

# Villa Lobos's

## *backwoods trunk*

Researcher organizes  
collection of tunes, ballads,  
poems and parodies that were  
in the composer's collection

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*Sabiá três pote,  
siricóia miudinha  
sabiá três pote  
siricóia miúda.*

*I know you take a long time,  
sir to come here to our place  
I stay here spinning around  
I hear here and there  
O, God, if that guy  
Won't show up as early as Christmas.*

Chico Antônio

**T**his music is part of a genre of impromptu singing called *coco*, and it was improvised by a singer called Chico Antônio, in Natal (RN), at the farewell for Mário de Andrade, in 1929. Imagine the surprise of researcher Edilene Matos on hearing it, last year, in front of the Model Market, Salvador (BA), played to the sound of the tambourine and viola by three singers. Mysteries of the oral tradition, the appreciators of popular culture would say. Edilene is one of them. Her post-doctoral study, carried out at the Brazilian Studies Institute of the University of São Paulo (IEB/USP) and financed by FAPESP, is

related to Mário de Andrade, Chico Antônio, Catulo da Paixão Cearense, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Leandro Gomes de Barros and so many other artists involved with valuing the art of the people. "Popular culture is no second fiddle to so-called erudite culture, it is creation in the same way, and it is the people that most renew, create and stir things up," says the researcher.

Edilene set out to put in order the so-called Villa-Lobos Fund, an abundance of documents – tunes, parodies, pamphlets, songs, musical duels and poems – that probably dates from 1905, and gathered together by artists in the role of researchers of the stature Pixinguinha and Donga, back in the 1920s. The commission originated from Arnaldo and Carlos Guinle, rich industrialists and patrons

This refrain is frequently used by the *cantador* (popular folk singer) Chico Antônio, from the State of Rio Grande do Norte, in the Northeast of Brazil. It is an invocation for inspiration to create the lyrics of a folk song. Such invocation, which was later incorporated by other folk singers, refers to the *sabiá três pote* – one of the many species of Brazilian song-thrushes – and to the *sirigóia* – a small reddish sea crab (the *siricóia* in the folk singer's lyrics).



of the arts from Rio de Janeiro, who intended to solicit themes and items of folklore throughout the north and northeast and to publish the production of the people in the four corners of the country. They brought back vast material, the fruit of a wide-ranging and disorderly investigation. To organize it all, they invited Villa-Lobos. The composer's objective, according to an interview given to journalist and writer Alcântara Machado, in Mappin's tea room, in 1925, was to publish three books: the first on music; the second and third on poetry and dance. In 1927, he started to turn the papers over, but did not manage to make any headway, given the vast amount of texts and to the busy life he was leading. Probably in 1929, he decided to pass them on to his friend Mário de Andrade, who had just undertaken his famous trips to the country's hinterland, to study and to collect the art of the people.

Mário read all the material, made notes and marks with pencil or in ink. There were question marks, exclamation marks, crossed lines, references to authors or poems. He went so far as to

Letter from Villa-Lobos to Mário, with a photograph and a dedication: study to yield a book and a CD-ROM with facsimiles of the documents, a precious source for revisiting the production of this writer from São Paulo



do a sort of classification, in spite of not believing in the pure genres, which he called “silly rhetorication”. He classified them into musical duels, narratives, historical and lyrical romances, epics, tunes, improvisations, ditties, slang and dialogs. The objective was to publish a major work on popular culture, the title of which would be *Na Pancada do Ganzá* [To the Beat of the Rattlebox] (in an allusion the instrument that had been offered him by Chico Antônio, of whom Mário used to say that he was worth a dozen Carusos). The wish was revealed in a letter to his friend Manuel Bandeira, in 1930.

The researcher resolved to enter into “the fabulous realm built by Mário de Andrade’s foray into popular culture”, also inspired by the work carried out by researcher Ruth Terra, which culminated in her book *A Literatura de Folhetos nos Fundos Villa-Lobos – The Pamphlet Literature of the Villa-Lobos Funds* (IEB/Edusp, 1981). In it, the author did a survey of what she found in the collection. To start with, Edilene intended to work with seven files – in all, there are 22. But, as she read the texts, she thought it was better to carry out the organization,

systematization and analysis of all the 22. They comprised 633 texts, some with over 60 pages. The greater part of them, some 300, were pamphleteering (cordel), literature on the border between the oral and the written works, typographically set, but which keeps all the marks of the oral tradition, besides rousing other languages, like the visual language, present on the front and back covers of the leaflets. Another 300 cover several genres, including parodies, popularized texts, lyrics for music and dialogs. “I put them in order and did a classification that see-

med to me suitable for the material I found, based on the dominant themes,” she says.

*(I recall the healthy time  
of my dear childhood  
when I, in the freshness of life,  
would play on the banks of the river  
admiring the beauty  
of the baroness’s bosom,  
which, let loose in the current,  
passed by like a ship)*

(a poem/parody, with no indication of authorship, which reminds the reader of Casimiro de Abreu and his anthological *Meus Oito Anos* [When I Was Eight]. Mário made the following annotation: “Admirable. Compare with *Meus Oito Anos*”)

Edilene Matos made copies of the texts, took care of digitalizing them, ordered them into new files, but she left the originals in Mário’s order, who had embarked on “a disorganized organization.” She managed, with this work, to detect the authorship of many pamphlets, such as one “To the Beat of the Rattlebox”, which she attributed to Chico Antônio.

The researchers concluded the opening essay, in which she deals with such

### THE PROJECT

*The Other Face of the Villa-Lobos Funds: Popular Poetry*

#### MODALITY

Post-doctoral grant

#### SUPERVISION

TELÉ ANCONA LOPES – Brazilian Studies Institute/USP

#### GRANT HOLDER

EDILENE DIAS MATOS – Brazilian Studies Institute/USP





Mário de Andrade:  
heir to the musician's collection

issues as the primordial days of popular culture, the origins of the Villa-Lobos Funds, intertextuality, Mário's relationship with popular culture, as well as an analysis of the Villa-Lobos Funds. She also intends to launch the material in a book, which will come with a CD-ROM. An idea praised by Professor Telê Ancona Lopes, from USP, who is the coordinator of the Mário de Andrade Archives. "This CD-ROM, like the volume where the analysis of the documentation is to be found, including Mário's marginal notes and the summary of each content, expands the dissemination of the funds in an extraordinary manner," says Telê.

*(The wave of the people arose  
the general kept quiet  
the oligarchs thought  
that the state was the object  
that fathers left their sons  
and sons left for the grandchildren)*

(political pamphlet Antonio Silvino at the election of Rego Barros to be gover-

nor of Paraíba, of the authorship of Leandro Gomes de Barros. Mário noted in pencil: "Almost entirely excellent – taking out a few stanzas it looks very good")

According to Telê, Mário worked with popular culture from 1922 onwards, in his study, but also by doing some fieldwork. In 1928, in the *Revista de Antropofagia* [Anthropophagy Magazine], he published his first study on folklore, with the title of *O romance do Veludo* [The Romance of Veludo]. "He used to correspond with practically all those who tarried with popular culture – Câmara Cascudo, Ademar Vidal, even with Lehmann Nitsche, who compiled South American Amerindian myths," she says. When he became director of the Culture Department of the Municipality of São Paulo in 1936, he created the Ethnology and Folklore Society, with an enormous network of informers. He contracted a photographer and a filmmaker to record the cateretê country dance, the frolic of the Magi, the São Paulo rural samba, and he founded the Folklore Research Mission. Villa-Lobos's backwoods trunk could not have been in better hands. •