New Selection 1
Freitas Branco, Luís de

Cultural Current: Music
Cultural Community: Portuguese
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Freitas Branco, Luis de

During his long and varied musical and musicological career, Luís de Freitas Branco (1890–1955) became one of the period’s most recognized and influential figures in Portuguese musical life, active as a composer, music critic and journalist, teacher, musicologist, radio broadcaster and lecturer. Usually regarded by his pupils as the introducer of musical Modernism in Portugal (mainly due to his symphonic poems with their impressionist and expressionist aesthetics), Freitas Branco later became, during the 1920s and 1930s, one of the most motivated musical propagandists of a nationalist New Classicism. His ideas of a classical, balanced and fundamentally rational music (as opposed to musical Romanticism) were disseminated both in writing, published in the Portuguese periodical press, and by the creation of symphonies and other sonata-form music; they appear to have emerged while the composer was closely involved with the founders of a Portuguese monarchist movement, Integralismo Lusitano.

The founders of Integralismo Lusitano were a group of young men, mainly university students in Coimbra, who were disappointed with, or opposed to, the unstable and troubled First Portuguese Republic (1910-26); they included monarchists and anti-republicans, with a traditionalist, regionalist, Latinist, nationalist and, to a certain extent, racist and anti-Semite outlook close to the ideology of Charles Maurras’s Action Française. According to one of the movement’s main thinkers, Hipólito Raposo (1885–1953; Dois nacionalismos: l’Action Française e o Integralismo Lusitano, 1929), its creation can be dated to 1911, when he and Alberto de Monsaraz witnessed, in Paris, manifestations of what they considered a “counter-revolution”. The name “Integralismo Lusitano” appeared two years later in the journal Alma Portugueza, published in Belgium by exiled Portuguese students. As in the case of the Action Française, Integralismo Lusitano made its propaganda mainly through publishing activities. Besides Alma Portugueza, Integralismo Lusitano published the journal Nação Portuguesa between 1914 and 1938, the daily newspaper A Monarquia between 1915 and 1922, and the journal Integralismo Lusitano in
1932-34. One of the movement’s primary aims was to demonstrate the antiquity and individuality of what they called the “Portuguese race”, by recalling glorious historical periods (such as the Renaissance and the Portuguese maritime discoveries) and heroes of Portuguese military and cultural history. One of these national heroes, frequently evoked in Integralismo’s lectures and publications, was Viriato, a second-century-BC figure linked to the resistance of the Lusitani tribe against Roman expansion, and supposedly killed by Roman soldiers and Lusitanian traitors. Despite the doubtful nature of the historical information and the fact that Viriato was also claimed as a Spanish national memory-figure, the Integralistas canonized him into an icon of the “Portuguese race”. These ideas were propounded in one of the most salient publications of Integralismo, A Questão Ibérica (1916), which brought together a set of lectures held in 1915 in the Liga Naval Portuguesa, a Lisbon institution with a strongly anti-republican agenda. Distinguishing Portugal from a Greater-Spanish Iberismo was, indeed, the main purpose of these lectures, including the one by Luís de Freitas Branco, “Música e Instrumentos”.

Freitas Branco engaged in Integralismo’s propaganda in three ways: lecturing, music criticism, and compositions. In “Música e Instrumentos”, he describes the Portuguese music history, opposing the decadent, Italian-influenced court music of the previous centuries to the authentic heritage of folk-music, notably from the Alentejo region (with which many Integralismo figures, himself included, had ties).

Freitas Branco also contributed to the integralista newspaper A Monarquia with concert criticism and with a series of columns testifying to his monarchist outlook: texts about the Latinism or Germanicism of certain composers, distinguishing the “Latin race” from the “Germanic race”, or voicing his admiration for French composers like Vincent d’Indy (from whom Freitas Branco seems to have derived part of his aesthetic and even political ideologies, mainly through one of his composition teachers, Désiré Pâque).

Besides A Monarquia, there was the monthly Atlântida: mensário artístico, literário e social para Portugal e Brasil. In its 16th issue appeared Raposo’s short story Funerais de Viriato with part of the accompanying symphonic poem by Freitas Branco. It featured an illustration showing part of the score including the Viriato Leitmotiv (the piece shows Wagnerist influences throughout). The symphonic poem evokes the moment when Viriato is found dead by his soldiers, their mourning, then the funeral ceremonies. Manuscript notes bear out the close links with Raposo’s tale.

Funerais de Viriato had been preceded by Tentações de S. Frei Gil (1911), based on a work by António Correia de Oliveira, close to the integralista ideology. Freitas Branco also composed, in 1915, three melodies for voice and
piano using poems by António Sardinha, another prominent thinker of Integralismo. In 1918 followed Canto do Mar (1918), for voice (baritone) and orchestra on a text by the Raposo’s associate Alberto de Monsaraz. The regionalism of the first Suite Alentejana celebrates a part of the country with which the movement’s doctrinaires had strong ties.

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