to find beauty in works written atonally. I have the feeling that these works cannot be beautiful. I find them profoundly intellectual. [...] All means are licit when they aim at a purely artistic, sincere end. That's why I admire you. Your chamber music, especially your Improviso e Estudo for solo flute, pleases me a lot. I want to envision in you the same transition that Hindemith went through, who at first wrote music so complicated, obscure, and today it is so clear, simple, close to Bach (GUARNIERI, 1941a).

Guarnieri's interest (and later opposition) to Koellreutter's atonalism possibly influenced his *Improviso no. 1* (1941) and, conceivably, *Improviso No. 2* (1942). As some scholars have suggested, both *Improvisos* do seem to project a "rather imprecise tonal orientation" (VERHAALEN, 2005, p. 207; WALKER, 2016, p. 42). Moreover, *Improviso No.1* was originally dedicated to Koellreutter, who premiered it in a concert held at the Teatro Municipal de São Paulo in 1941. Following his disagreement with Koellreutter in 1950 (GUARNIERI, 2001b), Guarnieri withdrew the original dedication (present in early manuscripts) and replaced it with a dedication to Brazilian flutist Moacyr Liserra (present in the edited version). According to John L. Walker (2016, p. 43), *Improviso No. 1* is likely the first piece for solo flute composed by a native Brazilian, and the first one published in Latin America. [29]

With the exception of the flute *Improviso No. 2*, Guarnieri dedicated all his ten piano and two flute *Improvisos* to Brazilian pianists and flutists. It is important to mention that the reception of Guarnieri's overall work and his other *Improvisos* differs from that of *Improviso No. 2*. According to reviews as well as musicological literature, all other *Improvisos* showcase the composer's so-called nationalistic traits. For instance, in 1941 critic Caldeira Filho praised the *Flute Improviso No. 1* for its "rare anticipations of the formation of a Brazilian spirit:"

[29] Koellreutter's Improviso e Estudo para Flauta (1938) and Honorio Siccardi's Deseo (1939) were composed before, however the former has only recently been published and the latter remains unpublished.

> With this work, Camargo Guarnieri reveals a significant moment in his evolution and, it is curious that he has done so voluntarily within the limitations and relative lack of resources of the instrument, unaccompanied by either harmonic or polyphonic support. [...] And even admitting that the balance and finesse of Improviso might be French, his way of feeling is a Brazilian thing. [...] It is one of those rare anticipations of the formation of a Brazilian "spirit" beyond the folkloric and the regional (FILHO, 1941).

In contrast to the perceived "Brazilian feeling" in *Improviso* no. 1 (and, arguably, no. 3), I propose that some musical configurations in *Improviso No. 2* can be seen as representing a broader concept of *Latinidad*, placing Guarnieri's music beyond his national borders. Pablo Palomino, in his book *The Invention of Latin American Music* (2020, p. 1), argues that, despite Latin America's musical heterogeneity, the category of "Latin American music" is everywhere and naturalized by listeners throughout the world. The question that remains is: What are the musical indicators that could signify the so-called "Latin American music" in this case? The idea that art music carries the imprint of other musical styles, and the belief that these musical elements hold significance for composers, listeners, and particularly performers, has invigorated discussions on absolute music, challenged the idea of music as an isolated entity, and enabled the exploration of musical meaning (AGAWU, 2008, p. 38). To address this, I turn to Topic Theory, which identifies recurring musical gestures called "topics" with cultural associations.[30]

Topic theory involves topical awareness, which indexes knowledge of various musical styles and procedures and the ability to project such knowledge imaginatively or speculatively (AGAWU, 2008, p. 51). Following Saussure, Agawu (2008, p. 49) recast this discussion in semiotic terms by describing topics as musical signs: the indissoluble union of a signifier (a certain disposition of musical dimensions such as melody harmony, rhythm, etc.) and a signified (a conventional stylistic unit, often but not always referential in quality). Although Topic Theory was initially conceived as a tool to analyze center European art music from the eighteenth century, it has also been proven fruitful in

[30] In *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and* Style (1980), Leonard Ratner introduced the concept of "topics" as vital components of musical discourse used by eighteenth-century composers. These topics encompassed a range of "characteristic figures," including dance rhythms, military and hunt styles, Turkish music, and more, which served as subjects for musical expression (RATNER, 1980). Ratner's ideas garnered further exploration and expansion by his disciples, Wye J. Allanbrook and Kofi Agawu, who broadened the scope of topic theory to encompass questions of form, meaning, and syntax. Moreover, Raymond Monelle recognized the semiotic potential of Topic Theory and proposed an alternative perspective, viewing topics not merely as isolated morphological units within individual compositions but as interconnected elements in a larger, intricate web of cultural associations (AGAWU, 2008, p. 48).

studies of non-Western and non-canonical repertories, including Latin American Music[31] In this context, Melanie Plesch (2012, p. 330) mentions that a nationalist *topos* is not a literal quotation of a folk song or an isolated occurrence, but a recurrent idea that runs through the entire corpus at different levels of abstraction. In her defense of the *topos* of the guitar as representative of *argentinidad,* Plesch (2009, p. 243) argues that, through the use of a number of musical commonplaces or *loci topici* that are immersed in a categorically European idiom, Argentine musical nationalism persuades Argentinians of their own *argentinidad* by pointing to certain worlds of meaning that have historically been recognized as emblematic of the national identity.

Crafting a similar argument in the context of Guarnieri's *Improviso*, and following Agawu's interpretation of topics as Saussurian signs, I argue that rhythmic patterns known as *tresillos* are signifiers that, in the pieces I analyzed, encapsulate the concept of *Latinidad.* My goal, however, is not to claim that Guarnieri intentionally employed the *tresillo* topic in his composition: there is no documentary proof that neither he nor his audience heard the piece that way. Instead, my intention is to demonstrate that topics do not directly document a social reality; rather, to the degree that they do document anything, it is via the effort of the imagination in depicting that reality (AGAWU, 2008, p. 49).

According to Raymond Monelle's classification of iconic and indexical topics (2006, p. 28), the tresillo should be considered indexical, since both signifier and signified are musical. For indexical topics, Monelle (2006, p. 28) argues that one must examine the musical original to see how closely it is reproduced. Latin American musicologists have demonstrated the tresillo's prominence in the

[31] For a comprehensive list of publications, see PLESCH, Melanie. Decentring Topic Theory: Musical Topics and Rhetorics of Identity in Latin American Art Music. Revista Portuguesa de Musicologia, v. 4, n. 1, p. 27-32, 2017; and AGAWU, Kofi. Topic theory: Achievement, critique, prospects. In: Passagen/IMS Congress Zürich 2007: Fünf Hauptvorträge. Zurich: Bärenreiter, 2008. p. 38-69.

region's music, although it has not been extensively analyzed within the framework of topic theory.[32] For instance, drawing on the writings of Carpentier and Behágue—who discuss the strong presence of the habanera rhythm (see Figure 1) in Latin American music—and Mário de Andrade—who discusses his concept of *síncope característica* (see Figure 2) throughout Brazilian music—Carlos Sandroni (2000) proposes that the *tresillo*, as shown in Figure 3, is the lowest common denominator, the simplest version or the paradigm of the rhythms in question. In light of these discussions, it becomes evident that the tresillo rhythm holds a fundamental role in portraying the rhythmic landscape of Latin American music. The application of this rhythmic pattern, as exemplified in *Improviso No. 2*, not only reflects its prominence but also highlights its potential for energizing compositions and creating a unique sonic identity.

FIGURE 1 – Habanera rhythm

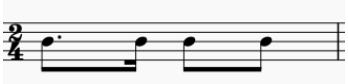


FIGURE 2 – *Síncope característica*

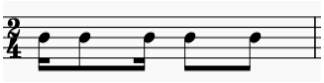


FIGURE 3 – Andrade's *síncope característica*, habanera and *tresillo* and their common points

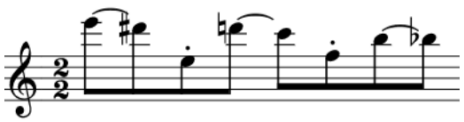
	2/4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
«syncope caractéristique»		x	x		x	x		x	
«rythme de habanera»		x			x	x		x	
tresillo		x			x			x	
points communs		x			x			x	

Source: SANDRONI (2000, p. 59)

[32] The examination of the tresillo within Topic Theory is enriched by previous research on Latin American topics. Key contributions in this realm include the work of Moura (2012), who applies Sandroni's tresillo concept to expound upon syncopation in Choro, though without explicit application in his analyses. Cazarré (2001) introduces the "a la Havana" topic, which encompasses the rhythmic-melodic patterns of tresillo and cinquillo in Latin American music. Costa (2017), in her exploration of *canto de xangô* and *berimbau* topics, references Sandroni's conception of the tresillo in shaping her ideas. Lopes (2021) analyzes Villa-Lobos' *Cirandas* through Topic Theory, identifying various forms of the tresillo as proposed by Sandroni. Arletys (2023) delves into sound elements associated with the *tópico afro*, including the tresillo, within the context of Latin American music and explores topics linked to black culture. Piedade serves as a pivotal figure in the examination of Brazilian musical topics. While some of the topics he has identified are associated with syncopation, they do not explicitly touch upon the tresillo. Additionally, Piedade has linked Guarnieri to the realm of *tópicas caipiras*, contributing to a broader understanding of the composer's intricate rhythmic elements within Brazilian music (PIEDADE; BENCKE, 2009).

In *Improviso No. 2*, also titled *rítmico*, the melody seems secondary, conferring to it a unique character in comparison to his other *Improvisos*. While those works articulate some kind of melancholy—as their titles suggest, and are filled with "internal rubatos,"[33] this piece distinguishes itself through its energetic and grooving qualities of the syncopation. To that end, Guarnieri makes use of the *tresillo* in its original form, as well as rhythms that, according to Sandroni, derive from it. In order to see this interplay, one should consider some gestures as compound melodies, musical textures in which a single instrumental voice articulates two or more melodic lines. For instance, in the first measure, shown below, the *tresillo* is outlined, in register and articulation, by the upper voice.

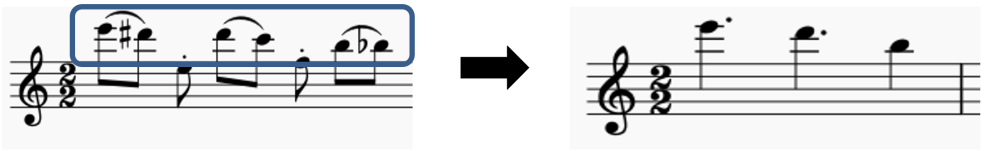
FIGURE 4 – Camargo Guarnieri, Improviso No. 2 for solo flute, m.1



Source: (GUARNIERI, 1941b)

In consequence of the register and articulation with which m. 1 is written, the implicit rhythm can be heard as the following rhythmic pattern:

FIGURE 5– Outlining of the *tresillo* pattern in Improviso No. 2 for solo flute, m.1



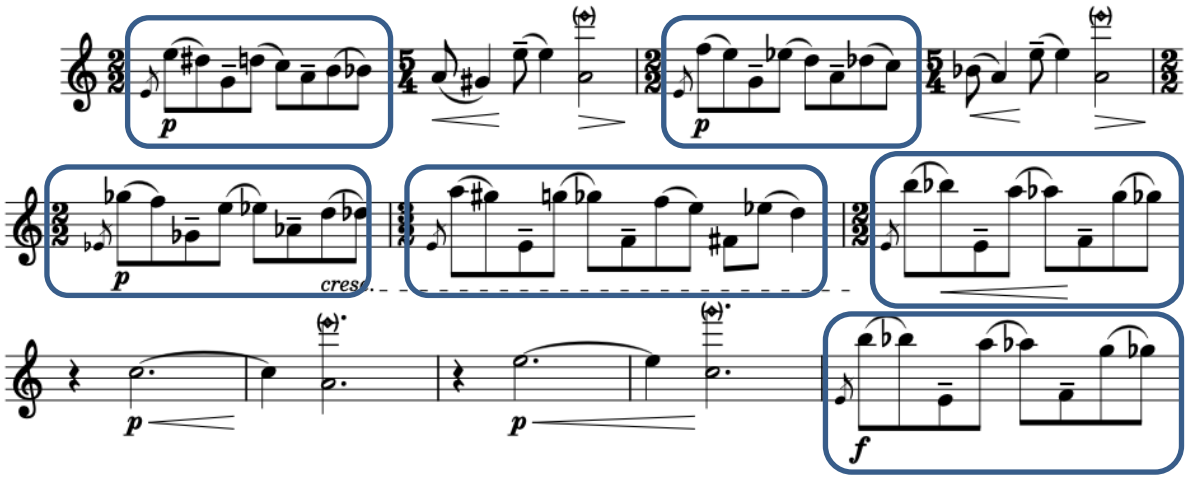
Source: GUARNIERI, (1941c)

The frequent occurrence of what I will refer to as the "tresillo measure" throughout the piece bears testament to its structural and rhetorical significance. Improviso No. 2 follows a simple ternary (ABA) structure, with a middle section that functions as an abbreviated development. This formal scheme, wherein the B section of a ternary structure develops material from the A section rather than

[33] Improvisos 1 and 3 are titled, respectively, "Tristonho" and "Lamentoso." According to Francisco Curt Lange, the "internal rubato" is a distinctive characteristic often observed in Brazilian musical compositions (VERHAALEN, 2005, p. 98).

introducing new elements, is a recurring feature in Guarnieri's body of works (VERHAALEN, 2005, p. 75).

FIGURE 6 – The *tresillo* measures in the B section. Camargo Guarnieri, *Improviso No. 2* for solo flute, mm. 39-50



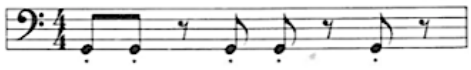
Source: GUARNIERI, (1941c)

In the excerpt in Figure 6, the prominently featured tresillo measure undergoes a transformative trajectory characterized by intensification and sequential repetition. Adhering to Agawu's Paradigmatic Analysis approach (2009, p. 12), which considers repetition, "the most indigenous of all musical attributes," as a guide to the selection of a composition's meaningful units, one can argue that the tresillo measure takes on a rhetorical function, going beyond its narrative role to embody the essence of "*latinidad*." This section initiates subtly, seamlessly carrying forward the initial thematic material and progressively building up to its zenith before transitioning back with renewed tonal and luminous attributes, reinstating the original theme. According to Agawu (2009, p. 305), repetition can serve to anchor a musical process, yet an unpredictable pattern of repetition can evoke anxiety or elicit (extra)narrative interest. The repetition towards this apotheosis, where the tresillo measures radiates brightly within the musical narrative, performs a rhetorical function, where the medium ("tresillo measure") and the message (*latinidad*) semiotically reinforce each other (AGAWU, 2009, p. 312).

While theorizing on the tresillo paradigm, Sandroni (2002, p. 103) puts forth the idea that the rhythmic formulas of South and Central Americas, as explored by various authors, reveal an implicit notion of being "equivalent" or variations of a fundamental rhythm, which he encapsulates as the

tresillo. The connection I propose between Guarnieri's use of the tresillo topic in Improviso No. 2 and its dedication to Carleton Sprague Smith also finds resonance in other compositions from that period, in which he also pays homage to other prominent Pan-Americanist figures. While my analysis has predominantly focused on the tresillo in its fundamental form, it is important to note that Guarnieri has also delved into its derived patterns, allowing him to express not only his Brazilianness but also to inadvertently showcase a distinct sense of *latinidad*. A remarkable instance can be found in his First Symphony, a piece dedicated to Serge Koussevitzky.[34] Here, the tresillo plays a prominent role in the second movement, aptly named "Profundo," assuming the form of the *síncope característica*, as defined by his mentor Mário de Andrade (see figure 2 and the figure below). The bass ostinato also embodies the rhetorical qualities of repetition, naturally, at the same time that it underpins the bass clarinet's mysterious melody.

FIGURE 7 – Ostinato bass in movement 2 of Guarnieri's Symphony no. 1



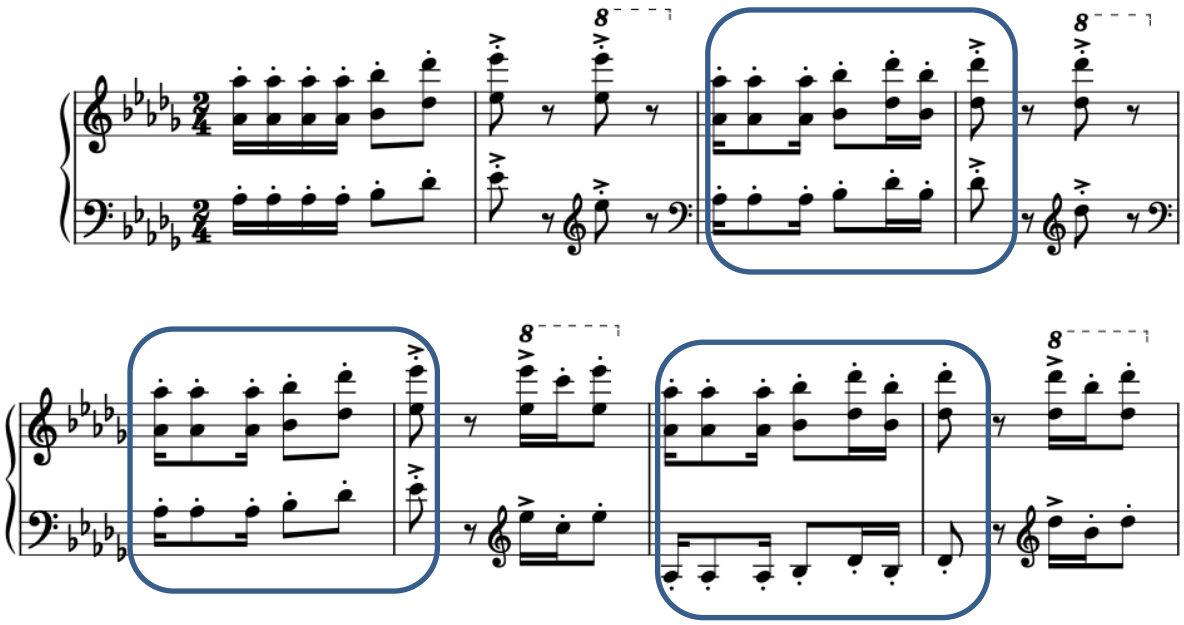
Source: TACUCHIAN (2001, p. 453)

Guarnieri's use of the tresillo during that period exhibited a range of variations, stemming from his interactions with fellow composers, musical compositions, and adaptations/fragmentations of the tresillo pattern. Notably, his association with Aaron Copland extended beyond a personal connection and held significant musical implications. In his correspondence with Andrade during his first stay in New York, Guarnieri mentions meeting Aaron Copland and playing the latter's *Birthday Piece (on Cuban Themes)* for two pianos—a piece which is now known as *Danzón Cubano* (GUARNIERI, 1943). This is also recorded in the correspondence between Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, in which Copland narrates having played the piece with Guarnieri (COPLAND,

[34] Serge Koussevitzky was a distinguished conductor, composer, and double-bassist, celebrated for his extensive leadership as the music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1924 to 1949. In a letter to Koussevitzky about his First Symphony, Guarnieri wrote: "This work of mine, cher Maître, which obtained the first prize in a music contest here, I wrote especially for you, because of all the admiration and estimation that I have for you." Koussevitzky then replied: "I am doubly pleased, since it is dedicated to me and shall anxiously await the receipt of the score and material, so as to plan for a performance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra."(GUARNIERI, 1944; KOUSSEVITZKY, 1944)

1942). In the letter to Andrade, Guarnieri narrated his introduction to the piece, adding that "the uses Copland makes of Latin American rhythms and themes give his music a great wealth and interest" (GUARNIERI, 1943). Guarnieri's observation is key, as he not only acknowledged the existence of "Latin American rhythms" but also their expressive potential. Copland's *Danzón* also extensively features the tresillo in the form of s*íncope característica* in section A (COPLAND, 1949), even though these rhythmic patterns only appear occasionally in *danzones* and cannot be considered their most characteristic feature (see Figure 8) (MADRID; MOORE, 2013, p. 225). While Copland rightly makes use of the *tresillo* in the piece, he frequently combines characteristic Afro-Caribbean rhythms with the irregular metric changes and accents symptomatic of his style.(MADRID; MOORE, 2013, p. 225) Therefore, Copland's *Danzon Cubano* evokes the *danzón* in a highly abstracted fashion.

FIGURE 8 – *Síncope característica* highlighted on extract of section A. Aaron Copland, Danzon Cubano.

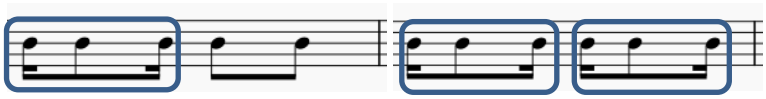


Source: COPLAND, (1949, p. 3)

Copland's experience with *danzones* was based on limited exposure to the dance at a specific moment in time, informed by the inter-Americanist atmosphere of US politics in the 1940s and the neoclassical aesthetic that dominated Western art music composition (MADRID; MOORE, 2013, p. 225–226). Upon closer examination of the rhythmic cell highlighted on Figure 8, one can observe

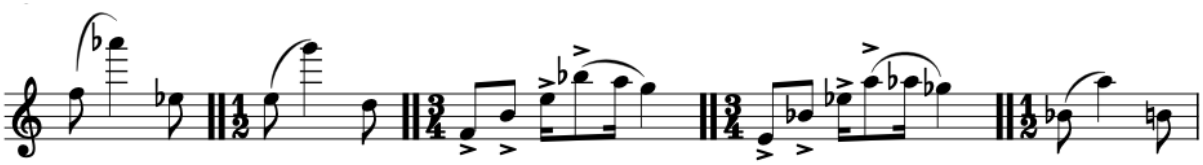
that its first half aligns with the first half of the *síncope característica*, thus aligning with the tresillo itself.

FIGURE 9 – *Síncope característica* and amphibrach highlighted.



Latin American musicologists have referred to this rhythmic pattern as the amphibrach, and it bears crucial historical importance in Cuban popular music and shares strong ties with various other Latin American musical traditions (MANUEL, 2009). In Guarnieri's *Improviso No. 2*, this pattern can be spotted in several instances, some of which are depicted in the figure below:

FIGURE 10 – Amphibrach spotted in mm. 12, 14, 22, 24, 29



Source: GUARNIERI, (1941c)

Plesch (2012, p. 332) emphasizes how "spotting" such patterns can become a relatively simple exercise in compositions where the "folk element" is used as thematic material, clearly presented at the beginning of the composition, or even alluded to in the title. Examples include Copland's *Danzón* (and other pieces where *latinidad* is hinted at the title) and Guarnieri's *Improviso No.* 2, which, despite lacking a direct reference to *latinidad* in its title, distinctly features the tresillo rhythm right from the very first measure. However, the task becomes progressively more challenging when references are fragmentary, less literal, occur simultaneously, or are generally more abstract, behaving like topics (PLESCH, 2012, p. 332). Works like *Improviso No. 2,* for instance, possess a distinct, recognizable, yet indefinable atmosphere that appeals to elusive but accepted notions about the expression of *latinidad* in music. Plesch's analysis highlights that topical analysis allows us to objectivize this otherwise elusive "spirit." By carefully inspecting the repertoire from a topical point of view, she uncovers a plethora of musical figures at different levels of abstraction, and competent

listeners are able to recognize their meaningful and expressive associations. Thus, topic theory offers a solid methodological ground for conceptualizing the communicative efficacy of nationalist (and, in this case, supranational) works (PLESCH, 2012, p. 332).

Regardless of how the rhythmic patterns of the works above have been systematized, what they have in common is a strong syncopated feeling. However, syncopation can manifest in various ways, which is why topical analysis becomes essential in identifying where these rhythmic patterns emerge as recurring topics. Mário de Andrade, on an essay on Brazilian music, comments on the value of syncopation in Brazilian music:

> As used in popular music, we do not have to discuss the value of syncopation. It is useless to discuss an unconscious formation[...] Brazilian syncopation is rich. [...] If now is, in fact, a period of formation, we must use frequently and abuse this direct element provided by folklore. The composer not only has to employ the rich syncopation that people provide but should draw lessons from it. And in this case the syncopation of the people will become a source of wealth. (ANDRADE, 1928, p. 14–15)

Considering the discussion on the rhythmic intricacies of both Brazilian music and Copland's *Danzón*, one can argue that this piece adheres to Andrade's vision of Brazilian nationalist aesthetics while simultaneously serving a broader Latin Americanist and therefore, Pan-Americanist one.

Coda

As theorist Michael Klein (2005, p. 50) reminds us, texts release meaning when surrounded by other texts. On the one hand, by understanding the *tresillo* as the common denominator of a variety of Latin American rhythms, the newly heard *Improviso* could be associated with Latin America more so than with Brazil, as Guarnieri's body of work deliberately does. On the other hand, by alluding both to his mentor's *síncope caracteristica* (and thus to Brazilianness) and to the Cuban *danzón* (as understood by Copland), we can now hear the piece and make a threefold intertextual connection: Brazil, Latin America, and the US, the three geopolitical actors that played the cards in its conception. In the end, one can argue that Guarnieri didn't need to compromise his musical nationalist belief outlined at the beginning of this paper, for he appealed to signs, or topics, that participate in the economies of both Latin American and Brazilian music.

Initially conceived as a means to identify "characteristic figures" in eighteenth-century music, topic theory has transformed into an analytical strategy for verifying correspondences between musical signifiers and extramusical meaning (PRINCIPI, 2024, p. 1). Despite theorists' efforts to transcend the flawed opposition between music and the extramusical[35], the binary nature of this distinction persists, rooted in long-standing conceptions of absolute music (PRINCIPI, 2024, p. 1). Drawing from Dylan Principi's insights, my analysis contends that interpreting musical topics doesn't force a choice between rule-bound reconstruction and reckless abandon. Principi (2024, p. 10) reminds us that an interpretation is never certain but only one possibility among many. Applying a hermeneutic worldview to the study of music, my approach embraces an "inclusive humility", acknowledging that no musical interpretation is all-knowing or final. This aligns with the transformative nature of topic theory, urging a broader exploration beyond its confines to confront music's relationships with affect, performativity, and ineffability (PRINCIPI, 2024, p. 10). My interpretation of Guarnieri's piece contributes to the ongoing dialogue, representing just one among many possibilities and recognizing the intricate web of meanings embedded in musical compositions.

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[35] See, for instance, Lowe, Melanie. 2007. Pleasure and Meaning in the Classical Symphony. Musical Meaning and Interpretation. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

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