Brasil, Brasílico – The Age of Keyboard on Luso-Brazilian Lands of the 18th Century

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Abstract
Based on historical evidence, keyboard music in Brazil from the 18th Century and beginning of the 19th Century, while scarcely studied, is important in terms of its originality and uniqueness, especially considering the remote colonial circumstances at the time. Recently found musical works and evidence that harpsichords and fortepianos actually existed during the 17th and 18th centuries reveal an unexpected, yet valuable musical movement in colonial Brazil. Nevertheless, this knowledge also demonstrates that the Brazilian artistic scene during the 17th and 18th centuries lacks more profound research.

Keywords: keyboard music in Brazil; harpsichord; fortepiano; Sonata 2ª.

Introduction
The invention of the fortepiano by Bartolomeo di Francesco Cristofori (1655-1732) occurred during the first decade of the 18th century, but one would not expect the “invention” to even come to the attention of scholars from the Portuguese colony in remote South America. More surprisingly, however, is the actual use of such an innovative instrument in a place so far from its Italian origin. The sensibility and artistic discernment of a few personalities, in particular João de Seixas da Fonseca (Borges) (1691-1758) – a wealthy native of Rio de Janeiro, later ordained Fr. João da Madre de Deus, a Benedictine monk (1711) - who, according to the Dietário dos monges de São Bento no Rio de Janeiro, was
highly cultured and an excellent instrumentalist (Stevenson 1978/79) – led him to finance the publication of what is considered the “first” collection of *Sonate da Cimbalo di piano e forte detto volgarmente di martelletti* composed by Lodovico Giustini (1685-1743) in 1732.

![Image of Giustini's Sonate](image)

Figure 1. Fac-similar Edition of Giustini’s Sonate.
Source: Edizioni Scelte

For a period of 200 years after the so-called “discovery” of Brazil (formerly *Terra de Santa Cruz* in the year 1500), the colony demonstrated a reduced capacity to develop its “own” culture and, consequently, for Brazil to build its own unique cultural identity (when compared to the millennial formation of European culture). Nevertheless, since the 16th century, there is evidence of advanced technological knowledge in Bahia afforded by the direct intervention of the *Compagnia di Gesù* (*Societas Iesu* - Society of Jesus). When describing the artistic and musical scene of the time, Marcos Holler (2006) points to a “list of instruments” from an inventory, dated 1760, of personal property that includes a harpsichord at the Jesuit Seminary of the Vila Belém de Cachoeira, Bahia, in the year 1732. Likewise, a collection of 118 pages entitled *Essercizi per Gravicembalo* (30 Sonatas for Harpsichord) composed by Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757), published in 1738 according to R. Kirpatrick, provides a reference to Brazil in the second page of its preface, where it reads: *Alla Sacra Real Maestà di Giovanni V, Il Giusto. Re di Portugallo, d’Algarve, Del Brasile.*
Rio de Janeiro, the colony’s capital since 1763, already represented an important commercial and cultural center. With the transfer of the Portuguese crown to the colony in 1808, a promising newcomer was mentioned when the locals were exposed to the crown’s European possessions and customs. According to Mayra Pereira (2005:69), “among the numerous imported objects, one would certainly find musical instruments, foremost among them harpsichords.” Even as early as 1721, we find references to instruments in the Carta Régia (Palace Charter) of Customs Tariffs, which, according to Pereira, represents “the earliest record found with regards to the entry of harpsichords through the port of Rio and consequently the existence of ‘cravos grandes de tocar’ (large playing harpsichords) in the city of Rio” (p. 70. italicized by the author). As early as 1766, import duties were charged for harpsichords, as referred in the Custom’s Goods List (Pauta das Avaliações das Fazendas) of Rio de Janeiro (Rezende apud Pereira 2005:71). Until the 19th century, some historians considered Rio the “City of Pianos”. Since this type of trade was not permitted, the building of harpsichords was illegal. Pereira also states that:
It is plausible, therefore, to believe that artisans located in Brazil also managed to bypass the law, since it was likely that Piano and Harpsichord builders existed in Rio de Janeiro as early as the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. These builders of musical instruments, besides native Brazilians, could also have been native Portuguese who migrated from the metropolis, thereby connecting this probable Rio school of instrument building to the Portuguese building tradition. (Pereira 2005:80)

We can thus assume that harpsichord and fortepiano building workshops were established along the Brazilian coast during the mid-18\textsuperscript{th} century like in cities such as S. Salvador in Bahia (the country’s first capital), Recife/Olinda and Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, as far as we know, there are no surviving harpsichords or fortepianos from this period. However, musical material of significant importance has become available in recent years, allowing for the understanding of artistic activities of this era.

Among recently found material, in 1993, is a musical work by an unknown author, located in the Santa Cecilia Musical Society in the city of Sabará (state of Minas Gerais) informally referred to as “Sonata Sabará”, but actually entitled “Sonata 2\textsuperscript{a}” (2\textsuperscript{nd} Sonata). According to its musical text, the piece is suitable for different keyboard instruments, including the harpsichord, the fortepiano and even the clavichord.
On the Sonata 2ª.

The work comprises three movements, written horizontally (landscape format) on a five-line staff. The first movement, called Allegro, has a key signature with two flats, a C meter (quaternary) and is divided into two parts with repetition bars in an AABB format. Even though the movement begins with an F(orte) chord in B♭ Major, there is a modulation in part B that determines the true key of the work: Eb Major. There are 93 measures with a typical “concerto” cadence at the end of the movement, literally written, on a dominant 6/4 involving six measures (81 to 86), confirming the modulation and conclusion to Eb Major.

The second movement – Adagio – has a key signature of two flats (Bb Major), the indication of a ¾ meter (a simple ternary meter) and is divided into three parts: part A – ten measures (1 to 10), part B – twelve measures (11 to 22) and part C – sixteen measures (23 to 48), totaling forty-eight measures for all three parts.
Figure 4. Second movement Adagio of *Sonata 2ª*.

There are two repeat notations: a repeat at the end of measure 10 with a specific repeat bar, and another at the end of measure 22 using abbreviated *D.C. (Da Capo)*, which is missing in the modern edition. The first repeat for the refrain after the third part [C] was literally written as an exposition of the first one. Written in the penultimate measure (47) on the staff for the left hand is an illegible phrase that will require a more profound graphological study.

The third movement – *Rondô* – has a key signature of two flats and is in a simple binary, 2/4 meter.
There are 70 measures corresponding to three parts AA BB CC. The first part [A], with sixteen measures, ends with a repeat bar. The second part [B] has twenty-six measures and at the end, as in the second movement, includes a D.C. (Da Capo), followed by a double bar. The third part [C] begins in C minor comprising thirty-four measures. The last refrain of the Rondó is literally written and totals fifteen measures.

There is a cadence on a dominant pedal typical of the Classical period, written from measure 83 to 92, totaling ten measures. Noteworthy are the three phrases written in cursive: God is good. God is good. God is just, as can be seen in the following figure:
Figure 6. The last measures with a pedal note on B₃ and the phrase: *God is good. God…*

It was not possible to confirm whether the writings were by the author or by a performer, but these phrases, just a measure before the end of the virtuosic cadence, allude to “overcoming a task” and also “thank God” for the technical challenges overcome with “bravery and righteousness”!

The 2nd *Sonata* (probably composed by the end of the 18th century), seems to be, however, an example worthy of consideration, in that it reflects, through its text, the technical and stylistic advancement of keyboard works, either through compositional means or by insertion of innovative elements, like the appearance of a cadence in the last movement. Therefore, the piece reflects the transition process between Harpsichord and Pianoforte in Europe and Portuguese America during the turn of the 18th century, and reveals the use of advanced European techniques.

**References**

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**Author’s biography**

Edmundo Hora – Doctoral degree in Harpsichord (UNICAMP) – develops his play according to old keyboards instruments properly techniques, owning: harpsichords, Organ Positive, Clavichord and Fortepianos – two copies of 1796 and an original of 19th century. Since 1993 he is Harpsichord Teacher at Music Departement of Arts Institut - University of Campinas (SP-Brazil) for Bachelor, Master and Doctor in Harpsichord.