

NAXOS

# BOWS UP!

Portuguese Music for Strings

**AZEVEDO • BRAGA SANTOS • FRAGOSO**

**Camerata Atlântica • Ana Beatriz Manzanilla, Leader**



## Bows Up!

Sérgio Azevedo (b. 1968) • Joly Braga Santos (1924–1988) • António Fragoso (1897–1918)

Portuguese orchestral music was, until the 20th century, scarce. After the brilliant but short-lived career of Carlos Seixas (1704–1742), one of the first European composers (if not the first) to write a concerto for harpsichord and orchestra, some time before J.S. Bach wrote his own harpsichord concertos, audiences in Portugal had to wait for João Domingos Bomtempo (1775–1842) to finally hear a native Classical symphony (of which he wrote two) or piano concerto (four), written after the examples of late Mozart and early Beethoven. No Romantic orchestral music of any importance survives prior to the ambitious *Sinfonia 'à Pátria'* (*Symphony 'To the Fatherland'*) (1894) of José Viana da Mota (1868–1948), who was better known as a great pianist than as a composer. This work, which followed the models of Beethoven's symphonies and Liszt's tone poems while quoting Portuguese folk songs, thus inaugurating Portuguese musical nationalism, was written the same year as Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Once more, Portugal was behind the curve where European musical evolution was concerned.

Portugal finally got its first modern composer – and 'spiritual father' in the lineage of the great Portuguese composers who followed – in the seminal figure of Luis de Freitas Branco (1890–1955) (his *Duas Melodias* can be heard on the digital bonus single for this album available on Naxos 9.70326). All of the featured composers can claim to be part of the same heritage. Freitas Branco was the beloved teacher of both António Fragoso (1897–1918) and Joly Braga Santos (1924–1988), and later taught Fernando Lopes-Graça (1906–1994), arguably the most important Portuguese composer of the 20th century, and represented here by his celebrated disciple, Sérgio Azevedo (b. 1968).

António Fragoso was a gifted young artist, but he died young, a victim of the 1918 influenza pandemic. Fragoso was initially influenced by Chopin and other Romantic-era piano composers, as was customary, but like his teacher Freitas Branco he absorbed the more

modern French styles of Fauré, Debussy and early Ravel. His output is (understandably) small and hardly ambitious (there is only one piece for orchestra), consisting mainly of pieces for piano, his own instrument. In 2018, to mark the centenary of Fragoso's death, the composer's heirs commissioned Sérgio Azevedo to write a violin concerto based on Fragoso's *Suite romantique* (1916), a four-movement work for violin and piano. The new piece, *Concerto romântico*, is broadly a free orchestration of the original, with the violin part carrying most of the modifications, written to give the soloist more virtuosic display in-keeping with the concerto form. The first movement, *Prélude*, has a neo-Baroque style and strings-only orchestration and is distinct from the other movements, which employ Classical orchestration, with two harps and some light percussion, and have a style more akin to Fauré, early Debussy and Ravel.

The *Concerto for Strings in D minor* (1951), known as the *Concerto in D*, by Joly Braga Santos is one of the best-known and most-loved compositions by a Portuguese composer and is regularly performed around the world. It belongs to Braga Santos's popular early period and shows the influence of the late music of Freitas Branco, who gave Braga Santos his taste for neo-Modalism and Alentejo folk song. The music of Ralph Vaughan Williams and William Walton also played a part in the formation of Braga Santos's style. Braga Santos was for the most part an orchestral composer; his output includes six symphonies and numerous other works for orchestra and string orchestra. The *Concerto in D* is a wonderfully inspired masterwork, shaped by Portuguese Renaissance polyphony and Baroque *concerto grosso* form but with a recognisable language of its own. The first movement, *Largamente maestoso – Allegro*, is propelled by a powerful forward drive from the start, an arresting ostinato motif that leads to the dramatic and lyrical *Allegro* that follows. The second movement conjures images of the hot and arid Alentejo plains, where the composer stayed many times at Freitas Branco's *monte* (a type of

rural farm). The final movement, a fast *rondo* in 5/8 time, is a showpiece combining busy string writing, vigorous rhythms and ornamental counterpoint. The central theme, a dance, is a wonderful display of Renaissance-style melodic invention. Melody remained at the core of Braga Santos's music for all his life, and even during the 1960s and 1970s, when his music became more abstract and chromatic due to the influence of the avant-gardists of Darmstadt, he never abandoned it.

A disciple of Fernando Lopes-Graça, Sérgio Azevedo is one of the best-known and most-performed Portuguese contemporary composers, with more than 150 published works to his name. A great number of his compositions are for string orchestra, a result of his close working relationship with several chamber orchestras, including Camerata Atlântica. After the successful premiere of *Autumn Concerto* in 2019 (the second concertino from *As Quatro Estações* ['The Four Seasons'] for oboe and strings), the Camerata commissioned a strings-only work, to which Azevedo responded with two pieces: the *Sinfonietta for Strings* (2019) and *Music for Strings – in memoriam Béla Bartók* (2021). Both works are neo-Classical in style, the *Sinfonietta* more diatonic, even modal, while *Music for Strings* is more chromatic, harsh-sounding and complex.

The *Sinfonietta* follows a narrative path of 'darkness' to 'light'. The first movement, *Inquieto*, is tense and relentless; the second, *Coral*, has a texture like that of a Renaissance chorale. The third movement, *Alla Rustica and Hino*, begins in the style of a vigorous folk-dance, which leads to a bridge section whose function is to build enough tension for the music to culminate in the last section, a hymn of 'dramatic joy'. A series of multiple-stopped chords brings the work abruptly to a close.

Azevedo dedicated his *Music for Strings* to the memory of Béla Bartók, marking the 140th anniversary of the Hungarian composers' birth in 2021. The homage is clear in the work's title and in the first movement, a complex fugue based on the fugue in the first movement of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. Following Bartók's model, Azevedo retained the order of the entrances in the exposition, the terse, chromatic counterpoint always verging on the limits of tonality, and the unison ending. After this memorial, the remaining three movements have little in common with Bartók except for the chromatic and dissonant nature of the counterpoint and harmony. Fast and slow movements provide the necessary musical contrast, and the alternation between *solí* and *tutti*, as with Braga Santos's *Concerto in D* and Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, shapes the music in the manner of a modern Baroque *concerto grosso*.

**Camerata Atlântica**

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Recorded: 22–23 December 2020 at Auditório Senhora Boa Nova, Estoril, Portugal

Producers: Sérgio Azevedo, Ana Beatriz Manzanilla

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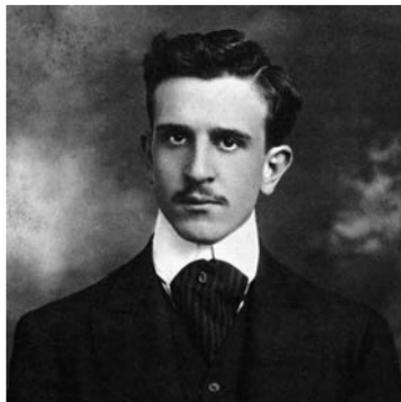
Sérgio Azevedo  
Photo: Carlos Mateus de Lima



Joly Braga Santos  
Photo courtesy of the heirs of the composer



António Fragoso  
Photo courtesy of the Association António Fragoso



Luís de Freitas Branco  
Photo: AvA Musical Editions  
Freitas Branco's *Duas Melodias* can be heard on 9.70326,  
the digital bonus single accompanying this release.

## Ana Beatriz Manzanilla

Photo: Márcia Lessa



Venezuelan violinist Ana Beatriz Manzanilla founded Camerata Atlântica in 2013 and is the ensemble's artistic director. She has been a member of the Gulbenkian Orchestra in Lisbon since 1996 and she is also a violin teacher at the Escola Superior de Música in Lisbon. Manzanilla is the founder-director of the National Vasco Barbosa String Competition, and since 2018 she has been musical director of the Fernando Mascarenhas Music Festival at the Palace of the Marquesses of Fronteira in Lisbon. In 2019 she received the 'Relevance in the Community Award' in Arts, granted by the Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon. Ana Beatriz Manzanilla studied within the El Sistema de Orquestras Juveniles de Venezuela music programme, and at the European Mozart Academy in Krakow, Poland. She has performed in recital and with orchestra in Venezuela, Panama, Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina, Spain, Italy, Poland, France, Norway, England and Belgium. She has made two recordings: of duets for violin and viola with Pedro Saglimbeni Muñoz, and as a soloist with the Gulbenkian Orchestra marking the orchestra's 50th anniversary.





**First violins:** Ana Beatriz Manzanilla, Maria José Laginha, João Andrade

**Second violins:** Francisca Fins, Sandra Escovar, Beatriz Saglimbeni

**Violas:** Pedro Saglimbeni Muñoz, Isabel Pereira • **Cellos:** Nuno Abreu, Jeremy Lake • **Double Bass:** Marine Triolet

Camerata Atlântica was formed in Lisbon in 2013 by its artistic director, violinist Ana Beatriz Manzanilla. Comprising eleven string players, the ensemble has performed at the Centro Cultural de Belém and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, both in Lisbon, and at festivals including the Festival de Música in Leiria, Festival das Artes in Coimbra and Festival ao Largo in Lisbon. Other appearances include concerts at the church of São Roque in Lisbon and the Teatro Joaquim Benite in Almada. In 2017 the ensemble released its first album, *Fuga para a América Latina*, featuring music by Piazzolla, Villa-Lobos, Alberto Nepomuceno and others. The recording was broadcast in Germany, Bulgaria, Croatia, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Czech Republic and Romania. The same year the group also toured Spain and performed as part of the official programme after Lisbon was elected 2017 Capital of Culture by the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities. Since its founding Camerata Atlântica has engaged in educational programmes for young musicians and taught masterclasses at conservatoires in Portugal. The ensemble also created the National Vasco Barbosa String Competition, which inaugurated in 2015. [www.camerataatlantica.pt](http://www.camerataatlantica.pt)