

Bach in Brazil: An Intertextual Analysis of the *Bachianas brasileiras*

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From 1930 to 1945, Heitor Villa-Lobos, the most influential Brazilian classical composer, composed a series of nine pieces, grouped together as a suite. The suite was titled *Bachianas brasileiras* and had the ambitious proposition of merging musical techniques and ideas from the baroque period and the Brazilian popular music style as an homage to one of Villa-Lobos's favorite composers, Johann Sebastian Bach. However, since its conception, scholars have been debating whether Villa-Lobos succeeded in his proposition, with some arguing that the suite sounds artificial and lacks baroque substance.¹

This paper will analyze *Bachianas brasileiras* Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9 in their completeness, as well as the first movement from *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 6 and the fugues from *Bachianas* Nos. 7 and 8, discussing both baroque and popular Brazilian music elements that the composer used. Scholars suggest *Bachianas brasileiras* Nos. 2 and 4 were likely composed before the idea for the whole suite was even conceived. This paper will therefore provide specific attention to these movements.

¹ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 2.

The Mythical Composer

On February 17, 1922, in the Municipal Theatre of São Paulo, a five-foot-five-inches dark-haired man got up on the stage during the *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern Art Week) to present some of his original modern compositions. Wearing a flip-flop on one foot and a shoe on the other,² his presentation and looks provoked a series of boos, with some members of the audience even threatening to throw tomatoes at him.³ That young man was Heitor Villa-Lobos, the only composer to present his works during that week and who now is regarded as the most influential name in Brazilian classical music.

Born on March 5, 1887, his presentation during the Modern Art Week was not the only controversial episode in his life, even with his actual birthdate being up to discussion for years.⁴ Villa-Lobos lived his childhood and teenage years in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His father, Raul Villa-Lobos, was the main musical influence in young Villa-Lobos's life. Starting with a makeshift cello that was improvised by his father out of a viola, young Villa-Lobos soon got a taste for classical music, a fact that was driven by his father's support and wish to help his son acquire a taste for music, and the flourishing classical scene in late nineteenth to early twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro. Raul, however, did not limit young Villa-Lobos's experiences to classical music, taking him to the streets of Rio de Janeiro to hear and participate in circles of popular music, especially the music of *choro*, which had a major influence in Villa-Lobos's compositional style (he would later on write a series of suites named *choros*), with the composer regarding *choro* as a form of art that surpassed jazz, calling jazz a temporary phenomenon.⁵ His mom, Noêmia, always wanted Villa-Lobos to be a medical doctor, even forbidding him to learn guitar in hopes that it would suppress the young man's passion for music. However, after Raul's death in 1899, Villa-Lobos, then twelve

² Zeitel, *Entenda Como*. All translations from Portuguese throughout this paper are mine.

³ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 75.

⁴ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 40.

⁵ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 52.

years-old, turned to his Aunt Zizinha for refuge. Zizinha was an amateur pianist who absolutely loved the works by J. S. Bach, and many believe that it was perhaps during this time of Villa-Lobos's life that his aunt's performances of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* inspired Villa-Lobos and created a mythical image of Bach in him, that he would carry throughout his entire life.⁶

Between twelve to eighteen years, Villa-Lobos performed with a group of *chorões* (players of the *choro*) in bars, movie theatres, and dance saloons to economically sustain himself. It was during his eighteenth year that Villa-Lobos supposedly sold his father's rare books collection to finance a tour around the country in which he played the music that he knew and gathered over a thousand melodies from all types of regions of Brazil. As Eero Tarasti comments, however, the truthfulness of this trip and the acquisition of the thousand melodies has been up to debate, since Villa-Lobos was known to deliberately confuse interviewers with false information about his life, a fact that would add to a mythical savage fame that he received during his years in Paris before 1930.⁷

The Modern Art week was the biggest turning point in Villa-Lobos's career. Organized primarily by the poet Mário de Andrade and the painter Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, the arts festival was sponsored by the coffee oligarchs of the state of São Paulo to bring relevance to the city, as the capital of the country at the time, Rio de Janeiro, was considered the center of society in Brazil. Many artists of all different fields presented their modernist and provoking works, but Villa-Lobos was the only composer to do so. Even though the whole event was not well received by the general public, even with the police getting involved in some situations, the whole event was considered as a major success, especially to Villa-Lobos, whose fame now extended out of Rio de Janeiro and reached the richest state of São Paulo. This newly acquired fame was essential for Villa-Lobos.

⁶ Paz, *Villa e a Música Brasileira*, 16.

⁷ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 39.

In 1923 Villa-Lobos was regarded as a central figure for the spreading of Brazilian culture and art in Europe and a vivid demonstration that Brazilian art was not inferior (as regarded by European countries).⁸ He was then, with the help of the government and some rich patrons, sent to Paris with intention of spreading Brazilian culture through his works and learn the new artistic trends that were being laid in Europe at the time. As Tarasti observes, however, that was not completely what happened, as Villa-Lobos saw this trip to Paris as an opportunity primarily to establish his own fame as a composer.⁹

Villa-Lobos's exaggerated tales that he told to the press about his adventures in the middle of the Amazon, such as his supposed kidnapping by indigenous peoples which gave him the chance to show some of the western music with a guitar or phonograph, helped build Villa-Lobos's mythical aura of a savage man, something that he exploited for fame in his exotic writing. It is during this time in Paris that he composed the bulk of his *Choros* suite. In 1930, with the intention of performing a couple of concerts back in Brazil, Villa-Lobos was persuaded by Getúlio Vargas, a dictator that stayed in power from 1930 to 1945, to assume the position of director of the Superintendência de Educação Musical e Artística (Music and Artistic Education Secretariat).

Hoping for some financial stability, which he certainly achieved, Villa-Lobos took on the position and became a big controversial figure in the history of Brazilian classical music, with scholars debating over his real level of support to the dictatorship at the time. It is during this period that Villa-Lobos organized the *Canto orfeônico*, his big project to educate and create in Brazilian society cultured citizens who could appreciate music.¹⁰ Villa-Lobos used primarily the music of Bach, of whom he had deep admiration, to educate Brazilian society at the time. Villa-Lobos's view of Bach was

⁸ Paz, *Villa e a Música Brasileira*, 18.

⁹ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 54.

¹⁰ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 162.

almost mythological, calling him “the folkloric spring of all nations”¹¹ and having his music in the highest regard. Certainly, this return to Bach, as described by Tarasti, is what influenced the composer to write one of his masterpieces, the *Bachianas brasileiras*.

A Daring Homage

A series of nine suites, the *Bachianas brasileiras* are regarded as “one of the best examples of homage to J. S. Bach’s music in the twentieth century.”¹² These compositions do not have a particular unifying orchestration, varying from a normal symphonic ensemble to flute and bassoon duet. These nine suites are also regarded as the culmination of all of Villa-Lobos’s compositional efforts and a paradoxical representation of his controversial personality. It is important to emphasize, as Norton Dudeque puts, that the *Bachianas brasileiras* are not the first homage that a composer made to Bach, with other composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and Dimitri Shostakovich writing their own renditions of preludes and fugues reminiscent of Bach. However, Villa-Lobos’s intent with the *Bachianas brasileiras* was to join the two worlds of his musical upbringing, classical and popular, into the ultimate homage to his favorite composer.

At a superficial level, this fusion of what one would consider very contrasting styles can be seen in the titles of each movement in the suite. Villa-Lobos assigned both a baroque title (such as Fugue, Gigue, and Aria) and a Brazilian title (such as Embolada, Conversa and Modinha) to each movement, already setting the listener with an expectation of what they are going to listen, but also a great question: how do these two styles, separated by centuries, fit together? Villa-Lobos’s idea was not new; Villa-Lobos was just keeping up with the neoclassical trend in Europe, even though his music is certainly a different type than the usual works by European composers.¹³

¹¹ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 176.

¹² Dudeque, *Bachianas*, front inside cover, n.p.

¹³ Dudeque *Bachianas*, 16.

Even the two styles, as argued by Adhemar Nóbrega in his *As Bachianas brasileiras de Villa-Lobos*, are not so distant after all. Nóbrega uses Bach's Courante from Partita No. 6, BWV 830, and slightly modifies the music, producing what he describes as a Brazilian *choro* (see Example 1 and Example 2 below). He also modifies the meter in the beginning of the second cello Suite (BWV 1008), transforming it into a "delightful modinha" (an interesting parallel to the second movement of the first *Bachianas brasileiras*, composed for "an orchestra of cellos").¹⁴

Even though Nóbrega's experiments seem to prove that the two genres are not so distant after all, some are still not convinced and use the suites Nos. 2 and 4 as an example to argue that Villa-Lobos's music has very little in common with Bach.¹⁵ As scholars suggest, *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 2 and 4 were likely composed before the idea for the whole suite was even conceived (even though Villa-Lobos was known for attributing the date in which he had an idea for a new composition as the date of completion for his compositions.¹⁶), with performances of such pieces in different arrangements (cello and piano instead of orchestra) dating back to 1930 and 1931, which coincides with the general date in which he composed the suite (1930 to 1945) but does not coincide with the composition dated by the composer of suites Nos. 2 and 4. This led some, including musicologist Lisa Peppercorn, to argue that the suite lacks baroque substance, which can only be seen in the "Brazilianized-baroque name."¹⁷

To understand Villa-Lobos's real intentions with the music would take years, as he himself would deliberately lie to reporters and did not write much on this specific subject (save some of his letters expressing his admiration for Bach¹⁸).

¹⁴ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 96.

¹⁵ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 1.

¹⁶ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 76.

¹⁷ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 2.

¹⁸ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 32.

Therefore, one must investigate the music to look for intertextual relationships and determine whether or not the *Bachianas brasileiras's* suite was really conceived as a Brazilian-baroque hybrid. The suites are, however, almost completely different from Villa-Lobos's previous compositions. As described by Tarasti, the whole suite has the idea of *cantabile*, which distinguishes the suite from a *choro* for example.¹⁹ This led Villa-Lobos to abandon the short and neutral motives that he usually employed in his compositions and adapt to long melodic lines. To successfully determine whether the two *Bachianas brasileiras* (Nos. 2 and 4) were meant to be part of the suite and if the composer successfully accomplished what he proposed to do, it is necessary to delve into the score and have a knowledge of both the baroque period and Brazilian popular music from the early twentieth century.

Example 1: “Courante” from Partita No. 6 in E minor, BWV 830, mm. 1–4.²⁰



Example 2: Altered version by Nóbrega, which he describes as a *choro*.²¹



¹⁹ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 187.

²⁰ Bach, *Partita No. 6*.

²¹ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 97.

Looking at the first piece in the suite, the very first of its characteristics that sets it apart from the other pieces in this suite is the fact that it was composed for an “orchestra of violoncelli.”²² This fact by itself, as described by Nóbrega, was already something that brought a lot of attention to the piece, with critics describing it as “heresy” and arguing that it shows the composer’s ignorance.²³ Since the starting of his career and even after his death, the fact that Villa-Lobos never graduated from the music conservatory in Rio de Janeiro was always brought up especially due to his “controversial autodidactic studies,”²⁴ which is a fallacy since his musical formation, even though not predominantly in the conservatory, happened in personal meetings with teachers that saw Villa-Lobos’s potential and decided to invest and teach him in many ways.²⁵ Nonetheless, this fallacy about him became a shadow that soon was used to justify Villa-Lobos’s revolutionary view that he expressed in his music.

The first movement of the piece is titled “Introduction” and “Embolada.” Even though introduction is not alluding to a baroque term, it makes a parallel with another piece composed prior to this one, also in the form of a suite named *Introdução aos Choros* (introduction to *choros*) and has the intention of “setting the mood” for the rest of the suite.²⁶ Even still, the first movement displays some baroque elements that, when contrasted with other of Villa-Lobos’s pieces, becomes more obvious and noticeable.

As Dudeque argues, the sole fact that the piece, beginning in C minor, modulates to closely related keys (to G minor, C minor, and then F minor for the first section of the piece) instead of distant ones, already demonstrates the composer’s intention of looking back to a more classical approach to music.²⁷ This constant modulating also makes sense in its Brazilian setting. *Embolada* is an improvisatory genre

²² Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas No. 1*.

²³ Nóbrega, *As Bachianas*, 23.

²⁴ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 43.

²⁵ Tarasti, *Vida e obra*, 42.

²⁶ Nóbrega, *Os Choros*, 137.

²⁷ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 46.

from the North-East of Brazil between two musicians that “challenge” each other with rhymed verses and, in the same way that the lyrics in an *embolada* are constantly changing, so is the key in Villa-Lobos’s composition. The syncopated rhythm that prevails through most of the movement is also an important aspect of Brazilian popular music.²⁸

The second movement is titled both “Prelude” and “Modinha” and it accomplishes both titles by being a contrasting slow movement. Looking at most of Bach’s preludes to fugues, such as the Prelude in C-Major, BWV 846, we can determine that preludes were short movements that focused in one musical characteristic and lead to another, contrasting movement. The second movement is similar to the first in the sense that its close tonal relationship between sections (from D minor to the parallel major and then the subdominant) displays Villa-Lobos’s looking back into the past. The slow and long melodic lines in the movement assume an aria-like character that is also fitting to the description of a prelude and is harmonized as a four-voice chorale.²⁹ In regard to its Brazilian characteristics, Villa-Lobos satisfies the description of a *modinha* with the aforementioned long melodic lines that express a religious and melancholic feeling, as *modinha* consists of sweet songs usually in a minor key.³⁰

Finally, the third movement, titled “Fugue” and “Conversa” (talk), is nothing more than a clear demonstration of the composer’s success in blending the baroque and popular Brazilian music styles. In general, Villa-Lobos’s fugues are not exactly like a baroque fugue in the sense that it does not always maintain the counterpoint texture that is characteristic of its original period. Villa-Lobos’s fugues also differ from the strict, rule-following French *fugue d’école*, with the composer himself describing his compositions as “sort of informal.”³¹ Even still, Villa-Lobos’s fugues can still be analyzed in a similar way as one would analyze a fugue written by Bach, since it presents the

²⁸ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 27.

²⁹ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 92.

³⁰ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 108.

³¹ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 43.

heavily imitative style common in fugues as well as elements as complex as double fugues.

The syncopated theme, represented below in Example 3a, is first presented in the dominant of the key for the first section, therefore, the answer to the subject is tonal. The subject is presented on a 1234 order (commonly associated with soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) which was a common treatment for fugues during the baroque period, although Bach did not use it for any of the fugues in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.³² Table 1 below provides a more detailed analysis of the fugue, using Dudeque's own analysis as a parameter and then confirmed by my additional score observations.³³

The syncopated subject also alludes to its Brazilian theme not only because of its rhythm, but also because of the "mood" that Villa-Lobos sets with the title "conversa" or "talk," as the fugue's subject being passed through every voice emulates a conversation on a common theme, with slight variations of the theme (such as the subject's augmentation in measures 74–94). It is important to note however, that unlike in a baroque fugue, there are some slight variations on the subject even during the exposition (See Example 3a and Example 3b).

Table 1: Structural Analysis of the Fugue from *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 1.³⁴

Section	Measures	Tonality	Structural Observations
Exposition 1	1–16	G minor	Subject receives a tonal answer, 1234 order. Counter-

³² Kennan, *Counterpoint*, 211.

³³ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 74.

³⁴ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 74. Table 1 provides a more detailed analysis of the fugue, using Dudeque's own analysis as a parameter and then confirmed by my own score study and additional structural observations.

			Subject presented on measure 13.
Episode 1	17–30	Eb Major (Relative major)	Counter subject is augmented. Heavily sequential from measures 24 to 29.
Episode 2	31–38	G minor	Sequential material from previous section contrasted with original subject. Another sequential passage measures 34 to 38.
Exposition 2	39–58	C minor (until measure 44), G minor (until measure 47), C minor.	Subject presented in a 4321 order in stretto texture.
Episode 3	59–65	G minor	Same episodic material used for the first episode.
Exposition 4	66–74	G minor	Subject presented in a 421, subject is presented on the third voice for final episode.
Episode 4	75–94	Eb minor and Bb major	Subject is augmented starting fourth beat of measure 75. Final cadence as VII+-V7-I.

Example 3a: Fugue subject presented by the first voice in the first exposition (*Bachianas brasileiras* No. 1, Mvt. 3, mm. 1–4).³⁵



Example 3b: Fugue subject presented by the second voice in the first exposition (*Bachianas brasileiras* No. 1, Mvt. 3, mm. 5–8).³⁶



The second piece in the suite is the first of the two pieces in the suites in which there are controversies around its composition date and whether Villa-Lobos composed it as part of the suite or not. Strikingly different from the previous work, the second piece differs itself in the sense that its Brazilian elements are more related to setting a mood than alluding to specific elements of Brazilian popular music.

As previously mentioned, this piece had some of its movements performed before the composition of the first work in the suite. There is a need, however, to consider that, even though composed before the composition of the first piece in the suite, *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 2 was still composed during a period in which Villa-Lobos looked back to the life of Bach by arranging some of Bach's pieces for his *Canto Orfeônico*. This can be clearly seen by Villa-Lobos's conventional harmonic approach in sound progression for the first movement. For the extent of measures 14–20, for example, Villa-

³⁵ Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas No. 1*, 22.

³⁶ Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas No. 1*, 22.

Lobos uses a strictly tonic to dominant progressions, which is not usual in his compositions.³⁷

The movement titled “Prelude” and “O canto do capadócio” (The Capadócio Song) tries to evoke an atmosphere or mood and does not present many clear baroque elements. This is a common characteristic for this piece. Even though it displays Villa-Lobos’s intentions of looking back, *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 2 is the weakest of the nine pieces in the suite in demonstrating its baroque elements, although successfully demonstrating its Brazilian elements. A *capadócio* is a charlatan, someone who only thinks about their own interests and the motive used for the *capadócio* can be first heard in the tenor saxophone, with slow slides that evoke the “slick” way a *capadócio* walks (see Example 4 below).

Example 4: Tenor Sax. Solo with slides setting the mood for the piece (*Bachianas brasileiras* No. 2, Mvt. 1, mm. 13–15).³⁸



The second movement, named “Aria” and “O canto da nossa terra” points to its baroque side with the use of modal scales (F Mixolydian), which even Bach did use for his Fugue in D minor, BWV 538, but not very often in his many compositions. It does emulate the proposed atmosphere (as the title “The Song of Our Land” proposes) by using long melodic lines, which also fit into the Aria description.

The third movement receives the title of both “Dança” (dance) and “Lembrança do Sertão” (Memories from the Sertão). It is unclear if Villa-Lobos wanted to reference a specific dance from the baroque period, such as *belle danse*, or if he just wanted to reference dances in general. Nonetheless, the music is agitated and somewhat fit for a

³⁷ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 56.

³⁸ Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas No. 2*, 2–3.

dance. There are no clear baroque elements that go beyond the more tonal approach in this movement, however. Regarding its Brazilian elements, the *pizzicato* and *staccato* played by the strings resembles the playing of the country guitar or *viola sertaneja* (guitar from the Sertão), a region in the north-east of Brazil known for its desert-like dry weather, commonly referred as the “backcountry of Brazil.”

The last movement is arguably one of Villa-Lobos’s most famous works. Titled “Toccata” and “O trenzinho do caipira” (The Little Countrymen Train), Villa-Lobos heavy use of percussion, and intelligent orchestration successfully imitates the different noises that a real train would make. The term toccata fits in an interesting way, since the piece is replete of full chords, rapid flourishes, and a delicate melodic line.³⁹ One final reason for why this piece is the weakest in its baroque elements is the fact that *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 2 is the only piece in the suite to present a program for a choreography, which Dudeque argues “removes the Bachian relationship of this music.”⁴⁰

The third piece in the suite is structured as a piano concerto, with a piano soloist in the foreground, but as Nóbrega argues, “it is not entirely a piano concerto.”⁴¹ The first movement is titled both “Prelude” and “Ponteio” and present a theme which its rhythm resembles the opening for the second movement. In an interesting way, Villa-Lobos seems to use a prelude more like an opera overture, in which some of the important themes are presented. The composer also heavily relies on fast moving strings that imitates the *pontear* or plucking of a guitar, which is also characteristic in the *ponteio*. Here Villa-Lobos also uses a quasi-citation of Bach’s *Die Kunst der Fuge*, BWV 1080, *Contrapunctus* IV (see Example 5a and Example 5b).

The opening of the second movement (titles “Fantasia” and “Devaneio” or Daydreaming) is strikingly similar to the theme in the first movement. This makes an interesting turn that fits into the

³⁹ Kennedy, *Oxford*, 1064.

⁴⁰ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 104.

⁴¹ Nóbrega, *As Bachianas*, 47.

description of what a baroque fantasia is, a composition in free form, usually for a soloist.⁴² Villa-Lobos also uses several musical gestures from the baroque idiom. The clarinet in B-Flat has a descending sequential melody accompanied by the strings from measures 46 to 54, in which the harmony clearly denotes a I^6_4 -V7-I, a very tonal relationship. There is also a huge choral-like passage in measures 91 to 99 in which Villa-Lobos instructed to be played “à la manière de Bach.”⁴³ Besides the usual syncopations commonly attributed to Brazilian popular music, Villa-Lobos also uses the free form structure of the movement to allude to its “daydreaming” title.

The third movement is titled both “Aria” and “Modinha” and, much like the second movement of the first piece in the suite, Villa-Lobos uses long melodic lines in minor to satisfy both titles. A very distinctly baroque section is played by the piano solo in measures 18–23, with sequential material and a descending bass line that resembles a lament-bass, commonly used in baroque compositions.

The final movement is titled “Toccata” and “Pica-pau” and presents various fast passages that emulate the improvisatory passages of a baroque toccata.⁴⁴ These passages have a special emphasis on staccatos, imitating the pecking of a woodpecker, a *pica-pau*.

Example 5a: J. S. Bach, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, BWV 1080,
Contrapunctus IV, mm. 1–3.⁴⁵



⁴² Kennedy, *Oxford*, 344.

⁴³ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 90.

⁴⁴ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 118.

⁴⁵ Bach, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, 8.

Example 5b: *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 3, Mvt.1, mm.17–18.⁴⁶

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Piano, Violin, and Violoncello. The music is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The Piano part begins with a whole note chord (F major) and a fermata. The Violin part plays an arpeggiated melody of eighth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The Violoncello part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

The fourth piece in the suite, alongside the second, had some of its movements composed before the compositions of the first *Bachianas brasileiras*, which is when some scholars consider the idea for the suite to be conceived. Much like the second piece, the fourth piece proposes moods instead of genres from Brazilian popular music.

The first movement is titled both “Prelude” and “Introdução,” as an introduction to the various scenes that the composer proposes for the rest of the piece. Villa-Lobos uses a beautiful yet simple counterpoint in which the violins play an arpeggiated melody in sequential material, while the lower strings travel through the circle of fifths. It is during this initial exposition that Dudeque argues that Villa-Lobos used yet another quasi-citation of Bach’s *Ricercar* from the *Musikalisches Opfer*; BWV 1079 (see Example 6a and Example 6b). This is the only movement in which there is no element strikingly Brazilian. One could argue that the long melodic lines in minor mode are a reference to previous melodies used in the suite, but Villa-Lobos’s intentions seem to be more of an introduction to the scenes than anything else.

The second movement titled both “Choral” and “Canto do Sertão” (Song from the Sertão) is very similar to one of Villa-Lobos’s previous works, *Choros* No. 6, as it presents long chorale-like passages accompanied by an ostinato played by the flute. Villa-Lobos does use

⁴⁶ Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas* No. 3, 4.

a four-part choral structure for most of the piece, imitating the style of Bach. There are also two passages in which Villa-Lobos uses some counterpoint in which the cellos and violas play the cantus firmus, while the violins play a 2:1 and 4:1 counterpoint. Villa-Lobos uses this cantus firmus as the song from the Sertão for the entire movement, almost as a melancholic yet not sad song from the people who live in a place with such harsh conditions.

Yet another song, the third movement titled “Aria” and “Cantiga” is one of the only movements in the entire suite in which Villa-Lobos uses a previously existing folk song, as was common in his music. Villa-Lobos uses the song *Ó mana deix’eu ir*, a *cantiga* (a short poem meant to be sung) that is believed to have originated from the Northeast region of Brazil.⁴⁷ The homophonic texture of the piece is the main indicator of the baroque idiom.

For the last movement of the piece, “Dance” and “Miudinho,” Villa-Lobos also uses another folkloric song, *Vamos Maruca*, a song that originated in the state of São Paulo. The whole piece also presents counterpoint of several degrees, similar to the way that Villa-Lobos composed the Toccatas in the suite.

Example 6a: J. S. Bach, *Musikalisches Opfer*, BWV 1079, Ricercar, mm. 1–3.⁴⁸



⁴⁷ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 104.

⁴⁸ Bach, *Musikalisches Opfer*, 3.

Example 6b: *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 4, Mvt. 1, mm. 1–2.⁴⁹

The first movement of *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 6 is titled both “Aria” and “Choro” and perfectly represents the duality between the baroque and Brazilian popular music through a flute and bassoon duet. Villa-Lobos composes with heavy use of counterpoint, with one instrument playing a baroque accompaniment to a melody that feels like a Brazilian *choro*. A *choro* is much like jazz in the sense that it originated as a rendition of European classical music by lower-class Brazilians, which were predominantly of African descent and therefore influenced by African traditions.

The flute starts taking part with the baroque counterpoint. One of the passages of the flute is remarkably similar to a passage from the chaconne of Bach’s second partita for the solo violin (See Example 7a and Example 7b). The roles are inverted in measure 15, with the flute playing the main melody while the bassoon plays the counterpoint. In Brazilian *choro*, the flute is a vital melodic instrument, turning the second section of this movement into an authentic *choro*.

As Dudeque argues, Villa-Lobos seems to suggest a freer *choro*, still using a characteristic minor mode, but with a polyphonic texture also very virtuosic.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, this movement can be used to demonstrate Villa-Lobos’s success in his baroque-Brazilian proposition for the suite.

⁴⁹ Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas No. 4*, 1.

⁵⁰ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 113.

Example 7a: J. S. Bach, Partita II, BWV 1004, Chaconne, m. 87.⁵¹**Example 7b:** *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 6, Mvt. I, m. 11.⁵²

The fourth movement of *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 7 is similar to the fugue in the first piece of the suite. Also titled both “Fugue” and “Conversa,” the fugue in the 7th piece assumes a less agitated tempo and more dense orchestration than its predecessor. Even still, there is a recognizable order in which the fugue’s subject is presented. The subject starts with the cellos that pass it to the violas at measure 13, with a real answer. Since the contra-bass is playing more harmonic material and not really a subject, the order of subject entrances for the first expositions is 4321. Table 2 below discusses in more depth the structure of this second fugue in the suite. Besides its fugal form, Dudeque also argues for a tertiary ABC structure in which each exposition marks the beginning of another section.⁵³ The use of a Picardy third towards the end of the piece can also be considered a nod to the baroque style.

⁵¹ Bach, *Partita II*, 7.

⁵² Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas No. 6*, 3.

⁵³ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 74.

Table 2: Structural Analysis of the Fugue, *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 7.⁵⁴

Section	Measures	Tonality	Structural Observations
Exposition I	1–48	D minor (until measure 13), A minor (until measure 25) E minor (until measure 37), and B minor (until measure 49).	Presentation of the subject in 4321 order and receiving a tonal answer.
Episode I	49–62	B minor	The main countersubject appears, supported by a progression in the circle of fifths and an A pedal point.
Exposition II	63–110	D minor (until measure 75), A minor (until measure 87), E minor (until measure 99), B minor (until measure 111).	Presentation of the main counter subject instead of original subject.
Episode II	111–113	B minor	Also based on material from Episode I.

⁵⁴ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 74. Table 2 provides a more detailed analysis of the fugue, using Dudeque's own analysis as a parameter and then confirmed by my own score study and additional structural observations.

Exposition III	114–135	D minor (until 126), A minor (until 129), D minor (until 136).	The main countersubject is presented in a stretto.
Coda	136–148	D minor	Slower passage ending on a Picardy third.

Yet another fugue, the fourth movement of the eighth piece is also named “Fugue” and “Conversa.” In this movement, the fugue’s subject is first presented as a theme in an introduction. Each exposition in the movement is followed by an episode that emphasizes the countersubject.⁵⁵

Table 3: Structure Analysis of the Fugue from *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 8.⁵⁶

Section	Measures	Tonality	Structural Observations
Introduction	1–6	C minor	Use of the subject as thematic material.
Exposition I	7–21	C minor	Bassoon first present the subject, receiving a tonal answer from the English horn. No defined order entrance due to the orchestration.
Episode I	23–45	F minor (until measure 37), C minor (until	A new countersubject is used.

⁵⁵ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 75.

⁵⁶ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 75. Table 3 provides a more detailed analysis of the fugue, using Dudeque’s own analysis as a parameter and then confirmed by my own score study and additional structural observations.

		measure 46).	
Exposition II	46–57	F minor	Stretto using the subject.
Episode II	58–65	C minor	Use predominantly of the countersubject.
Coda	66–70	C minor	Use of a 6 ⁺ chord for the cadence, coda functions as a balance to the form with the introduction section.

Finally, the last fugue and the last piece analyzed is the ninth piece in the *Bachianas brasileiras*'s suite. Structured just like a fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*; the final fugue is preceded by a solemn and contrasting prelude.

The prelude consists of long held notes while other sections play the melody, section by section. This last piece was originally composed for string orchestra and then rearranged for mixed choir, which probably was triggered by Villa-Lobos's efforts with his Canto Orfeônico.

Soon, the contrasting prelude is followed by a vivid fugue, dense in counterpoint, and worthy of finishing such masterwork of a suite. Villa-Lobos uses the F Dorian scale for the subject that is first played by the cellos. The violas then answer with C Aeolian, which could be considered a real answer due to its tonic-dominant relationship.

The subject is presented first by the cellos in F Dorian, which receive a modal answer by the violas in C Aeolian.⁵⁷ Villa-Lobos seems to demonstrate his closure in “looking back” by not only using heavy syncopation, even in the subject, but also an asymmetrical meter of

⁵⁷ The term “modal” answer is used because the usual “tonal” answer does not apply in this fugue.

11/8. Nonetheless, the use of counterpoint and basic conventions in the fugal form makes obvious the composer's Bachian intentions.

This last piece is also the only piece in the suite that does not possess a Brazilian title, only "Prelude" and "Fugue." Still, Villa-Lobos does not diverge from the theme, applying several aspects of Brazilian popular music, namely syncopation.

Table 4: Structure Analysis of the Fugue from *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 9.⁵⁸

Section	Measures	Tonality	Structural Observations
Exposition I	1–28	F Dorian and C Aeolian	435221 order with dense counterpoint.
Episode I	29–44	Eb Major	Change of texture, less counterpoint and more chordal.
Episode II	45–55	Eb Major	New, Chorale-like theme. Circle of fifths progression.
Episode III	56–71	Eb minor	Development of the subject with slight variations.
Exposition II	72–94	A minor	Stretto with incomplete subject.
Episode IV	82–95	C minor	Stretto on Chorale- Like theme.
Coda	95–99	C minor	Polytonal in texture.

⁵⁸ Dudeque, *Bachianas*, 76. Table 4 provides a more detailed analysis of the fugue, using Dudeque's own analysis as a parameter and then confirmed by my own score study and additional structural observations.

Conclusion

By deeply analyzing some of the pieces belonging to the *Bachianas brasileiras*'s suite, one can identify the many ways in which Villa-Lobos envisioned the Bachian-Brazilian merge of styles. His reliance on tonality and longer melodic lines, as well as his understanding of fugal form and other musical elements from the baroque period, reveals that the composer truly looked back to the classical tradition, successfully merging it with the popular Brazilian idiom.

Furthermore, even though composed before the believed conception of the suite, *Bachianas brasileiras* Nos. 2 and 4 present several common compositional techniques that are present throughout the whole suite, No. 4 in particular, leaving no doubt of its place belonging to the ambitious proposition by Villa-Lobos of composing one of the largest homages to J. S. Bach ever written.

Villa-Lobos's care in meticulously crafting such great work only serves to represent the composer's motivation for the composition in the first place: honoring a great composer whom Villa-Lobos held great appreciation and admiration, almost to a mythical level. However, much more than just a homage, Villa-Lobos's masterpiece serves as a testimony of the quality offered by non-European composers who, like Villa-Lobos and the neoclassical movement, managed to adapt European trends into an idiom proper to their nation's own rich culture.

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