

A SMALL BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Viscount of Taunay

On September 22, the day the Church dedicates to St. Maurice, was born in 1767 in the city of Rio de Janeiro, from where he should never leave, José Mauricio Nunes Garcia, the unique fruit of the legitimate consortium of Apolinário Nunes Garcia, a native of the Governor's Island, and Maria Victoria da Cruz, a daughter of the bishopric of Marianna (Minas Geraes), both colored; she was granddaughter of a black slave from the Coast of Africa (Guinea).

At the age of six years, in 1773, he had the misfortune of losing his father; but to his fruitful and powerful support was left the love of his extremely industrious and intelligent mother, aided by an older sister, whose name is unfortunately lost, and perhaps no longer can ever come to be known.

Showing, from a very young age, great vivacity of nature, applied to any genre of study, having a voice very finely tuned, extensive and ductile, and patenting the most remarkable inclination for music, after learning the first letters in a royal school, could José Mauricio, thanks to the efforts of his natural protectors, be enrolled in the class of sight singing and rudiments of harmony of José the brown, and there he made such progress that he earned at once the friendship of the master and the respect and admiration of his fellow students. These lessons were given in a guitar, which was passed from hand to hand.

It can be affirmed that, by the results obtained, since then the career of José Mauricio was saved, getting well compensated the heroic sacrifices made for his own benefit and for the glory of the Brazilian homeland by those two humble creatures: the mother and the aunt.

Enrolled, still very young, in the Latin school of teacher Elias, in three years there he demonstrated such an application, that the Latin scholar, celebrated at the time, stated him in a position to sit in the chair of professor and teach his colleagues.

He also distinguished himself exceptionally in the public

class of Rational and Moral Philosophy, conducted by Dr. Goulão, who graduated in Coimbra, and this teacher also proposed him to be his substitute.

In the midst of all these studies and helping the family with his daily work, from his 15 to 20 years old, playing string and wind instruments in music bands and orchestras of music festivals of the church, José Mauricio continued with an uninterrupted strive to cultivate the art of music, conducted up by his own effort and by constant meditation on the classics, to increasingly broad and high spheres. He was also climbing up, more and more, in the general concept, achieving a greater consideration among the elites of Rio de Janeiro, for whom in 1790 he was enormously well-liked and heeded.

He then thought about taking orders to be a priest, and having received a generous donation by his businessman and friend Tomás Gonçalves, of a house in a street called, at first, Bellas Noutes, and then christened Marrecas, he could, with the establishment of a heritage, be received as deacon, to sing a solemn Mass in the year 1792 and to obtain the license to preach in 1798, though only after that year had he studied rhetoric with Dr. Manoel Inácio da Silva Alvarenga, whose 1804 certificate tells us "that he attended his class for two years and he made in it quick progresses, as rarely there are".

Since that year 1792, he was admitted to the best circles of Rio's society despite all the bitter prejudices of color; [such prejudices] the sweetness and the humanitarian spirit of the princes of Braganza, since D. João VI, came among us to destroy. José Mauricio was much appreciated by the vastness and depth of his knowledge in various sciences and languages and even more by the mastery with which he played organ, harpsichord and later piano and improvised on them, getting out of these instruments the most stupendous effects.

It seems to be proved that his first great sacred instrumental production was in the year 1790; and after this first, other works of rising value quickly happened, which amazed the many connoisseurs of his prolific talent.

Employing all his savings in joining the widest collection of all then existing musical compositions of German, Italian and French authors, ever and ever increased, so that in 1816 it produced the biggest surprise to Sigismund Neukomm, the dear pupil of Haydn, he instinctively affiliated to the grandiose and severe school of Handel, Haydn, the Bachs, Mozart and Beethoven, this one already emerging into the wide horizons of art, as a star of unexceedable brilliance.

In June 2, 1798, José Mauricio was appointed organist and chapel master of the ancient Cathedral and See, today's Rosario church, with the annual salary of 600\$000.

He was admitted to the private circle of the illustrious Bishop of Rio de Janeiro, José da Silva Coutinho, with proofs of his knowledge, and made his best efforts to develop the population's taste in music, by giving, for a minimal compensation, lessons in private homes of guitar, harpsichord and spinet to girls and ladies, and by holding a free class in which he lectured with greater dedication and diligence for the space of 38 years, almost to the eve of his death!

In the midst of so many fatigues, followed up, one after the other, the manifestations of his genius with admirable abundance, all linked to the masculine and indestructible texture of the German school, which ensures not a few of them to immortality.

II

The impression that José Mauricio caused to the Prince Regent D. João and to the Portuguese court, when they docked, in January 1808, to the capital of the large colony was of true wonder.

- How can it be such a musician in a simple colony of Portugal?

The Prince surrounded him soon with pleases and more formal signs of his appreciation; these, however, served further to encourage and incite the envy and hatred in the musicians from Portugal, than to improve the living conditions of Brazilian artist, who, overwhelmed at work, almost fought with misery. The habit of Christ in 1810, with the respective annuity plus the monthly fee of \$32, however, gave him some snort and compensation.

However his sorrows and struggles increased with the arrival, in Rio de Janeiro, of the celebrated Marcos Portugal in 1811, and not 1813, as Porto Alegre says. The unbearable snobbery of the infamous Portuguese maestro, whose operas were at that time represented even in the theaters of Russia with loud applause, operas today completely forgotten and not at all worthy to be presented, the deep rivalries and no possible reconciliation stemmed mainly from the difference and antagonism of the schools followed by each of the composers, numerous intrigues and evil gossip, all this has become to José Mauricio, not for a few years, the cause of incessant disappointments, slights and humiliations, which he bore with patience, gentleness and unshakable dignity.

Despite all the prestige that the repeated triumphs in Europe ensured to Marcos Portugal, and the perks of a Portuguese born man and his clean blood, as it was then said, the musical intuition of D. João VI made him lean in to José Mauricio, so that dying the queen his mother, D. Maria I, in March 20, 1816, the king also commissioned him a solemn Mass for the funeral. What a scandal in the Court!

To this proof of very high confidence, which exasperated Marcos Portugal and his clique, the Brazilian priest answered with a true masterpiece, the Requiem, today finally reduced to piano, organ and voices by our fine and hardworking conductor Mr. Alberto Nepomuceno and ready to be delivered to the presses to get the most publicity.

This will be the first work of José Mauricio to be printed! ... And how many balks to overcome to publish a single work out of more than four hundred compositions!

I have endeavored in this arduous campaign no less than 25 years of tenacious propaganda, either in the Chamber of Deputies or in the Senate, in the daily press and in countless articles and repeated calls to those who could help me! ...

This Requiem, Sigismund Neukomm had no doubt to put alongside the [written by] the divine Mozart, so many solemnity and anguish, accents, anointing and pain it condenses and capture.

It had been also written with intimate and heartfelt tears, for the same day as the death of the Queen, March 20, 1816, José Mauricio lost his doting and shaken mother, to whom he owed everything.

The fury of the supporters of Marcos Portugal did not slow down, and on the contrary, it became more exacerbated

with the admiration instilled in everyone by the presentation of the Requiem, preceded by nine long and very inspired Responsories. Neither was of avail the real homage that ultimately paid to them the same José Mauricio, modifying his style and manner of writing and adopting unfortunately, as subordinate to the taste of the season, the myriad of trills, volatas, cadences and fioritturas of Italian provenance, even in parts of more intense religious character, having loosed the force of the harmony and Polyphonia and overwhelmed everything into flaccid melodies.

So therefore one can divide the works of the great sacred composer into two broad periods: the first of maximum value and purity, derived from the genuine Germanic source, which runs from 1790 to 1816, no less than 26 years; the second of adulteration and decay, and if, here and there, glow the flickers of the estrus and the maturity of science, often appear the signs of a deplorable depression due to the influence of the bad taste of the Italian School, of which the most illustrious representative was Rossini, lender, at the beginning, of censorship and fair repairs by the Brazilian maestro.

This period runs from 1817 to 1830, or 13 years; fecundity was on a much smaller scale, if it can be stated that in the first period José Mauricio composed over three hundred important *spartitos* for the feasts of the Church, all without a doubt worthy of arising from the unqualified oblivion they have been falling into, when instead they deserve to be in full and brilliant light.

The proclamation of the Independence of Brazil on September 7, 1822, brought the required zeal to the finances of the new nation that was being organized, and made it even more difficult the already precarious life of José Mauricio, with the deep cuts that annihilated the wide expenses of the Imperial Chapel.

Marcos Portugal, who, it is not clear why, did not follow D. João VI in his return to Lisbon, staying in Brazil, suffered even more; and then, at the time of disfavor and disgrace, looked for his companion in art, which welcomed him with the greatest affection and friendship, and with all the nobility, oblivious of the old and cruel wrongdoings, helped him insofar his meager forces.

For the two elder composers, since then, the days dragged on, melancholic and heavy.

"Today," said in an occasion José Mauricio, "instead of the big orchestras that once caressed my ears, I can only hear the chirping of the crickets, my groans and the whining of the dogs, which annoy and sadden me".

Both died in the year 1830; José Mauricio on April 18, at his home at 18 Nuncio Street; he was 62 years old and 5 incomplete months.

Manoel Araujo Porto Alegre took his features in a mask of plaster, which belongs to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and History.

His burial was done at the expenses of the Brotherhood of St. Cecilia, and the body buried in the church of St. Peter, as he left determined. Later, however, his bones were transported to the church of the Sacrament, by the provision of Monsignor Narcissus, where they still are.

José Mauricio was quite high in stature, had an expressive physiognomy, an intelligent, penetrating gaze, but gracious in the extreme, a mulatto light colored [skin], somewhat purplish in the commissure of the lips, cheekbones, broad forehead, with a marked cyst on the right side, in the last years of life.

Januário da Cunha Barbosa, his personal friend, in the obituary article [published in] May 7, 1830 in the [newspaper] *Diario Fluminense*, says: "he joined to all the necessary studies to the priesthood, a vast and deep knowledge of geography and history, both profane and sacred, and of the French and Italian languages, not being fluent in Greek and English, which he also studied, but not so hard".

This man was undoubtedly a musical genius, to whom Brazil has not paid a penny for the debt of admiration and recognition that he has indisputable right, with prejudice and discredit to the entire nation that just ignores the treasures it possesses, not to José Mauricio Nunes Garcia, who laid solid foundations for his rights to immortality and can always appeal to the remotest posterity.

Rio de Janeiro, September 22, 1896

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