LUCAS GALON'S CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN, PERCUSSION AND STRINGS: A COMPOSER IN SEARCH OF HIS VOICE

O CONCERTO PARA VIOLINO, PERCUSSÃO E CORDAS DE LUCAS GALON: UM COMPOSITOR EM BUSCA DE SUA VOZ

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Resumo

Este artigo discute algumas das influências no *Concerto para violino, percussão e cordas* de Lucas Galon. Enquanto compositores como Bartók, Stravinsky e Villa-Lobos desenvolveram um estilo de composição independente e variado, sem adotar nenhum método específico, a autoproclamada *mainstream* da Segunda Escola Vienense estabeleceu uma forma bastante estruturada e particular de escrever música. Galon parece questionar a mecanização da composição do método dodecafônico, mas valida seu uso como forma de refrear seu impulso criativo. Enquanto o *Concerto para Violino Nº 2* de Bartók fornece um modelo estrutural para sua peça, as ferramentas que ele usa para manipular os materiais musicais são extraídas de um uso livre do serialismo e da filosofia e estética da música contemporânea brasileira. O compositor absorve uma variedade de influências ao procurar por sua própria voz.

Palavras-chave: Lucas Galon; Concerto para violino; Serialismo; Música brasileira.

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss some of the influences on Lucas Galon's *Concerto for Violin, Percussion and Strings*. While composers such as Bartók, Stravinsky and Villa-Lobos followed an independent, more varied compositional style without subscribing to any specific method, the self-proclaimed mainstream of the Second Viennese School established a very structured, particular way of writing music. Galon seems to put into question the mechanization of composition of the dodecaphonic method, but validates its use as a way of refraining his creative impulse. While *Bartók's Violin Concerto N° 2* provides a framework for his piece, the tools he uses to manipulate the musical materials are drawn from a free use of serialism and Brazilian contemporary music philosophy and aesthetic. The composer uses a blend of influences to search for his on voice.

Keywords: Lucas Galon; Concerto for Violin; Serialism; Brazilian music.

Introduction

Lucas Galon is an important figure in the contemporary music scene in Brazil. Besides serving on the faculty at the University of Ribeirão Preto, he is also the artistic director of the *Música Nova* Festival, one of the most important showcases of contemporary music composers in South America. He has an emerging career as a composer and his compositions have been performed in Brazil and in North America.

He was born in Ribeirão Preto, a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo. Raised in a musical family–his mother was a guitarist and his grandfather played the accordion–his interest in music arose around age seven. Galon was greatly influenced by his uncle, Augusto Seabra, who was a composer and multi-instrumentalist. Other major influences were the works of Heitor Villa-Lobos, Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Dimitri Shostakovich, Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky and, most importantly, Bela Bartók. Galon holds a Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. degrees from University of São Paulo (USP), where he studied with

Gilberto Mendes (1922-2016), Rubens Ricciardi (1964) and George Olivier Toni (1926-2017).

I met Galon in 2013, when I started teaching violin lessons at the *Academia Livre de Música e Artes* (ALMA) in Ribeirão Preto. Galon is the artistic and pedagogical director of this musical institution, which offers free music and theater lessons for children ages seven to eighteen. From that moment on, we became friends, and when I decided to move to the United States to work on my master's degree, I asked him to write a violin concerto for me. By the end of 2017, he had finished the piece, and thanks to the sponsorship and support of the Miami University Department of Music, it was premiered here in Oxford, Ohio at the Community Arts Center on March 29, 2018.

In this paper, I investigate how the composer searches for his own voice in his violin concerto while using a blend of influences such as Bartok, twelve-tone and Brazilian popular music. Galon argues that composers such as Bartók, Stravinsky and Villa-Lobos followed an independent, more varied compositional style without subscribing to any specific method (GALON, 2016). On the other hand, the self-proclaimed mainstream of the Second Viennese School established a very structured, particular way of writing music. The composer seems to put into question the mechanization of composition of the dodecaphonic method, but validates its use as a way of refraining his creative impulse (GALON, 2016, p. 169). While *Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2* provides a framework for his piece; the tools he uses to manipulate the musical material are drawn from a free use of serialism and Brazilian contemporary music philosophy and aesthetic.

To understand Galon's desire to compose music that is not a mere reproduction of the established European-American tradition, it is necessary to comprehend the early experiments of twelve-tone music in Brazil, and its eventual developments and influence on his work; I then examine some of the similarities between Bartok's *Violin Concerto no. 2* and Galon's concerto, in order to understand how the first works as an inspiration to the former; next, I explore Galon's approach to writing twelve-tone music, and finally how he incorporates elements of Brazilian popular music in his composition. I conclude this paper with performance considerations and some topics for further exploration.

I. Historical Context

In 1937, the German composer, critic and flute professor Hans Joachim Koellreuter (1915-2005) migrated in Brazil, bringing with him the twelve-tone system. The twelve-tone technique that was developed by the German composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) consisted of creating a series with all the 12 notes of the chromatic scale and using this series as material to the composition of a given musical piece. Brazilian composers such as Cesar Guerra Peixe (1914-1993), Edino Krieger (1928-) and Cláudio Santoro (1919-1989), who had already been looking for new inspirations, found in the twelve-tone technique a new tool with which to work. They formed a group called *Música Viva* (Living Music). Led by Koellreuter, the group promoted concerts, published music and edited the *Boletim Música Viva,* a journal in which they defended their musical aesthetic and criticized the Brazilian nationalistic composers as retrograde. They believed that the more rational approach imported from the European school was the path to truly contemporary works.[1]

The nationalists, led by Camargo Guarnieri, defended the Brazilian national music and the use of folklore material for the development of their compositions and attacked the foreign musical language used by *Música Viva*. This debate played a significant role in the aesthetic developments of Brazilian classical music throughout the 20th Century and influenced that entire generation of composers. At that time, they affiliated themselves as followers of one of those two schools. Later, however, the way forward of the Brazilian Avant-guard was sparked by visionaries who managed to elaborate on both of these methods while adding other elements. Such is the case of Gilberto Mendes (1922-2016), a disciple of Koellreutter and Cláudio Santoro who became an icon of contemporary music in Brazil, who sought in serialism the advancement of the musical thought and compositional technique:

> The Brazilian composer Gilberto Mendes has aimed, since the late 1950's, at establishing a new Brazilian music based on more avant-garde techniques. His use of *musique concrète,* which might include radio programs as part of his basic "national" materials, has permitted him to absorb modified

1 APPLEBY, 1983.

> Brazilian (Portuguese) speech patterns and popular musical sounds into a cosmopolitan approach.[2]

In 1962, Mendes, along with Brazilian composers, Damiano Cozella (1929), Regis Duprat (1930) and Willy Correa de Oliveira (1938), went to the Summer Course of Darmstadt. They expected to learn about Integral Serialism with Stockhausen but were disappointed as they realized that Stockhausen had already abandoned Integral Serialism.[3] Understanding that some composers had already abandoned the strict rules and impositions derived from Integral Serialism while they still believed it to be the most avant-garde approach, caused two important shifts of thought. Firstly, they came to the conclusion that the way to write new and meaningful music was to emancipate themselves from the European traditions, otherwise they would always be behind its developments due to the time span it would take for these ideas to be absorbed by them. Secondly, it allowed for a more liberal use of serialism, which explains their flexible approach to twelve-tone system. As Antokoletz (2014) explains:

> Although some Latin-American composers have continued to combine elements from their heritages with contemporary influences, the tendency among the younger generation from the 1950's on has been toward more varied cosmopolitan styles, combining both traditional (Neoclassical) and the most modernistic approaches. This tendency has been evident in the postwar works of … Música Nova Group (Gilberto Mendes, Rogério Duprat, Willy Correa de Oliveira).[4]

This statement describes Lucas Galon's style. He studied composition with Gilberto Mendes, and inherited much of his musical and philosophical thought. Galon employs the traditional composition techniques of counterpoint and polyphony in his works, as well as twelve-tone technique and a more varied style influenced by Stravinsky, Bartok and Villa-Lobos.[5] He also draws from Brazilian popular music, as we can see in the samba and baião episodes in the first movement of his violin concerto.

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2 ANTOKOLETZ, 2014, p. 451.
3 BEZERRA, 2003, p. 148.
4 ANTOKOLETZ, 2014, p. 450.
5 GALON, 2016, p. 168.

II. Influences of Bartók's *Violin Concerto nº 2*

Bartók's *Violin Concerto nº 2* was composed between 1937-38. It was dedicated to the Hungarian violinist Zoltán Székely, who premiered it in 1938 with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam.[6] It is in three movements, and in addition to the solo violin, the score calls for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, 2 side drums, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, celesta, harp, and strings.

Galon's piece was written for solo violin, percussion (timpani, medium triangle, Brazilian tambourim [a small frame drum], Indian tablas or bongo) and strings. His concerto has three movements, with the second and third movement being played without pause. The whole piece takes approximately fifteen minutes, while Bartok's *Violin Concerto no. 2* has almost thirty-eight minutes of music. Aside the difference in instrumentation and duration of the pieces, Lucas Galon attempts to paraphrase Bartok's concerto using analogous features such as orchestration, solo versus tutti opposition, cadenza structure, rhythmic complexity and variety, while at the same time searching for his own musical language.

The opening of Bartók's *Violin Concerto nº 2* presents an ostinato played by the harp and the lower strings in pizzicato (Figure 1). This sonorous effect prepares the atmosphere for the solo violin entrance in measure 6. Galon's piece also utilizes the pizzicato of celli and basses on the first and last beat of each measure in a similar gesture in the beginning of the first movement (Figure 2). In his piece, Galon's use of the timpani in the opening of the first movement shows that the percussion section has a much more elaborated, prominent role than in the Bartók's Concerto.

6 LAKI, 2012, p. 153-159.

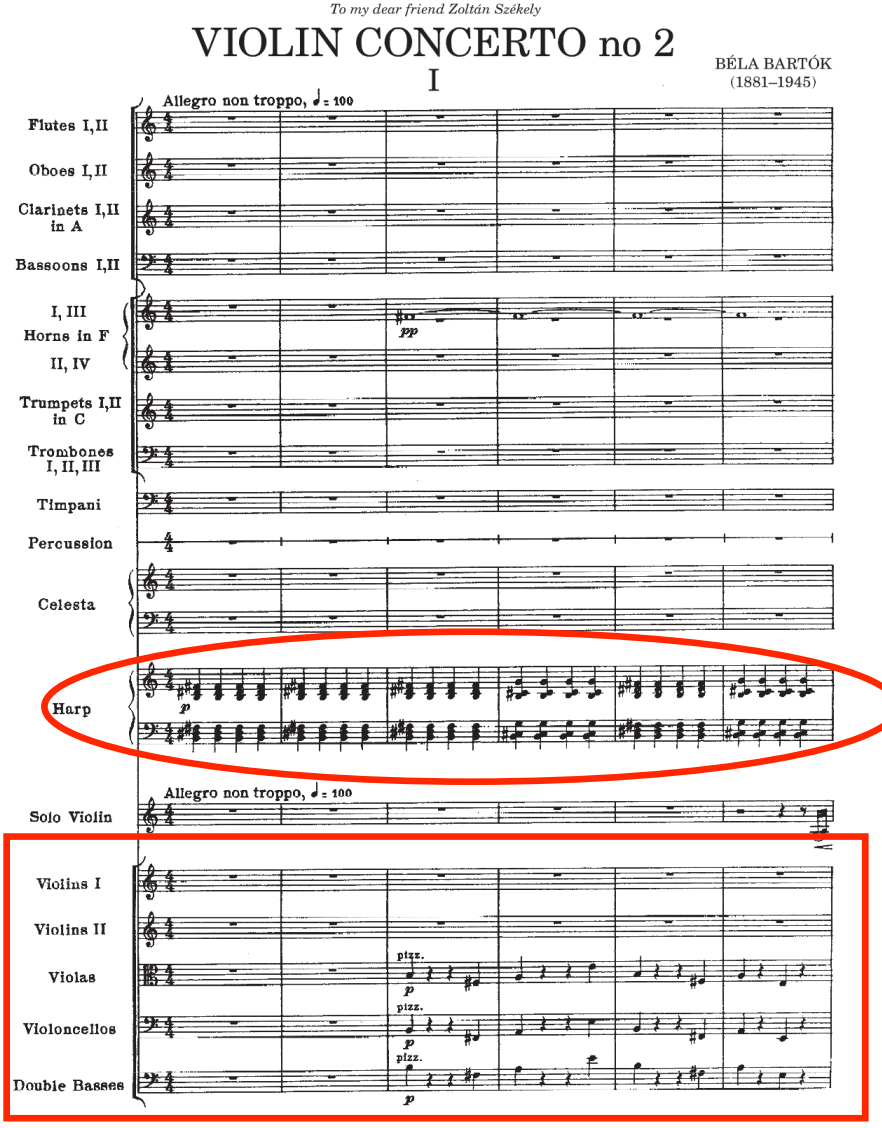

Figure 1 – Bartók's Violin Concerto nº 2, mm. 1-6

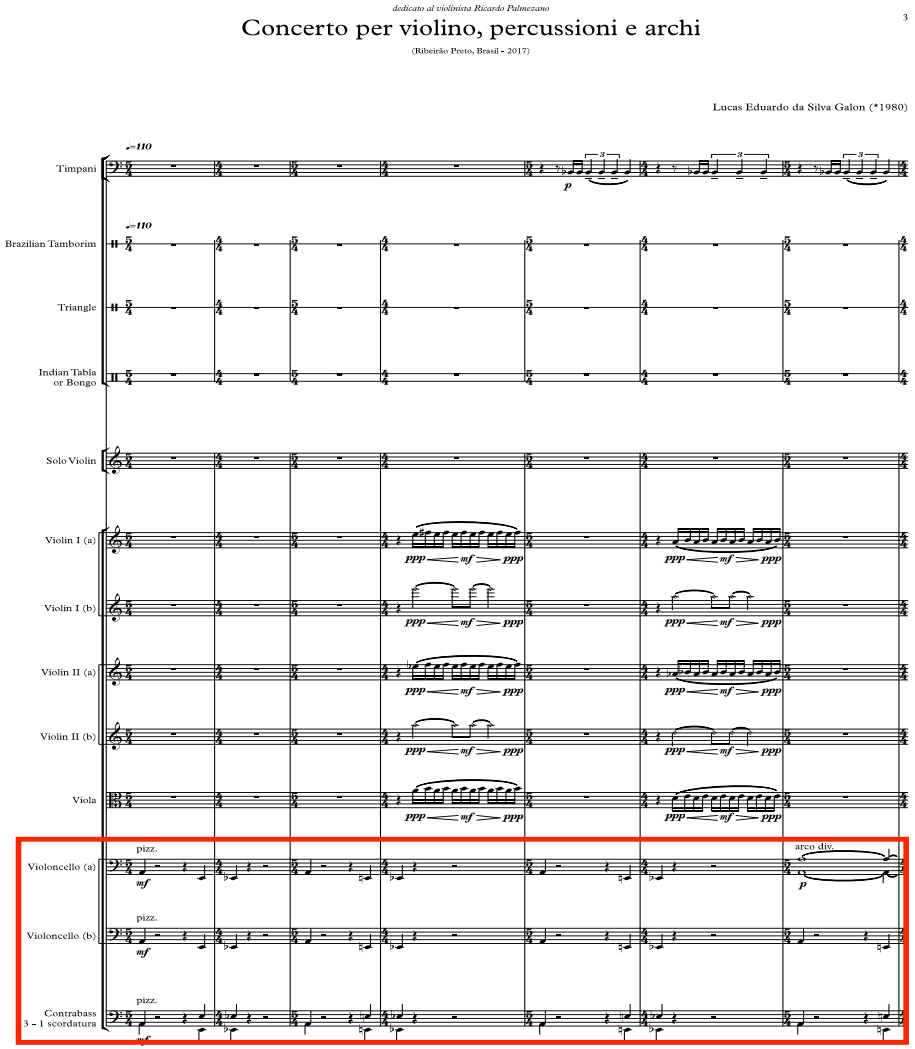

Figure 2 -- Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 1-7

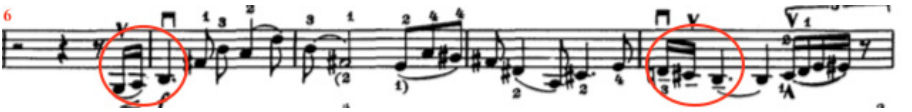

Figure 3 – Bartok's Violin Concerto N. 2 – mm. 6 – 10.

The first entrance of the solo violin in Bartok's *Violin Concerto no. 2* presents a musical gesture of two sixteenth note pick up leading to a dotted quarter note (Fig. 3). This is exactly the same rhythm as the first entrance of the solo violin in Galon's *Concerto* in measure 10 (Fig. 4). Although Bartok's initial gesture is ascending stepwise, the composer concludes the phrase with a similar figure, this time in a descending melodic direction. Galon employs the same contour and separate articulation of this concluding statement and turns it into a *motif* on which his whole piece is built. Galon uses this musical gesture throughout his entire piece. Figure 4 shows this feature in the beginning of the piece, while Figure 5 portrays again this same musical gesture at the end of the first movement.

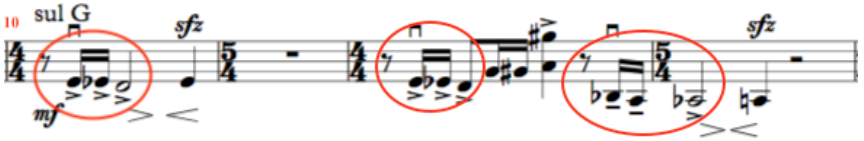

Figure 4 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 10 – 13.

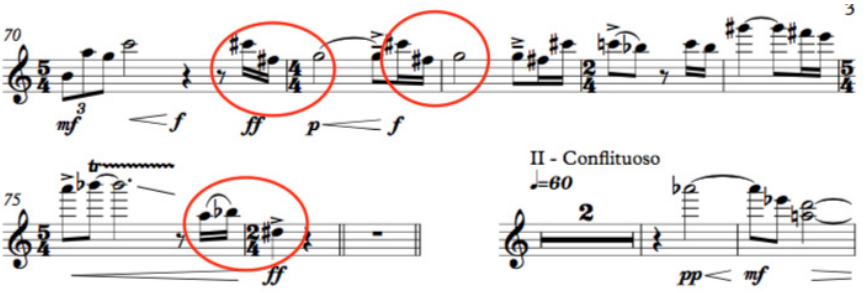

Figure 5 - Galon's Violin Concerto- m. 70 - 81.

In the second movement, the composer brings back this theme again with the solo violin playing it in double stops (Figure 6). Another example appears in the middle of the third movement as shown in Figure 7. This *motif* unifies the whole work and clearly was inspired by the Bartok violin concerto.

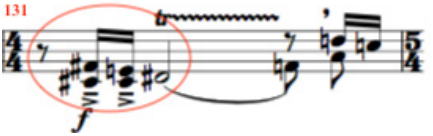

Figure 6 – Galon's Violin Concerto – m. 131.

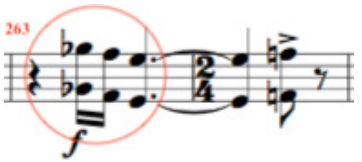

Figure 7 – Galon's Violin Concerto – m. 263 – 264.

Another similarity can be found at the end of the cadenza. Bartok wrote a passage in double stops, in which a sequence of sixteenth notes is played at the same time as the open A string, indicated by the symbol (o) in Figure 8 below.

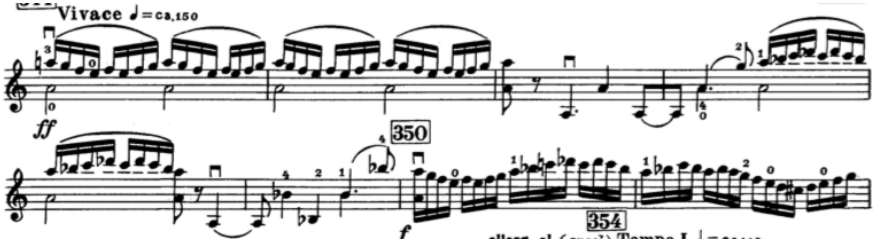

Figure 8 – Bartok's Violin Concerto n° 2 – m. 344 – 351.

Whereas Bartok's cadenza comes at the end of the first movement, in Galon's piece it occurs at the end of the second movement, working as a bridge that connects the second to the third movement. The cadenza ends with the solo violin playing a two-measure, *quasi ad libitum* chromatic double stops passage (mm. 132-133). In order to play this passage, the performer must sustain a quarter note with the first finger while simultaneously playing sixteenth notes with the second, third and fourth finger (Figure 9).

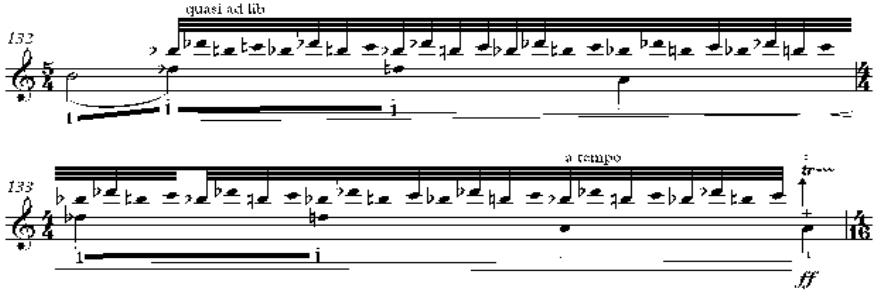

Figure 9 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 132 – 133.

Another aspect worthy of notice is the interaction between solo and orchestra parts. In Bartók's *Violin Concerto n° 2*, there are several instances in which the orchestra is not supporting but rather confronting the soloist as if it was an opposing voice. One example is shown in Figure 8: in measures 162-164 the woodwinds, brass, percussion and strings players all play the same rhythmic pattern in a *forte* dynamic. The solo violin then answers this call by playing a contrasting fast passage of sixteenth notes while the whole orchestra rests (Figure 10).

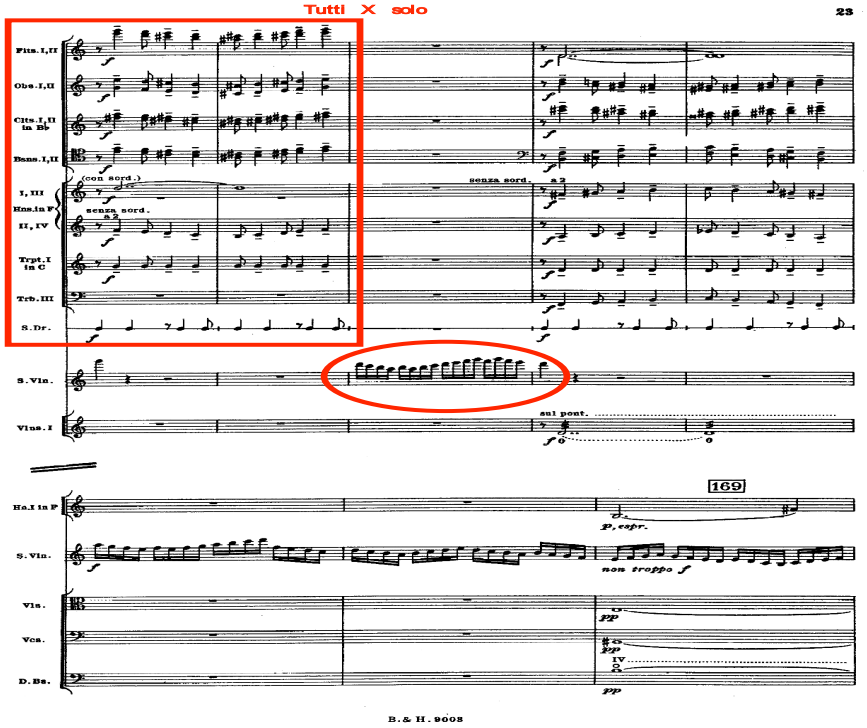

Figure 10 – Bartok's Violin Concerto n° 2 – m.m 162 – 166

Galon uses this approach to explore this contrast between the mass (*tutti*) and the soloists, that is, the violin and the timpani. While Bartok has at his disposal the weight and timbre of the brass and woodwind sections, Galon's modest orchestration makes this task more arduous. Nevertheless, he achieves an analogous effect by using the string section against the percussion and solo violin in order to convey this opposition. In measures 54-57, there is a *tutti;* in measures 56-57 the timpani play the solo in the dynamic of forte while the solo violin and the orchestra rests. In measure 58, the violin answers the timpani, playing an accented, descending passage (Figure 11).

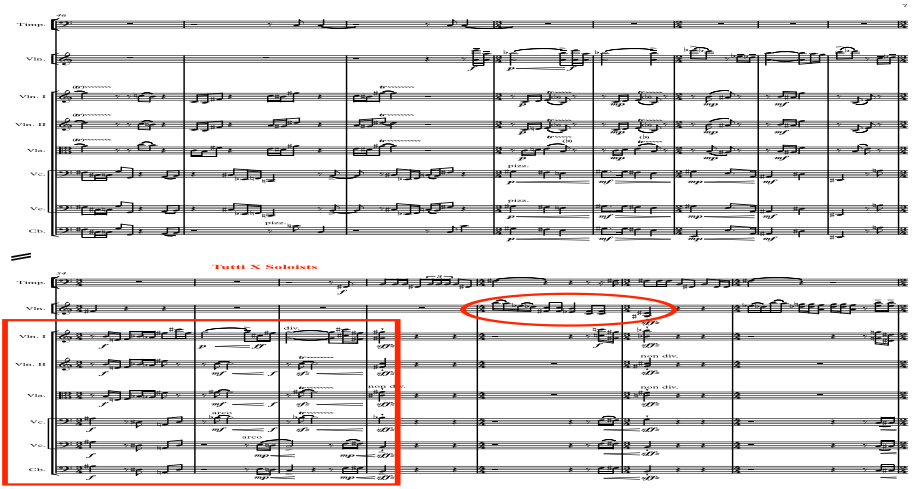

Figure 11 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 54 – 60.

While Bartók's example demonstrates the mass (*tutti*) against individual (solo) opposition in accordance to the more traditional concerto structure, Galon's writing suggests that the orchestra stops to watch the debate between solo violin and timpani, both arguing against each other. At the premier, Galon publicly affirmed that through this piece he sought to portray the social and political issues that are currently occurring in Brazil, where the general public watches the right and left political confrontations, only to find out that their principles are not that different from one another. The mass versus dialogue scheme shown in

Figure 11 above is an illustration of how the political situation is being represented in his music.

III. Twelve-tone influence

Peres (2010) discusses the free assimilation of the Twelve-Tone and Integral Serialism in the piece *Rimsky* composed by Mendes in 2003. The author suggests that the series (rows) presented by Mendes in this piece are a post-modern parody to Schoenberg's strict twelve-tone concepts:

> Sabemos que a série básica criada por Schoenberg, portadora de 12 sons distintos e irrepetíveis constituiu uma regra rigorosa de controle da composição musical dodecafônica. Em *Rimsky*, a série introduzida por Gilberto Mendes subverte essa intenção. Mendes inicia sua obra sem indicação de tonalidade sugerindo uma audição atonal, tornando-a, entretanto, ambígua através da utilização predominante de intervalos consonantes. Constatamos, portanto, logo de início, uma intervenção do compositor que descarta a representação rígida da série convencional para nos apontar uma nova singularidade em relação àquela.[7]

Peres (2010) points out that the frequent occurrence of consonant intervals—major and minor thirds, major seconds, perfect fourths – in Mendes's rows indicates a disregard for Schoenberg's ideas of emancipation of dissonance and avoidance of tonality. "There are no tritones nor intervals of 7th, 9th, minor 2nd. It is not anti-tonal, it has two minor thirds in a row (propitiators of arpeggio enunciation)".[8] Thus, she concludes, the series used by Mendes is distorted, ambiguous and ambivalent in the same way we find Lucas Galon's series to be.

As a composer, Galon identifies himself with a post-vanguard but not postmodern aesthetic.[9] He validates and employs the traditional composition techniques of counterpoint and polyphony in his works. Besides drawing from the theories derived from dodecaphonic serialism

7 PERES, 2010, p. 107.
8 PERES, 2010, p. 119.
9 GALON, 2016, p. 122.

and the use of pragmatic collections in his compositions, he criticizes what he calls mechanization of the invention that permeated the second half of the twentieth century with composers such as Pierre Boulez and others from the Darmstadt school.

As can be seeb in the analysis of his Violin concerto, Galon uses a series of six-tone collections (hexachords). Besides following some of the dodecaphonic principles, the composer mainly applies his collections (rows) in the horizontal (melodic) line, whereas in the vertical, harmonic direction he rarely enforces it. This approach allows the composer to manipulate the elements of serial music more freely, thus allowing him to create major and minor chords in the piece. The result is a compositional blend that portrays characteristic elements of atonal music with traces of tonal, chordal structures.

Following Mendes's influence, Galon's series also deviate from the strict rules of serialism. Griffiths defines serialism as:

> A method of composition in which a fixed permutation, or series, of elements is referential (i.e. the handling of those elements in the composition is governed, to some extent and in some manner, by the series). Most commonly the elements arranged in the series are the 12 notes of the equal-tempered scale. This was so in the technique introduced by Schoenberg in the early 1920s and employed by him in most of his subsequent compositions.[10]

The composer provides two distinctive series of six tones (hexachords), one for the first movement and another for the third movement, called "Coleções para concerto para violino" [collections for the violin concerto] as shown in the appendix. In this paper, I focus only on Galon's application of the twelve-tone system in the first section of the third movement. Figure 12 shows the original row. The intervals between each one of these pitches are: G to D, a perfect fifth; D to E, a major second; E to F, a minor second; F to Eb, a major second and from Eb to Gb, a minor third. Thus, the predominance of consonant intervals in Galon's row indicates that the composer's intention to integrate the ambiguity of tonality in his music. Galon's *Concerto for Violin* has no

10 GRIFFITHS, 2001.

indication of tonality, but the use of consonant intervals of perfect fifth, major second and minor third in the harmony suggests a compromise between those concepts.

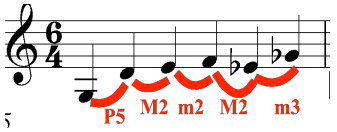

Figure 12 – Original collection (G)

Since the composer enforces the application of serialism on the melodic, horizontal line only, in this paper only considers its occurrence in the solo violin part. The collection first appears in its original form in measure 151 (Fig. 13). The perfect fifth interval between the first two pitches of this row allows for the simultaneous use of two open strings of the violin in the transpositions A and C. Taking advantage of this feature, these transpositions are the ones that the composer uses most frequently in this section of the piece (see Table 1, 18, below).

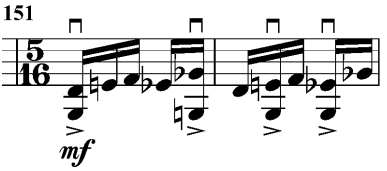

Figure 13 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 151-152.

In the beginning of the third movement, the composer uses a transposition of the inversion (inverse C). There are several repetitions of pitches before all the notes in the row are presented (the repeated notes have been circled in Figure 15). The repetition of certain pitches, such as C and F, plus the quality of the interval between them – a Perfect Fourth – creates centricity in the pitch of C.

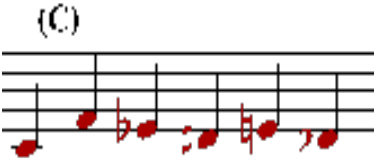

Figure 14 – Inverse C

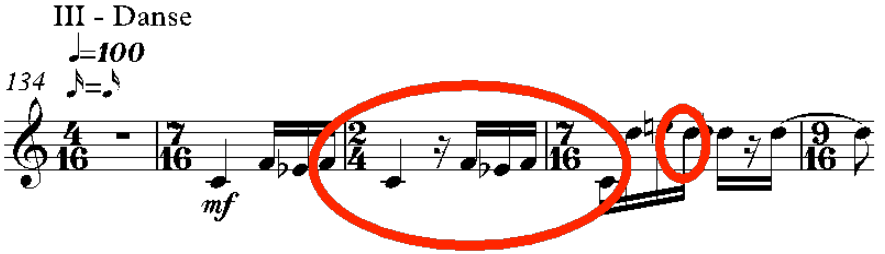

Figure 15 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 134-138

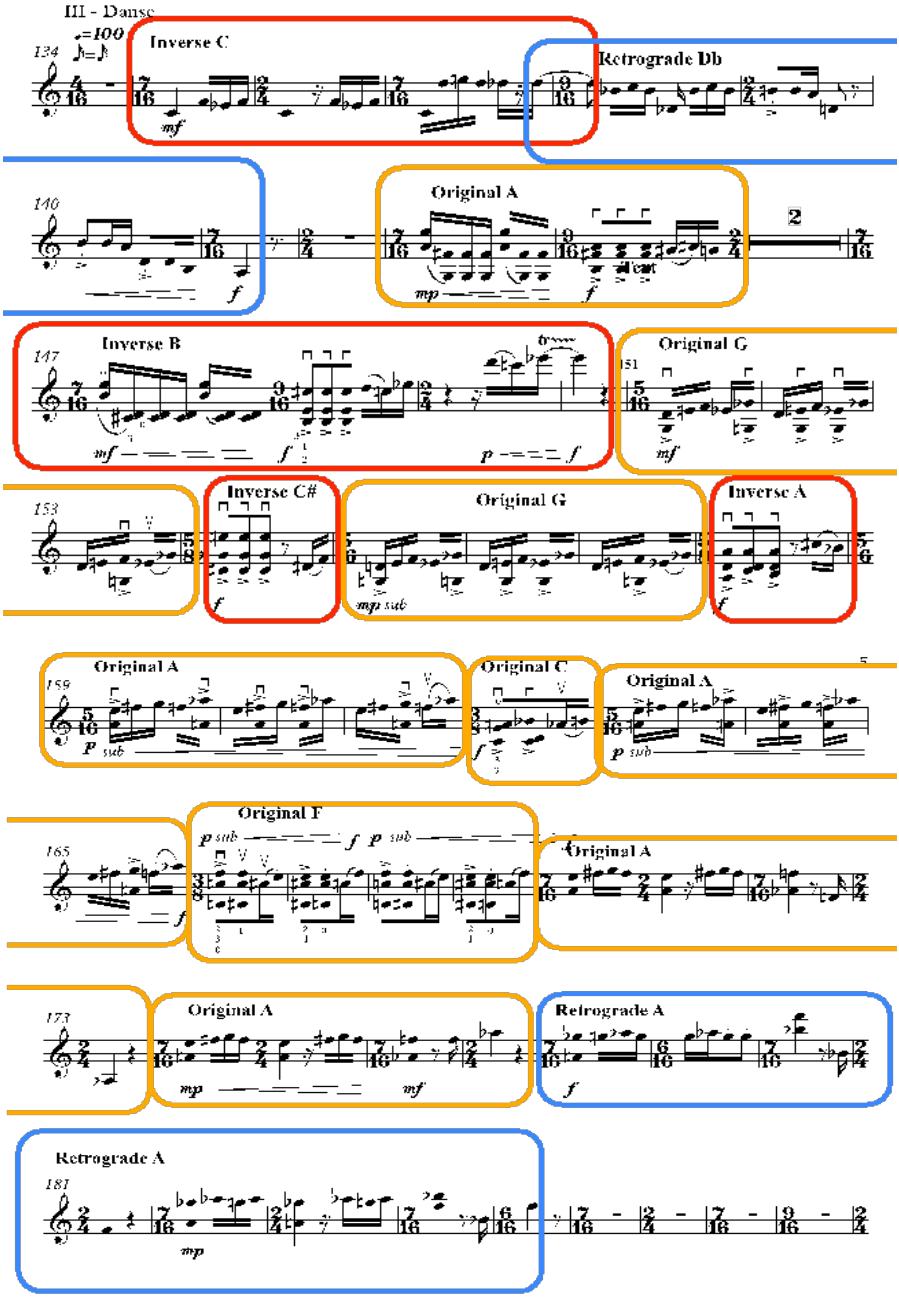

Fig. 16 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mov. 3, mm. 134-185 (not inclusive).

Table 1 below shows the occurrence of the collection in its various forms in the first large solo part in the third movement. The transpositions are indicated by the pitch name of the first note of the row.

Third Movement	Measure numbers
Inverse (C)	135-137
Retrograde (Db)	138-141
Original (A)	143-144
Inverse (B)	147-149
Original (G)	151-153
Inverse (C#)	154
Original (G)	155-157
Inverse (A)	158
Original (A)	159-161
Original (C)	162
Original (A)	163-165
Original (F)	166-169
Original (A)	170-173, 174-177
Retrograde (A)	178-180, 181-185

Table 1 – Row occurrences

The first section of this movement ends on measure 185; the solo violin concludes playing and the orchestra assumes the main line. Further development of this line of inquiry would be to investigate how Galon's series are woven together in the first and in the remaining of the third movement. How are the different series related? How does the composer fuse these distinct hexachords to create his musical discourse?

IV. Brazilian popular music influences

In the first movement, there are two episodes that are very distinct from the remainder of the piece. They are inspired by two Brazilian popular dance rhythms, *Samba* and *Baião*. They occur in the middle of the movement in form of a *collage* or an intervention in the musical discourse, an artifice frequently used by post-modern composers such as Gilberto Mendes as a parody.[11]

Samba is an Afro-Brazilian popular musical genre and a dance. It is one of the first things that comes to mind when considering Brazilian music; it has become Brazil's most importantpopular cultural expression. Gérard Béhágue defines Samba as:

11 PERES, 2010, p. 107.

> [an] Afro-Brazilian couple-dance and popular musical form. Originally 'samba' was a generic term designating, along with *batuque*, the choreography of certain circle-dances imported to America from Angola and the Congo. A characteristic element of the folk samba is the *umbigada*, an 'invitation to the dance' manifested by the touching of the couple's navels. Singing always accompanies the dancing. Melodic contours are generally descending and melodies isometric. In the *caipira* (i.e. rural São Paulo) folk samba, singing is almost always in parallel 3rds. Mostly in binary metre, samba melodies and accompaniments are highly syncopated: a semiquaver–quaver–semiquaver figure is particularly characteristic.[12]

It was brought to Brazil by the African slaves that first were forced to work on the sugar cane plantations in the northeastern of the country. *Samba de roda* appeared in the state of Bahia, originally it was performed during the religious ceremony of *candomblé*; "an Afro-Brazilian religion based on the Yoruban polytheistic deities called Orishá."[13] Later samba spread to the urban centers where it would evolve into subgenres such as *samba de gafieira*, *samba de morro*, *pagode*, *samba axé*, *samba-reggae*, and *samba rock*. Samba can be described as a lively rhythmical dance in 2/4-time signature. "Mostly in binary meter, samba melodies and accompaniments are highly syncopated: a semiquaver–quaver–semiquaver figure is particularly characteristic"[14] (Figure 17).

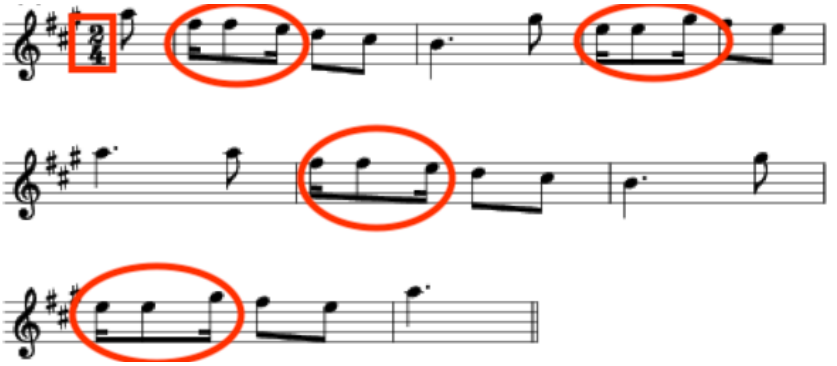

Figure 17 – Example of Samba

12 BÉHAGUE, 2001.
13 LIVINGSTON, GARCIA, 2005, p. 203.
14 BÉHAGUE, 2001.

The samba rhythm is traditionally played by the *pandeiro*, a tambourine-like instrument played with a uniquely Brazilian technique. Galon explores the rhythmic elements of samba in the percussion and in the solo violin in measures 26-34 (Figure 18). The tambourine plays the basic samba rhythm with its characteristic syncopations while the violin plays a pattern that imitates the sonority of the *cuíca*, a high-pitched friction drum commonly used in samba. The composer achieves the sonorous *cuíca* effect by the alternation of octaves in the fast sixteenth note passage.

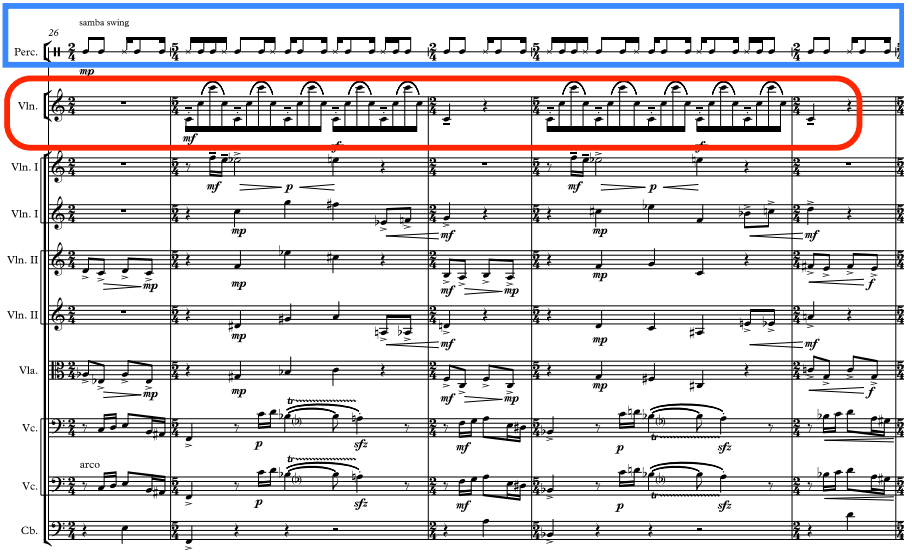

Figure 18 – Galon's Violin Concerto – m. 26-30

This samba episode is followed by what the composer called "baião torto", which can be translated as twisted *baiao*, a folkloric dance characteristic from the Brazilian Northeast that originated in the nineteenth century. The original instrumentation was the guitar (later accordion or *sanfona*), triangle and the *zabumba* (low-pitch side drum).

It became popular in the 1940's through the music of Luiz Gonzaga (1912-1989) and is as a fast-paced lively dance most often in duple meter.

In his *Violin Concerto*, Galon used the baião rhythm in the solo violin part and the percussion. The violin plays a sequence of sixteenth notes alternating accents between strong and weak beats. The accents are emphasized by the use of double stops, creating intervals of augmented seven, minor sixth, perfect fifth, octaves and augmented octaves. The triangle supports the rhythm and brings in the characteristic color and brightness of the dance (Figure 19).

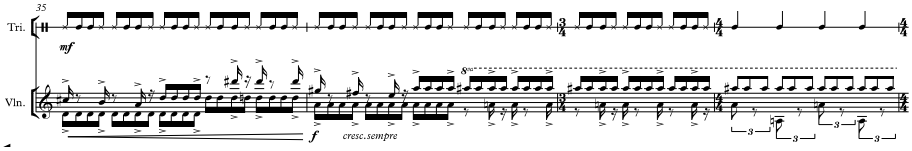

Figure 19 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 35-39 (Baião)

V. Performance

Galon's *Violin Concerto* was commissioned by and dedicated to this author. Thanks to the support of the Miami University Music Department, and especially to the efforts of Dr. Harvey Thurmer and Thomas Garcia, it was performed on March 29, 2018 at the Oxford Community Arts Center by the Morpheus Chamber Orchestra and members of the Oxford String Quartet. The composer was invited to visit the Miami University campus in order to work with the ensemble for a week and to conduct the world premiere of his piece.

When I first started working on this piece, I noticed the difficulty created by the frequent meter changes and use of irregular time signatures (such as 5/8, 7/8, 4/16, 5/16, 7/16 and 9/16.) To be able

to smoothly transition between a simple 3/4-time signature to an odd 7/8, for example, the solution was to constantly think in the sixteenth-note subdivision. Practicing with the metronome beating the sixteenth note was an important part of the learning process. In the beginning of the third movement, the composer alternates between 7/16 and 2/4 time signatures, breaking the regularity of the pulse and creating a sense of unpredictability.

Although the composer wrote this piece for the violin, percussion has a prominent role. In the beginning of the first movement, while the solo violin is resting, the lower strings are playing pizzicato, it is the timpani that has the first solo of the piece (this can be seen in Figure 2 on page 8 above.) Additionally, at the very end of the piece the timpani plays the very last notes (see Figure 21). The interaction between the solo violin and the timpani in the first movement on measures 56 to 64 exemplifies this approach. The timpani's call in measures. 56, 58-59 and the violin's answer on m. 58, 60 and 61, respectively, demonstrate the relevance of the percussion in the discourse of this piece and the rhythmic, percussive treatment of the solo violin part (Figure 20).

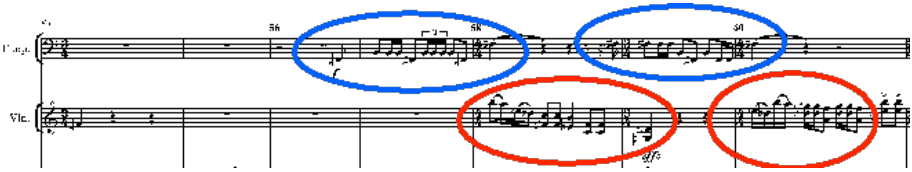

Figure 20 – Galon's Violin Concerto - m. 54-60

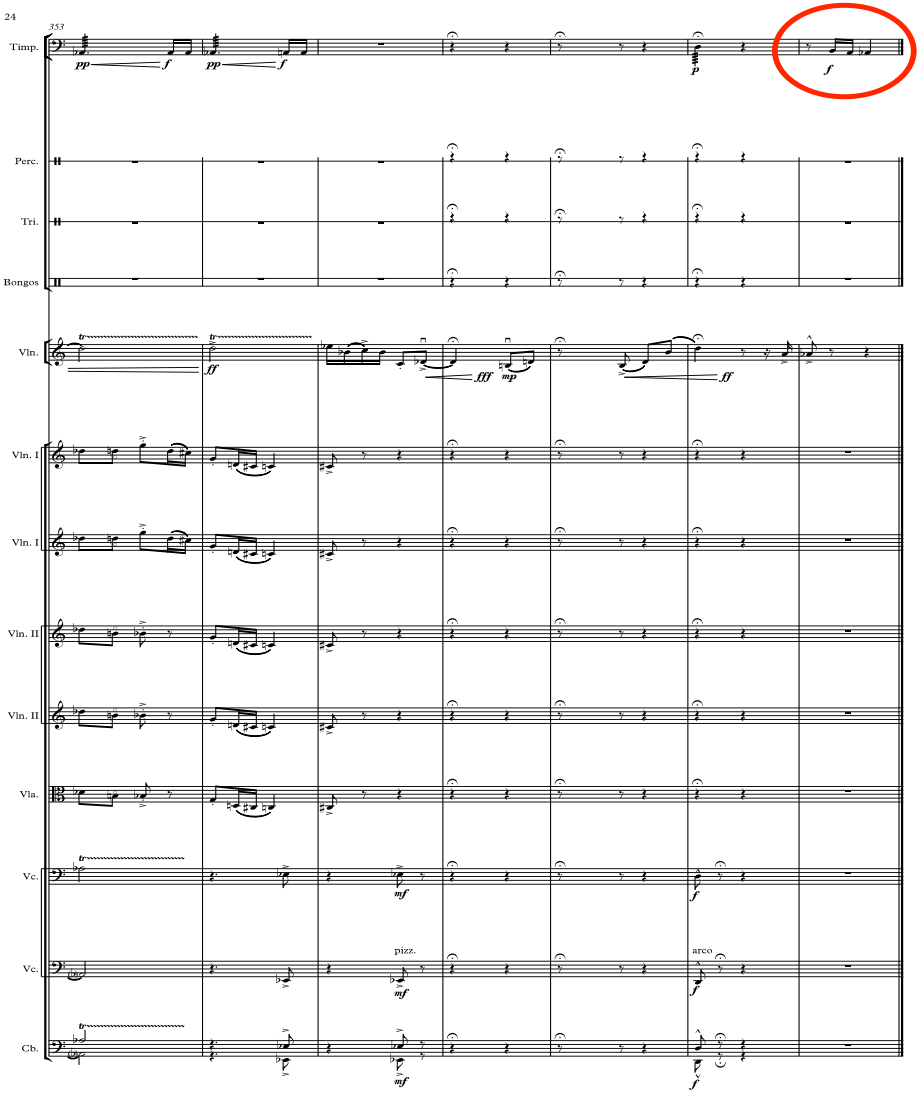

Figure 21 – Galon's Violin Concerto – m. 353-357.

The rhythmic aspect seemed much more relevant than the melodic line, which is a very unusual treatment of the violin. The solo violin is playing short accented notes most of the time, much like a percussion instrument (see Figure 4, page 9 above). The whole piece is structured around short rhythmic cells rather a than melodic theme (see page 9 above); the lack of long musical phrases that explore all the singing qualities of the violin prevents the performer from showing off the expressive possibilities of the instrument.

Besides the rhythmic irregularities, there are some passages that presented uncommon technical challenges. For instance, in the third movement on measures 166-169, the execution of the three-note chords requires an unnatural left-hand position (Figure 22). To play those notes in tune, instead of maintaining the left hand in a balanced position, keeping a straight line between the wrist and the hand, it is necessary to bend the wrist inwards (towards the neck of the violin, so that the palm of the left hand touches the neck of the instrument). This left-hand setup, although unusual in the standard technique, is reminiscent of fiddle technique, both in the US and in Brazil, where it is known as *rabeca*, a type of rustic violin (Figures 23 and 24).

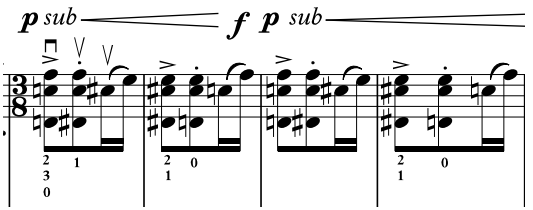

Figure 22 – Galon's Violin Concerto – mm. 166-169.

Figure 23 – Natural left-hand position.

Figure 24 – Contract left hand position.[15]

Undisputedly one of the most difficult passages in the concerto, these four measures also presented a fingering problem that must be addressed. In order to assist other performers that may want to play this piece, I would like to suggest a possible fingering for this passage. In measure 167, I advise to play the first and second three notes chord in half position; starting from the upper register the note (F) on the (E) string

15 Pictures by Ricardo Palmezano.

should be played with the second finger, while the note (C) on the (A) string should be played with the third finger and the note (D) within the open string as the composer advocates. The next two sixteenth notes, I suggest to be played also in half position; the (C#) with the fourth finger and the (E) should be played with the open string showed by the symbol (o). On m. 168, differently from the composer's suggestion of playing in first position, I recommend staying in half position for the whole measure (Figure 25).

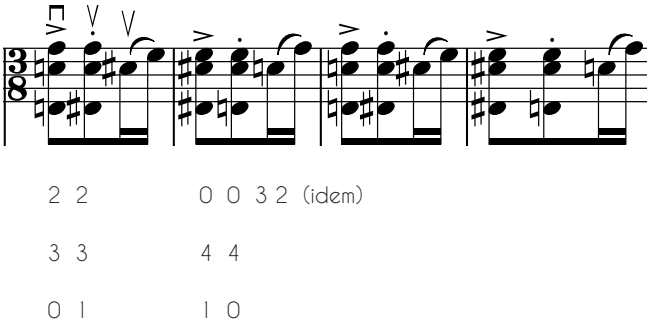

Figure 25 – fingering suggestion – m. 166-169

Another aspect of the execution of those three-note chords is the percussive sonority. As has been stated before, the rhythmic elements and the percussion are prominent. How to explore a percussive sonority on the violin, which has such a strong melodic appeal, is a challenge. When practicing this piece, I found that in order to convey this percussive timber quality, I needed to deliberately play these chords in the lower part of the bow near the frog. Playing this passage on this part of the bow (frog) allows the chords to sound harsh and bright, creating a percussive sonority. I also realized that it would be difficult to attack the three notes of the chords simultaneously, given the curve of the bridge; thus, the solution was to let the right arm balanced on the A string while engaging the neighbors D and E strings.

VI. Conclusion

A contemporary composer must deal with a vast heritage of musical traditions before he can find his own voice. Knowing how to reconcile these influences with his personal convictions may be one of the key elements in writing meaningful music. When Galon agreed to write a violin concerto, to some extent he subscribed to a traditional model: a three-movement piece that follows the habitual fast-slow-fast tempo pattern, and the conventional plot where the soloist either cooperates or contrasts with the orchestra. Nonetheless, Galon innovates in the use of percussion, which is almost as prominent as the solo violin. The percussion has the first and last words in this concerto; this unusual approach can also be seen in many instances when the percussion does not support the solo violin but instead opposes it, making allusions to the current political issues in Brazil, where the masses are paralyzed, watching the debate between opposing factions that seem to be all "birds of a feather".

Collaborating with a living composer has being a challenge and a joy at the same time.

The excitement of premiering a piece inflicted a sense of accomplishment and of great responsibility. This task inspired me to rethink the music-making process and the role of the performer. In this process, I had the opportunity to make deliberate choices that may (or may not) become a reference of the performance practice of this piece. I have discussed features such as articulation, suggesting fingerings and bowings and above all addressing the composer's musical and political inspirations in hopes that it will become a valuable source of information for colleagues and performers.

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Appendix

Coleções para o Concerto para Violino
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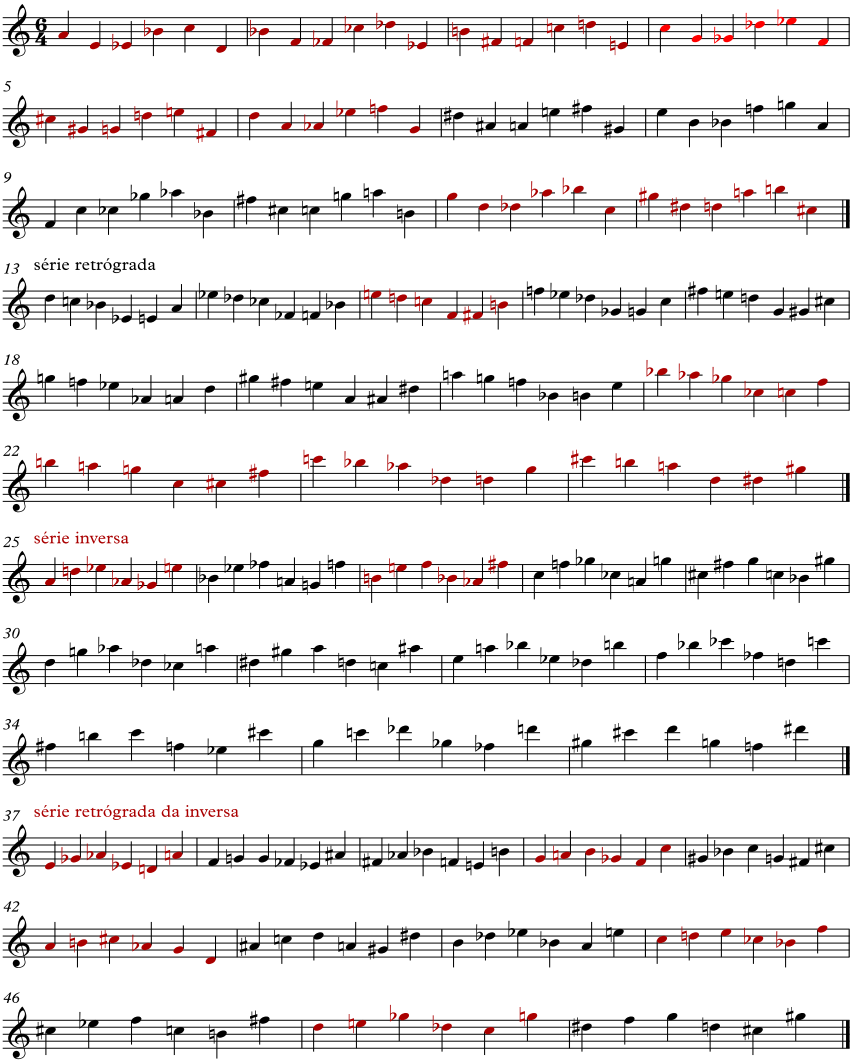

Coleções para concerto para violino

mov. III