

LEOPOLDO MIGUEZ' IMPROMPTU

Leopoldo Miguez (1850-1902) was born in Niterói, near Rio de Janeiro. After moving to Europe with his family when he was two years old, he received his musical education mainly in Spain and Portugal. He was principally known as a composer but was additionally a violinist, theorist, and the most prominent advocate of Wagner's romantic aesthetics in Brazil. His most famous works are the *Hymn to the Proclamation of the Republic* (1890), the Symphonic Poems *Ave Libertas* (1890) *Parisiana* (1888) and *Prometheus* (1891), and the Sonata for violin and piano.

The history of the *Impromptu* for double bass and piano is quite interesting. Until recently it was thought that Miguez had written a double bass concerto yet, instead of a concerto, it must be this *Impromptu*, thus making it the very first work written especially for a double bassist in Brazil. It was composed in 1898, when Miguez was director of the Instituto Nacional de Música in Rio de Janeiro.

This short work was specially written for Alfredo de Aquino Monteiro, then a pupil of Ricardo Roveda at the Instituto Nacional de Música. It is Roveda, and another double bassist, Leopardi, that show the importance of the Italian school of double bass in Rio de Janeiro, and thus underline the significance of the work. Miguez intended to compose a challenging piece, but at the same time he tried to be aware of the possibilities of the instrument, making use of the higher register whilst keeping it both comfortable and idiomatic. The *Impromptu* is written at sounding pitch, in the old Italian tradition, as opposed to our modern notation where it's written an octave higher than actual sound. It was possibly composed for a three-string bass tuned in fourths, as is revealed by the use of D and A open strings (with A being the lowest note of the score).

In the 1980s, one of the most prominent bassists in Brazil, Professor Sandrino Santoro (Rio de Janeiro), gave Professor Fausto Borem (Belo Horizonte) a copy of the *Impromptu* by Leopoldo Miguez. It was only the bass part and, as years went by, it was accepted that the piano part was lost. To replace this, Professor Fausto Borem organized an International Competition in 2005 for the composition of a new piano part. Amongst the jury members were double bassists Frank Proto, Gary Karr and prominent pianists and composers. The winning score was written by the Brazilian Roberto Macedo Ribeiro.

It is this version which is known by Brazilian bassists. It recently gained a beautiful rendition by double bassist Vinicius Frate Paranhos and pianist Stefano Bravo on a digital album featuring Brazilian works for double bass (2020).

In 2022 I was browsing scores for double bass and piano on the IMSLP website. You can imagine my surprise when I discovered that someone had shared a copy of the manuscript of the *Impromptu's* piano part! Our dear colleague Erasmo Fernandes, currently violinist of the orchestra of the Theatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, had discovered this manuscript and shared it on IMSLP. He'd also made an excellent Urtext edition. I immediately decided to record both versions, the newly discovered original one from 1898 as well as the more recent version with the piano part by Roberto Macedo Ribeiro (2005).

The double bass part had been encountered by Professor Sandrino Santoro in the Library of the Escola de Música da UFRJ (the very same school that was formerly the Instituto Nacional de Música, when Miguez was its first director in the 1890s). As for the original piano part, it was discovered by Erasmo Fernandes at the Centro de Documentação do Theatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro. We are grateful to Erasmo Fernandes who knew about the story of this score and lost no time, making a high quality copy and preparing the Urtext edition.

There is a surprising wealth of literature for the double bass in Brazil. Miguez' *Impromptu* is only one of many forgotten scores which are being rediscovered. I want to express gratitude to my dear colleagues Sandrino Santoro, Fausto Borem, and Erasmo Fernandes. Special thanks to pianist Marina Spoladore for the excellent partnership.

TWO DIFFERENT VERSIONS

What a surprise it was to discover the original manuscript of the piano part of a work that already has a new accompaniment, composed more than a century after the original! It is important that we stress the high quality of Roberto Macedo Ribeiro's piano part. He is a specialist in Miguez' work. This being said, the two piano parts are quite different. Whilst the

original piano part is mainly a simple, graceful accompaniment, Macedo's work is more elaborated and contrapuntal. The organizers of the competition of 2005 thought that there should be a small piano introduction, typical for this kind of music, even if no blank measures appear on the bass part. In accordance with the requirements of the competition, Macedo composed a nine-bar introduction which does not exist in the original manuscript. Likewise, bars 58 to 62 feature the double bass alone in the manuscript, whilst Macedo composed a prominent part for the piano. Another remarkable difference lies in the tuning of the double-bass. When the competition was organized in 2005, it was easy to imagine that the Impromptu should be played with a double bass using solo tuning which is a tone higher, as was widely used in the old Italian tradition, (for example, in Bottesini's compositions). Thus, Macedo's piano part lies in E minor. When we look at the manuscript however, it is in D minor, which means that the double bass uses orchestral tuning.

ARTISTIC CHOICES

We generally followed the corrections that were written with pencil in the manuscript. Bars 54 to 57 are problematic for the double bass due to the very high register. It is in fact nearly impossible to obtain a good rendition of that part, therefore I chose to play an octave down from bar 52. Playing a simple cadenza with octave jumps I return to the original register for the return of the main theme. Naturally, we need to choose another option when playing the Miguez/Macedo version: I play an octave down only at bars 55 and 56, then use the original melody (without using the annotated corrections), and finally play the repeated notes without octave jumps, while the piano plays the melody. In the original version, we changed the first bass note of the piano at bar 26 (G) for a B.

REFERENCES:

[https://imslp.org/wiki/Impromptu_\(Miguez%2C_Leopoldo\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Impromptu_(Miguez%2C_Leopoldo))
https://musica.ufmg.br/permusi/permusi/port/numeros/11/num11_cap_05.pdf