

Acting performer, sounding music and interpretative notations: oral tradition as research in the Portuguese guitar music of Carlos Paredes

The nexus between (interpretative) creation and (embodied) action is central to the performing arts, but is especially relevant for cultural expressions, such as the oral tradition of Portuguese guitar concert music, where its significance entails the interdependency of acting performer, sounding music, and interpretative attributions. The hybrid (osmotic) figure of the *centaur* imaginatively invoked by the cultural theorist Eduardo Lourenço (2004) upon hearing and experiencing the performance of Carlos Paredes (1925-2004) aptly captures a music nexus implicating the performer's body and sound, which in turn resonates with cultural significance attributed by an active listener. The result is a tripartite complex relation (sounding music–body–interpreting listener), which in the case of the guitar music of Paredes has acquired a striking symbolic meaning in the construction of Portuguese contemporary national identity.

This paper takes the stance that an active and vigilant oral tradition relies on the framework of research through artistic-practice as a way to better reinterpret and reinvigorate that tradition. This stance is especially urgent in light of the current touristic pressure that creates demand for live performances, and which often lead to an overabundance of poor-level and un-informed practices. The paper is informed by the experience of the author as both a music theorist and a performer of Coimbra-style guitar playing (and the music of Paredes in particular). This effort proposes to approach Paredes' music in the tradition of the composer/performer as stylistic hybrid of embodied and culturally constructed sound, and centers around two vectors of inquiry: (1) The examination of the performance style of Paredes within the larger context of the Coimbra-style of playing, (through analysis of video footage and by one of the authors being a carrier for the oral tradition of the Coimbra guitar), including the examination of plucking and figuration based patterns, qualities of vibrato, the relation between the guitar tuning system and ergonomic issues; (2) The first-hand research on the production of notated transcription as a place for negotiating performance idiosyncrasies, musical conventions and style, and the gestural and timbral imagination (of composition and reception), including aspects of stylistic-based characterization of the music corpus and range of formal designs.



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