

## César Guerra-Peixe (1914–1993)

Vasco Mariz

**B**ORN MARCH 18, 1914, at Petrópolis, a 2634-ft.-high mountain resort 27 miles north of Rio de Janeiro, César Guerra-Peixe died suddenly at Rio de Janeiro November 23, 1993.

Only a few weeks earlier his 36-minute orchestral *Tribute to Portinari* commenting on four canvases by the preëminent Brazilian painter Cândido Portinari (1903–1962)—famous for his stark pictures of drought-ridden northeastern Brazilians—had been premiered October 15 at the 10th Contemporary Music Biennial held in Rio de Janeiro. In July 1993 a jury comprising fifty foremost Brazilian musicians had voted him the 1993 winner of the \$10,000 annual composition prize established in 1991 by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture (65-year-old Edino Krieger was the runner-up).

Before enrolling in 1932 at the Instituto Nacional de Música at Rio de Janeiro, Guerra-Peixe had studied violin at Petrópolis 1925 to 1930, with the Czech immigrant Gáo Omacht and had in 1929 completed courses in solfège and theory with Deoclécio Damasceno de Freitas at the local Escola de Música Santa Cecília. After Omacht returned to Europe he studied violin with Leonel Maul and himself taught violin in the Petrópolis music school, 1930 and 1931. Transferring to Rio de Janeiro in 1932, he studied violin with Paulina d'Ambrosio (1890–1942), theory with Arnaud Gouveia (1865–1942), and courses culminating in composition 1938 to 1943 with Newton Padua (1894–1966). In 1941 he enrolled in the Conservatório Brasileiro de Música; in 1944 Rádio Tupi

broadcast his unnumbered symphony written while studying with Padua. In that same year, 1944, serialist Hans Joachim Koellreutter began teaching him privately.

In 1946 and 1947 English conductor Maurice Miles (1908–1985) directed BBC performances of his first numbered symphony (a serial work) for chamber orchestra and his *Divertimento No. 2* for strings. Other European performances of his works written during his allegiance to Koellreutter followed—at Brussels (André Joinin) and at Zurich (Hermann Scherchen—who in 1949 offered to teach him conducting).

Upon resettling in Brazil he located 1950 to 1953 at Recife, where he threw off the incompatible Koellreutter cloak and instead gathered material for his book *Maracatus do Recife* (São Paulo: Ricordi Brasileira, 1955; 163 pp.). From 1953 to 1962 while located at São Paulo he wrote film scores, accepted Mário de Andrade's doctrines, collected folk music, and in 1959 became head of the Comissão Paulista de Folclore. Although his nationalist phase no longer won him western European performances his *Suite sinfônica No. 1—paulista* premiered at São Paulo in 1955 was subsequently performed with great success at Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and Odessa.

Winner of a long list of composition prizes while established at Recife and at São Paulo, he again settled at Rio de Janeiro in 1962, next year joining the Orquestra Sinfônica Nacional (OSN) and the Rádio MEC (Ministério de Educação e Cultura) as



violinist. In 1968 he founded the Escola de Música Popular (Museu da Imagem e do Som). His numerous pupils throughout his long teaching career have followed in his footsteps, winning prizes, diversifying their talents, working as arrangers and orchestrators, appealing to the widest possible Brazilian public.

Universally regarded as a masterwork, his 38-minute *Symphony No. 2*, subtitled *Brasília* (1960), written to celebrate the inauguration of the new Brazilian capital, confirmed his reputation. Winner of a competition promoted by the MEC, this four-movement choral paean was recorded in 1963 under MEC auspices by the OSN directed by Isaac Karabtschewsky. His *Museu da Inconfidência* (1972)—played and recorded by the Orquestra Sinfônica Brasileira—successfully portrays forerunner struggles for Brazilian independence. His *Retirada da*

*Laguna* (Retreat from the Lagoon), another orchestral evocation, portrays a dramatic military withdrawal during the six-year war with Paraguay, 1864–1870.

Inácio di Nonno wrote a valuable study of Guerra-Peixe's songs. His frequently played guitar works include a three-movement *Sonata* (1969), 4 *Preludes* (1970), 10 *Lúdicas*; for violin, viola, clarinet, bassoon, he provided a large array, usually with piano (summary listing in *Enciclopédia da música brasileira erudita, folclórica, popular*, II, 596). His violin *Concertino* (1975) recorded in Europe and *Variações Opcionais* ("optional variations" for violin and accordion, containing aleatory movements, 1977) belong to his extensive repertory not yet itemized in any international lexicon. In later years, his reputation kept ascending and at death he ranked among Brazil's most revered composers.