

International Conference Consequences of Wagner Consequências de Wagner

Lisbon, Portugal - November 26-28 2009

Scientific committee

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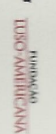
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Consequences of Wagner CD-ROM

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Proceedings of the International Conference
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The idea of progress and the reception of Wagner in Portugal (1883-1919)

LUÍS MIGUEL SANTOS

(CESEM, Universidade Nova, Lisbon)

It is widely known that the reception of Richard Wagner's works and ideas had a remarkable impact in ideological terms on various dimensions of Western culture. The heterogeneity of Wagner's followers, a typical aspect of all Wagnerian movements, was due to the fact that they appropriated him in a way that suited their own purposes. Thus, in order to understand the rising of the different Wagnerisms, it is essential to take into account the ideological framework that shaped their thought. In Portugal, Wagner was enthusiastically welcomed at the turn of the twentieth century by a group of musicians and intellectuals whose thinking was marked by the longing for progress. By focusing on the writings of Júlio Neuparth, one of the most outstanding figures of that group, this paper will explore the ideological dimensions of the discourse about Wagner, in order to understand the ideological framework that shaped his reception.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Portuguese society witnessed the arrival of material progress. In fact, there occurred some fundamental changes in economic terms, namely with the development of commerce and industry, as well as of the transport system, which made possible a wider opening to the outside and the consequent circulation of people and ideas.¹ This period was lived by a group of musicians and intellectuals born in the 1830s and 1840s, among whom were some lesser known figures today, such as Joaquim José Marques (1836-1884) and José Ferreira Braga (1837-1924), together with a few of the most outstanding figures of Portuguese musical life, such as Augusto Neuparth (1830-1887) and Ernesto Vieira (1848-1915). Besides having experienced the effects of material progress, they also evinced a concern with social progress. In this sense, they considered that music held a fundamental role in the regeneration of society. This belief materialised in the foundation of a periodical which was named *Amphion*, a designation that certainly was not unintentional, bearing in mind a connection between the idea of mission that is often stated in its pages and the

meaning of the myth. In Greek mythology, Amphion and Zethus were the twin sons of Zeus and Antiope. They were abandoned in their childhood and brought up by a shepherd. Amphion became a great singer and musician, Zethus a hunter and herdsman. After rejoining their mother, they built and fortified Thebes, with huge blocks of stone forming themselves into walls at the sound of Amphion's lyre.² Thus, the mythological figure of Amphion embodied the eloquence of music over primitive man and celebrated its constructive power, which was believed to be essential in the regeneration of society.

The publication of the periodical began in 1884 and the faith in the social mission of music is displayed from its very first page:

Our mission is very hazardous, and so we claim to have the right to beg for support and protection from all the artists and lovers of the musical art, as well as from those who care about the progress and prosperity of the country, for music is the greatest and the most powerful element of education, and the one that deserves more carefulness and investment from civilised nations.³

This belief was reflected in a discourse that touched on various dimensions of Portuguese musical life, focusing on the importance of supporting music education institutions, choral singing, and national music (reaffirming the old dream of national opera). Yet the idea that music has an inherent educational quality was echoed especially in their writings about symphonic music. The civilisational role was to be carried out by the Orquestra 24 de Junho, an orchestra constituted by the members of an association founded in 1834, the so-called Associação Música 24 de Junho, which was committed to defending the professional interests of the musicians. Between 1879 and 1888, the association itself promoted several series of symphonic concerts by its orchestra, conducted by illustrious foreign maestros, such as Barbieri, Colonne, Dalmau, Bretón, Rudorff and Steck. It performed works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Mendelssohn, Glinka, and Saint-Saëns, among others, as well as some Wagnerian symphonic excerpts. The role they assigned to the association is evident in Ferreira Braga's claim that it should seek to fulfil

the great artistic undertakings that our country needs in order to compete with the most civilised European nations. It is up to the Associação Música 24 de Junho to struggle against the indifference that is evident among us toward the beauties of the

musical art, that art which simultaneously enlightens, educates, and civilises a people.⁴

Afterwards he revealed what kind of music was indispensable to this end: 'It is the symphonic genre, in which brilliant pages have been written by Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Berlioz, Schumann, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and currently by Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Max Bruch, etc.'⁵

In an article dating from 1885, regarding a concert that included Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Wagner's *Tannhäuser* overture, Ferreira Braga tries to justify the superiority of symphonic music:

It is time to honour the symphonic style, so different and so superior to the dramatic. [...] Symphonic music should be preferred because it comprises all beauties without lacking support from poetry, dramatic action, painting and mimic. Alone, it is the reproduction of beauty, and it is unaccompanied by all the external effects that might affect the senses.⁶

Specifically about the *Tannhäuser* overture, he considered that 'the effects could not be more noble and elevated, and the processes of conception are as much as possible classical and well supported'.⁷ It is worth noting here the assimilation of Wagner to the 'symphonic genre', or 'symphonic style', as they call it, and consequently to the 'classics'. This is actually somewhat common already in the 1880s, even though the 'absolute' Wagner was not so popularised as it would be later on. The reception of Wagner in *Amphion* was generally enthusiastic, as revealed by the manifold news concerning him (mainly taken from *Le Ménestrel* and *L'Art Musical*): symphonic performances in France conducted by Padeloup, Lamoureux and Colonne, opera productions all over Europe, the polemics between defenders and detractors, and even reports about his family. The highest point was achieved in 1887 with the publication of an excerpt from *Oper und Drama*, translated into Portuguese from French.

The aspects alluded to so far are symptomatic of the ideological orientation of the periodical. Firstly, it should be mentioned that it involves a Romantic conception of the role of art and of the artist. Indeed, the resort to the mythological figure of Amphion (as much as that of Orpheus, in the case of choral music) contributes to evoke the dignity of the mission of music and of the musician in the present. On the one hand, this belief

reveals the idea that the ‘genial’ artist has a privileged perspective of the reality, providing humanity the means for regeneration. On the other hand, the idea of the pre-eminence of ‘pure’ instrumental music is also clear. The claim of the primacy of ‘absolute’ symphonic music and of its independence from any external reference to achieve dignity is an example of a shy attempt to elaborate a metaphysics of instrumental music.

Besides Romantic ideology, the influence of musical idealism should be referred as well.⁸ The idealist conception of music is observable, at first, in the veneration of music in itself, which had its counterpart in an opposition to trivialisation, commercialism and frivolity. This led to the construction of a musical ethics, in the sense that music was given a system of moral values that aimed to control the way it was performed and received. In fact, symphonic music was deemed an art more elevated than mere entertainment, and so the interpretation might be ‘true’ and respectful. There was also an attempt to establish a new, quasi-religious, social etiquette, which was reflected in the frequent disapproval of the public’s behaviour (including feminine toilette) and ‘inferior’ tastes (such as the bullfight and the circus). Furthermore, these authors shared the idea that musical knowledge was fundamental to the appreciation of music, and therefore they complemented the symphonic performances with programme notes which were also published in the periodical. In this way, the underlying belief in the civilisational mission of music was substantiated in a struggle against the decadence of culture. A significant outcome of their discourse was the promotion of the ‘classical masters’ at a time when a fundamental change in public musical taste was taking place. Actually, the absolute predominance of the Italian operatic tradition was to be defeated by a new performing canon of German symphonic music, whose characteristics will be explored later in this paper.

It was in this context that Júlio Neuparth appeared on stage. An outstanding figure of Portuguese musical life in the turn of the century, he was a violinist of the S. Carlos orchestra, professor of Harmony in the Lisbon Conservatory (for which he translated didactic works by Bazin, Gevaert and Durand), director of the musical section of the daily newspaper *Diário de Notícias*, contributor to many periodicals, and also a cultivator of chamber, symphonic and theatre music. He lived between 1863-1919, and was a son of Augusto Neuparth, former owner and one of the founders of *Amphion*. Júlio Neuparth came to inherit the direction of the periodical in 1890, a crucial time to the country in political and social terms due to the English Ultimatum affair. The era he

lived witnessed the vigorous emergence of Republicanism in Portugal, which culminated in the episode of the Regicide in 1908 and the implantation of the Republic in 1910. Leaving aside Júlio Neuparth's connections with the Republican milieu, which have not yet been clarified, it is observable that his discourse prolongs the aspects to which I have already referred. That he shared the same idea of mission is evident from his frequent restatements of it in the periodical.

In truth, Júlio Neuparth's profuse writings are an important repository of information concerning the reception of Wagner in Portugal in the turn of the twentieth century. The introduction of the Wagnerian dramas in the Teatro de S. Carlos started in 1883 with the performance of *Lohengrin*, followed by the premieres of *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* in 1893. This new wave in S. Carlos continued in the beginning of the twentieth century with the first performances of *Die Meistersinger* (1902) and *Tristan und Isolde* (1908), culminating in the premiere of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1909), before the close of the theatre in 1912. Its activity restarted in 1919, and the first performance of *Parsifal* was to be given only in 1921. Neuparth's reception of Wagner is markedly favourable, and in his discourse the composer is explicitly envisaged as *the* model of progress in drama. In an article from 1885, he asserts that in order to accomplish the composition of a successful opera, 'current composers always have the idea of following the steps of the great reformer Richard Wagner. It seems to them that this is the true path in order to reach their goal, *and they are right*'.⁹ Therefore, his appraisal of the most recent operas is always done taking into account the progressive model represented by Wagner, who is often referred to as 'the great reformer'. The valorised works are the ones that he considers close to this model, as is the case of Bizet's *Carmen* in 1885, Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* and Massenet's *Hérodiade* in 1886, as well as Verdi's *Otello* in 1890, and *Aida* and *Falstaff* in 1911.

Júlio Neuparth's articles also attest to the growing acceptance of Wagner's music among the general public. For instance, regarding the reprise of *Die Meistersinger* in 1906, four years after its premiere in S. Carlos, he writes that 'yesterday Wagner's lyrical comedy was heard by the public of the S. Carlos with an attention and an interest that reveal a quite visible progress in its aesthetic education, which really is a motive of gladness'.¹⁰ Wagnerian dramas undoubtedly were for him a synonym of an elevated taste, and for that reason he sought to divulgate those works, in order to facilitate its comprehension by the general public. In 1909, the premiere of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* — which we are remembering in this conference — brought about a movement never

seen before in Portuguese cultural life. In fact, these performances were preceded by two series of conferences that aimed to prepare the public to the audition. One of those series was held by Jaime Batalha Reis (1847-1935), a prominent figure among Portuguese intellectuals, and was directed to a limited public. António Arroio (1856-1934), also an outstanding figure of Portuguese cultural life, was the speaker in the other series, which was open to the general public. His purpose was 'to elucidate and prepare the public for the performance of the magnificent Wagnerian work',¹¹ and the conferences aroused great interest among the public. Besides these two series of conferences, there also developed a significant movement in the press with the publication of several preparatory studies. Neuparth contributed with a series of seven articles in the weeks before the premiere, in which he presented some of Wagner's theoretical ideas and the argument of the cycle, accompanying it with examples of a few *Leitmotive*. His source was Albert Lavignac's *La voyage artistique à Bayreuth* (1897). With these articles he aimed to provide 'a small preparatory study, indispensable to the understanding of the Wagnerian work, whose divulgation is essential to all those who intend to be up to date with progress and evolution'.¹² In spite of undoubtedly being a synonym of an elevated taste, never in his discourse is 'Wagner as drama' attributed a civilisational role.

That function was indeed reserved to symphonic music. The Wagnerian symphonic excerpts began to be performed in Portugal in the Concertos Populares given in Lisbon between 1860 and 1862. After the concerts given in the 1880s by the already mentioned Orquestra 24 de Junho, there were also a few performances by the S. Carlos orchestra in the 1890s. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lisbon began to be visited by some of the most important European symphony orchestras: in 1901, the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Arthur Nikisch; in 1903, the Colonne Orchestra, directed by Colonne himself; in 1905, the Lamoureux Orchestra, conducted by Camille Chevillard; in 1908, the Berlin Philharmonic directed by Richard Strauss; and finally, in 1910, the Munich Philharmonic conducted by Joseph Lasalle. The items that stood out in their programmes were the most popular excerpts from Wagnerian music dramas, along with orchestral repertory from Bach to Debussy.¹³ Júlio Neuparth wrote plentifully about these performances, often insisting on the necessity of an orchestra that could educate the Portuguese public. His reflections on symphonic music reveal the prolongation of Romantic ideological features that were common in the context in which he started his activity in the 1880s. The maintenance of the belief in the

civilisational mission of music is patent, for instance, in an article from 1905, regarding a concert directed by Lamoureux, in which he considers that ‘in the great capitals an orchestra is an element indispensable to progress and civilisation’.¹⁴ In the hierarchy of arts, the top position was occupied by symphonic music, which he appraised as ‘the supreme manifestation of pure music’.¹⁵ In addition, he asserted more than once that chamber music was the better preparation for the understanding of the ‘great’ symphonic works. Hence, Neuparth’s thinking included a metaphysics of instrumental music, though he does not seem to have produced any theoretical justification of it.

His desire of the establishment of regular concerts was to be fulfilled in the following years. After two ephemeral attempts in 1906 and 1910, this movement, inspired by French and German examples, achieved its highest point at the time when the S. Carlos was closed. In 1911, a series was initiated at the Teatro da República by the Spanish violinist and conductor Pedro Blanch, who came from the Madrid Conservatory, and in 1913 another one started at the Teatro Politeama with the Portuguese cellist and conductor David de Sousa, who trained at the Leipzig Conservatory. Both series continued successfully up to the 1920s. Once more, Júlio Neuparth wrote profusely about these performances, and his thinking also displays a prolongation of the idealist conception of music referred to above. Actually, the adhesion to a musical ethics, and the consequent promotion of a quasi-religious social etiquette, is manifest in his recurrent focus on the ‘trueness’ of the performance and on the importance of the devotional attitude of the public. Besides the remarks about its behaviour, it is worth noting Neuparth’s contentment with the development of that respectful attitude among the general public. For instance, already in 1908, regarding a concert by the Berlin Philharmonic, he praised ‘the respectful way in which our public pays attention and hears, showing regard and striving to understand the sometimes very intricate works of the great masters [...]’.¹⁶ Four years later, concerning a symphonic concert filled with Wagner and directed by Pedro Blanch, he said that ‘yesterday’s concert constituted another evident proof that [...] our public finally grasped the value of the orchestral performances to its aesthetic education [...]’.¹⁷

This point provides evidence of a fundamental change in public taste that was taking place. The referred kind of discourse had implications in the promotion of the ‘classical masters’, and by the 1910s it is observable that the Italian operatic tradition had completely lost its predominance. Actually, there occurred a gradual establishment of a new performing canon of German symphonic music, in which Wagner assumed an

outstanding position. The press invariably registered the success of the Wagnerian symphonic excerpts, a mode certainly influenced by the example of the foreign orchestras in the preceding decade. The popularity that Wagner achieved among the public is evident in an occasion in 1913, when the periodical *Eco Musical* published *Mein Leben* in an abridged version translated into Portuguese, having been out of stock during several weeks. This case also points to the popularity of the Wagnerian repertory in the concerts of philharmonic and military bands at the time, since military musicians were the main readers of this newspaper. Taking into account the frequency of the repertory, the references to the enthusiastic reception of the public, and the prominence conferred by the press, it is possible to identify in the new canon two parallel individual cults, besides that of the so-called First Viennese School. Symptomatic of this is the fact that both series of concerts included almost every year Wagnerian and Beethovenian festivals, which were announced as ‘the festivals of the great masters’. Regarding one of those occasions, when Blanch organised a festival to celebrate Wagner’s death in 1916, Júlio Neuparth wrote:

Under the pretext of the commemoration of that date, Pedro Blanch prepared an exclusively Wagnerian programme, whose *réussite* could not be more complete. For our public, Wagner is no more the frightening musician of the future, accessible only to the initiates of his complicated system; rather he became a powerful attraction in the symphonic programmes. [...] The room of the República was full of spectators avid to applaud the homage dedicated to the glorious musician.¹⁸

The event was repeated the following week, and he declared that ‘Wagner completely conquered the public of the concerts’.¹⁹

In this way, it is evident that Wagner was assimilated as a symphonic composer, along with the ‘classics’, especially Beethoven. This tendency could be observed already in the 1880s, but now it is much more intense. A similar idea is also present in other authors, such as Jaime Batalha Reis and António Arroio, precisely the two intellectuals that gave the *Ring* conferences. In a letter to Viana da Mota dated from 1904, Batalha Reis considered that Wagner’s works were symphonies that did not need drama and could be performed in concert rooms.²⁰ In 1908, regarding the performance of the overtures of *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger* by the

Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of Richard Strauss, António Arroio affirmed that ‘the public will have the opportunity to appreciate [these works] in a *superior* way and different from what they usually have in the theatrical performance’.²¹ This fact suggests that this was a broader belief among the Portuguese intellectuals of the time.

The reception of Wagner in Portugal occurred in the context of the establishment of a new canon of German symphonic music, a process in which the discourse of the intellectuals was an important agent. The acceptance and appropriation of Wagner as ‘absolute’ music seems to have been conditioned by an ideological framework constituted by an association between the idea of progress and the romantic and idealist conception of music. The idea of progress involves the notion of a history that is walking towards a utopian perfect time. In their thought, ‘pure’ symphonic music was assigned the mission of leading humanity to that utopian perfection.

Notes

¹ Cf. Luís Reis Torgal and João Roque (ed.), *O Liberalismo (1807-1890)*, in *História de Portugal*, vol. V, dir. José Mattoso (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1993), 121-129.

² The different versions of the myth agree on the fundamental points. Cf. P. Commelin, *Mythologie grecque et romaine* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961), 248-251; Michael Grant and John Hazel, *Who's who in classical mythology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 26-27; E. Hamilton, *La mythologie: ses dieux, ses héros, ses légendes* (Verviers: Marabout, 1962), 292-295; H. Haubert, *Dictionnaire de mythologie classique* (Paris: Librairie Vuibert, 1947), 14-15; J. Schmidt, *Dicionário de mitologia grega e romana*, (Lisboa: Edições 70, 1995), 33-34.

³ A Redacção, “Ao público”, *Amphion*, I/1, April 1, 1884, 1.

⁴ Ferreira Braga, “A Associação Música Vinte e Quatro de Junho”, *Amphion*, I/16, November 16, 1884, 4.

⁵ *Idem*.

⁶ Ferreira Braga, “Concertos”, *Amphion*, II/8, July 16, 1885, 61.

⁷ *Idem*.

⁸ Expression coined by William Weber. Cf. William Weber, “Wagner, Wagnerism, and Musical Idealism”, in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 28-71. See also William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste – Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially Chapter 4, “Musical idealism and the crisis of the old order”, 85-121.

⁹ J. Neuparth, “Teatros – S. Carlos”, *Amphion* II/16, November 16, 1885, 124-125. Italics added.

¹⁰ *Id.*, “Teatros – Primeiras representações – S. Carlos – Os Mestres Cantores de Nuremberg”, *Diário de Notícias*, February 21, 1906, 2.

¹¹ *Id.*, “Teatros – S. Carlos”, *Diário de Notícias*, Março 15, 1909, 3.

¹² *Id.*, “Crónica Musical CXXXV – A Tetralogia de Wagner – Apontamentos (1.º artigo)”, *Diário de Notícias*, January 6, 1909, 1.

¹³ Cf. Rui Vieira Nery and Paulo Ferreira de Castro, *História da Música* (Lisboa: Comissariado para a Europália 91- Portugal / Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1991), 140, 150-151.

¹⁴ J. Neuparth, “D. Amélia – Concertos Lamoureux”, *Diário de Notícias*, April 13, 1905, 2.

¹⁵ *Id.*, “Crónica Musical CXVIII”, *Diário de Notícias*, April 15, 1908, 1.

¹⁶ *Id.*, “Orquestra Filarmónica de Berlim – 4.º concerto”, *Diário de Notícias*, May 8, 1908, 2.

¹⁷ *Id.*, “Teatro da República – Terceiro concerto sinfónico”, *Diário de Notícias*, January 8, 1912, 4.

¹⁸ *Id.*, “Teatro República – Concertos Blanch – 11.º concerto”, *Diário de Notícias*, February 14, 1916, 2.

¹⁹ *Id.*, “Teatro República – Concertos Blanch – 13.º concerto”, *Diário de Notícias*, February 28, 1916, 2.

²⁰ Cf. Mário Vieira de Carvalho, «*Pensar é morrer*» ou o Teatro de S. Carlos na mudança de sistemas sociocomunicativos dsde fins do séc. XVIII aos nossos dias (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1993), 175.

²¹ A. Arroyo, “A Orquestra Filarmónica de Berlim II”, *Diário de Notícias*, April 30, 1908, 3. Italics added.