

The Clarinet

by Margaret Thornhill

Choir

THE ORQUESTRA POTIGUAR DE CLARINETAS: SHARING THE MUSIC OF NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL

One of my most exciting clarinet choir discoveries of 2017 was hearing the Brazilian Orquestra Potiguar de Clarinetas (OPC) perform their first concert outside South America at ClarinetFest® 2017 in Orlando, Florida. An ensemble like no other that has been profiled in this column, this outstanding group of classically-trained clarinetists made a strategic decision in 2008 to put aside the standard clarinet choir literature in favor of the *sambas*, *choros*, *baios* and *frevos* of Northeastern Brazil. This is music for dancing, which urges you to move to its beat.

The OPC is a group of 21 musicians (including percussion) that performs standing in a semicircle with no conductor. The energy and technical precision they brought to their performance in Orlando was electrifying to the audience and the novelty of this music gained many admirers at ClarinetFest®, (including Richard Stolzman, who photobombed their souvenir picture at the venue by bowing low to them on the floor of the lobby, much to the delight of passersby).

The OPC is based in the city of Natal in the coastal state of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil – a location at the closest point in the Americas to Europe, favored

by tourists for its beauty and climate. Its name “Potiguar” comes from an indigenous Tupi nickname for people who live in the Rio Grande region (Wikipedia claims that it literally means “people who eat shrimp.”) The orchestra is coordinated by Amandy Bandeira de Araújo and João Paulo de Araújo, clarinet professors at the music school at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (Escola de Música Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte or EMUFRN), where the group is a permanent ensemble. Several members are current students at the university; others are teachers and professional performers who are graduates



Orquestra Potiguar de Clarinetas (left to right): Hudson Ribeiro, Julião Adelino Barbosa, Amandy Bandeira de Araújo, Joabe Oliveiros, Melquíades Vasconcelos, Fernanda Santos, Anderson Medeiros, Paula Araújo, Alanderson Nascimento, João Paulo Araújo, Diego José (percussion), Leander Claudino (percussion), Jonathas Marques, Antônio Wendel, Artêmio Montero, Yuri dos Santos, Joelson Joe, Jonathan Costa da Silva, Itagam Ribeiro Rodrigues



Orquestra Potiguar de Clarinetas at ClarinetFest® 2017, with Richard Stolzman (foreground)

of the UFRN or other universities and conservatories in the region. The group has extensive performance experience beyond the university at concert venues and international festivals throughout Brazil, but the trip to Orlando was their first venture to another continent.

After the concert in Orlando, I spoke with Hudson Ribeiro, a teacher and soloist who is a first clarinetist and concertmaster with the group, and Julião Adelino Barbosa, another first clarinetist who is their official composer. The decision to travel overseas with a large group and their instruments was a challenge. The university provided significant help in the form of airline ticket purchases, but the group also solicited donations, raised money from benefit concerts, and ultimately collected \$10,000 to cover basic expenses. “We shared resources and helped each other out,” said Ribeiro. The group was committed to making sure all its members could travel.

Ribeiro and Barbosa also gave insight into the role this ensemble plays in the lives of its members. In Brazil, as elsewhere, there are simply not enough

orchestral jobs to go around for the many highly accomplished conservatory graduates. The clarinet “orchestra,” with its meticulous performance standards and busy concert schedule, often fills that role for the excellent clarinetists who play in it. Traveling to the United States for ClarinetFest® was also a transformative experience for many of the younger players who had never traveled outside Brazil. Since their trip to ClarinetFest® 2017, the orchestra has increased its prestige within their home state, and gained many more requests to play in different places in Brazil. Their local audiences are intensely proud of the OPC’s travel to the USA to share the music of Northeastern Brazil.

“Our experience at ClarinetFest® was amazing!” said Bandeira de Araújo, who lived in the United States for some years while pursuing his D.M.A. in performance with professor Ray McClellan at the University of Georgia, and an M.M. at the University of South Carolina with Joseph Eller:

We have Brazilian clarinet conventions, but they are much

smaller. The opportunity to choose from many different performances and watch recitals all day was incredible. It was a great experience for us to share our music with an enthusiastic audience and receive feedback from various artists, and to hear important names of the clarinet world and other clarinet choirs.

Members of the group also appreciated the opportunity to visit vendors to try different instruments and shop for accessories at favorable prices.

Several members of the OPC play clarinets made by the Brazilian firm of Devon and Burgani, including Ribeiro, who is one of their sponsored artists and was helping in their display booth in Orlando. I was curious to see how these clarinets contributed to the well-matched tone of the OPC and found them to sound smooth and mellow with excellent intonation in both grenadilla and the unstained brown *Aroeira* wood (*Astronium fraxinifolium*) that is native to central Brazil.

Many of the current professional members of the OPC are music educators,

and the orchestra is active in pedagogical concert outreach including a partnership with the city of Natal on a project called “Music for All – Formation of Audiences in Music in the city of Natal and Metropolitan Region,” which presents informational concerts for people of all ages at public schools and NGOs. The group also has a mission (as per their website) of “improving social reality, bringing instrumental music to people who otherwise would not have access to it.”

For readers eager to try this music, award-winning composer Barbosa has a personal website which offers many of his original works and arrangements in digital format at very reasonable prices. Among these are his original works *Riqueza Nordestina (Riches of Northeastern Brazil)*, a suite without percussion which was a submission to the 2017 ICA Clarinet Choir Composition Competition, and *Emboscada (Ambush)*, a virtuosic *frevo* which was a favorite at OPC’s Orlando

performance, along with instrumental arrangements of popular Brazilian songs such as *Feira de Mangaio (Mangaio Fair)*, a *baião* by composers Sivuca and Glorinha Gadelha; and *Chiclete con Banana (Chewing Gum and Banana)*, a *samba* by Gordurinha which was originally popularized by the singer Jackson do Pandeiro. Barbosa’s website (in Portuguese) is a little difficult to locate in a Google search: go to <https://juliaobarbosa.wixsite.com> and then choose “Criacoes Musicais” (Musical Creations) and “Para Clarinetas” (For Clarinets) to view the compositions.

“All of this music really needs to be performed with the percussion parts,” Barbosa rightly insists. Specific percussion instruments are notated in the score of each piece, along with performance suggestions for those unfamiliar with folk instruments such as *pandeiro*. These intensely idiomatic orchestrations also include parts for contrabass clarinet and alto clarinet, instruments which are rare

in Brazil and which are not represented in the OPC (a fact which may be of interest to other groups which do not have access to contrabass clarinet.)

Future projects of the OPC include producing a CD of their signature repertoire, commissioning music from different Brazilian composers, and fundraising toward the possibility of going to Belgium for ClarinetFest® 2018. *Boa sorte, OPC!* ❖

ABOUT THE WRITER



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her clarinet choir news or comments via her website: www.margarethornhill.com

ICA ANNOUNCEMENT

2018 Orchestral Audition Competition

Coordinator: Scot Humes – humes@ulm.edu

Eligibility: The competition is open to clarinetists of all ages who are not employed full-time as salaried members of a professional symphony orchestra.

Deadline: Saturday, March 31, 2018.

Repertoire (visit www.clarinet.org for specific audition requirements):

Solo:

Mozart: *Concerto, K. 622, Movement I, exposition, unaccompanied*

First Clarinet Excerpts:

Beethoven: *Symphony No. 4 – Mvt. II, mm.10-17 and mm. 81-89;*

Mvt. IV, mm.297-302

Prokofiev: *Peter and the Wolf – rehearsal [20] (Nervoso) until [21]*

Rachmaninoff: *Symphony No. 2 – Mvt. III, beginning to [47]*

Rimsky-Korsakov: *Scheherazade – Mvt. II, cadenzas from [F] to [G];*

Mvt. III, opening until [A]; Mvt. IV, [I] to [K]

Bass Clarinet Excerpts

Grofé: *Grand Canyon Suite – “On The Trail,” rehearsal [2] until one measure after [3]*

Shostakovich: *Violin Concerto #1 – Mvt. II, [23] until four measures before [25]*

Stravinsky: *Rite of Spring – [5] until four measures after [6]; [11] to [12]; and one measure before [141] to [142]*

Tchaikovsky: *The Nutcracker – No. 4. “Scène Dansante,” [33] to [34]*

Prizes:

First Prize – \$1000 USD and a professional level mouthpiece to be announced
Second Prize – \$500 USD and a professional level mouthpiece to be announced

Visit www.clarinet.org for full competition rules and application details.