

The Use of Roving Harmonies in Leopoldo Miguéz's Music

Thematic Area: Reception and Impact of European and North-American music theories in Latin America

Leopoldo Miguéz (1850-1902) was a vigorous proponent and pioneer of absolute music in the German romantic tradition in the late nineteenth-century in his country. Brazil's art music is normally recognized by vibrant and intense rhythmic textures and colourful modal or polytonal ambiances, characteristics solidly established around 1910 by nationalist composers such as Lorenzo Fernandez, Villa-Lobos, and Camargo Guarnieri, among others. However, a short musical romantic period precedes this, marked by a change in aesthetic orientation due to a profound political shift in the country. In 1889, 67 years of monarchy were interrupted by the proclamation of the republic. The new government's positivist project for the modernization of Brazil was implemented in different areas. In the case of music production and instruction, this involved an aesthetic shift, moving away from the Italian opera associated with the old order, toward German instrumental genres (Andrade 2013). Miguéz is a perfect example of a composer in accordance with these new times. He wrote the first Brazilian symphony, symphonic poem, and violin sonata, among many other instrumental pieces whose main common characteristic was a somewhat "German" accent both in character and structure.

Through an in-depth systematic analysis of some of Miguéz's compositions, I have been aiming to understand his style. I have identified some procedures that can be considered his stylistic traits. One of these is the use of *roving harmonies* (RH). Schoenberg defines this concept as progressions formed mostly by *vagrant chords* (i.e., of multiple meanings) that lack a clear definition of tonal reference. I will provide some illustration, as that presented in Example 1, extracted from Schoenberg's *Structural Functions of Harmony* (1969).

Miguéz typically employs RH progressions in transitional or elaborative passages, with the clear function of bridging remote keys and blurring the sections. Excerpts from four roving passages used in his works are presented and analyzed in this study: (1) in the development of the violin sonata op. 14's first movement [Example 2]; (2) introducing the retransition at the end of the development in the piano piece *Allegro Appassionato* op. 11 [Example 3]; (3) bridging subsections b and a' in the recapitulation of section A in the

Nocturne op. 10; and (4) in the retransition to the recapitulation in the main section in the Nocturne op. 20/I. [Example 4]. These show how he mastered the technique and incorporated it into his compositions. Another remarkable recurrent element in Miguéz's use of RH concerns voice leading. The voices of the vagrant chords of his progressions (having, mostly, major-seventh and diminished-seventh qualities) are preferentially connected by semitonal motions, evidenced in the examples by original analytical voice-leading graphs [see Example 4.c].

Miguéz advanced contemporary aspirations toward modernization, which is quite remarkable considering his lack of formal training, and the absence of local models in Brazil at the time. Maybe Miguéz's music is at risk of being particularly overlooked, even though there have recently been quite a few studies on Alberto Nepomuceno works, Miguéz's contemporary who shares a similar musical aesthetic (see Dudeque 2005; Coelho de Sousa 2021). This is because this period lies "in between" the old traditions (marked by Baroque and Classical influences) and the later, distinctively nationalist aesthetic, both more analytically studied by Brazilian academy (Volpe 2000, 36). This present study shows how Miguéz, while living and working mostly in Rio de Janeiro, was able to apply, this compositional procedure and technique that was not in common use in Brazil, most likely internalized through careful analysis of scores, perfectly. Finally, this study broadens discourses on nineteenth-century practices beyond the European repertoires that to-date have been the locus of attention.

Keywords: Leopoldo Miguéz. Brazilian Romanticism. Roving harmonies. Parsimonious voice leading. German influence.