Heitor Villa-Lobos's Los Angeles Connection
A Centennial Tribute*

FIRST LOS ANGELES ENCOUNTERS

On Sunday afternoon, November 26, 1944, at Los Angeles's Philharmonic Auditorium (Fifth and Olive) Villa-Lobos conducted his first concert in the United States. The orchestra, according to *The New Grove Dictionary*, xix, 764, was the "Jenson SO." Instead, however, the orchestra was the Werner Janssen Symphony.

The article on Werner Janssen (*b* New York, June 1, 1899) in the same dictionary (ix, 503) states that he founded the "Janssen SO of Los Angeles . . . for the performance of new works" in 1940. Again, a correction is needed. The first Werner Janssen concert in Los Angeles took place not in 1940 but at the Wilshire-Ebell Theatre (Eighth and Lucerne), Sunday, January 26, 1941. The program consisted of Haydn, Mozart, Honegger, Samuel Barlow's overture to *Mon Ami Pierrot*,[1] and an overture by Leone Sinigaglia. Comprising 36 to 40 studio musicians, and with Louis Kaufman as concertmaster, the orchestra played three concerts in its first season, January 26, February 16, and March 16. Its sponsor was the Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce Music Foundation.[2] During the second season—Eudice Shapiro now replacing Kaufman as concertmaster—the orchestra played four evening concerts, October 30, November 27, January 15, and February 19, complemented by four morning concerts November 29, December 27, January 17, and February 21 (again at the Wilshire-Ebell).[3]

During the opening concert of the second season, Thursday evening, October 30, Janssen introduced Los Angeles audiences to "two delightful fragments by Villa-Lobos."[4] In her two-column review published in the *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1941 (Part II, page 11), Isabel Morse Jones uttered these very favorable judgments:

> The Werner Janssen Orchestra concert in the Ebell Theater last night had the ear-marks of youth, of enthusiasm for well-played music chosen with care, and of real success. The audience was almost capacity and the younger generation in evidence. Bartlett and Robertson, duo-pianists, were soloists.

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*Born at Rio de Janeiro March 5, 1887; died there November 17, 1959.

[1] *Mon ami Pierrot*, with libretto by Sacha Guitry "on the life of Lully," premiered at the Opéra Comique, Paris, January 11, 1935.

[2] "The Werner Janssen Concerts," *Pacific Coast Musician*, xxx/2 (January 18, 1941), p. 6. Admission fees for the three Sunday evening concerts ranged from $1.50 to 50¢ per event. Janssen installed an acoustic shell. The February 15, 1941, issue of *Pacific Coast Musician*, p. 6, carried an article headed "Janssen 'Symphoshell' Sought by Studios."

[3] "Janssen Orchestra Expands Schedule," *Pacific Coast Musician*, xxx/19 (October 4, 1941), p. 7. This season the orchestra also gave programs at Pasadena and Santa Barbara.

[4] Categorized thus in *Pacific Coast Musician*'s review of the event (xxx/22, November 15, p. 8), which characterized it as "Altogether a concert of much charm played with rare artistry." J. S. Bach's concerto for two claviers, played by Bartlett and Robertson, a Haydn Symphony in D (Breitkopt & Härtel, No. 57), and Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of Animals* filled out the program.

Janssen conducted the orchestra of approximately 45 with additions and subtractions for certain numbers. The personnel is not quite the same as last year. There is a new concertmaster, Eudice Shapiro, and a new first cellist, Cyrus Bernard, both of whom had solos during the evening, acquitting themselves admirably.

The excerpts from Villa-Lobos's "Bachianas Brasileras, No. 2," were utterly delightful. This is contemporary music that an organization such as Janssen's can get teeth into. The playing was individual and full of character. Villa-Lobos described the excerpts as "Aria on a song of our country [= *O Canto da nossa terra*] and "Tocata, a Little Train from Caipira" [= *O Trenzinho do Caipira*]. It has nothing to do with Bach except that it is straightforward music with clear melodies and savors of the soil which bore the composer. It is naive but not childish. There is sincerity in the folk themes and richness in the use of instruments.

The entire "Bachianas" are in order after the success of these excerpts. Both the first cellist and concertmaster played solos and were thanked for them. Miss Shapiro, a product of Curtis Institute, is an accurate player with a small tone and considerable style. Bernard has a fine, large tone.

The other contemporary composers were William Grant Still and William Walton. Still's contribution was "Old California," which seemed an entertaining ten minutes of theater music on first hearing.

Given encouragement such as this to program Villa-Lobos's works, Janssen's orchestra—now expanded to eighty players—proved the ideal exponent of his major works given their first hearing in the United States at the concert that he conducted in Los Angeles's Philharmonic Auditorium Sunday afternoon, November 26, 1944. Three organizations not only sponsored the program but also underwrote his trip to Los Angeles: the Southern California Council of Inter-American Affairs, the music section of the Motion Picture Academy, and Occidental College. An announcement in the *Pacific Coast Musician*, appearing in the November 18, 1944, issue (XXXIII/22, page 9), contained this information:

The distinguished South American's trip to Los Angeles will be his first to the United States, and his music for the Janssen program will be heard for the first time in this country. Program is as follows: *Sinfonia, No. 2* (*Ascenção*) [1917]; *Naufrágio de Kleônicos; Caixinha de Boas-Festas* (Surprise Package); and *Chôros, No. 9*.[5] The exuberant musician has been described as "bustling, tall-talking, with an inexhaustible energy which feeds on a mere four hours of sleep each night."

However, as actually given, the hour-long symphony comprised the entire first half, and the second had to be abbreviated with *Chôros, No. 6* and *Rudepoema* replacing the three others mentioned in the initial announcements. Concerning the *Symphony, No. 2*, Ross Vernon Steele wrote as follows in his review published in *Pacific Coast Musician*, December 2, 1944 (XXXIII/23), pages 8–9: "The program opened with his Symphony No. 2 in B-minor. The symphony is remarkably sonorous and 'orthodox.' True, it was composed in 1917—when he was first making his way among composers. But it surprised by its orthodoxy." According to Steele, Villa-Lobos already showed in it his "complete command of his orchestra, and he contrives a score and orchestration which is important music." Commenting on the second half, Steele emphasized that the *Chôros, No. 6* was at last "more like what we have come to expect from the South American."

Much less sniffing than Steele's comments was the review in the *Los Angeles Times* of November 27, 1944 (Part I, page 9)—again by Isabel Morse Jones. Steele had used the word "important" three times in his review. But she reacted much more vividly to the "importance" of the concert in her two columns headed "Music Event Spotlights Villa-Lobos."

Heitor Villa-Lobos, Brazil's best known composer and an emissary laden with the gift of genius, conducted the Werner Janssen Orchestra in a program of three orchestra works in the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium yesterday afternoon. It was an occasion of major importance, the initial visit of the famous South American and the first time "Symphony, No. 2," "Chôros, No. 6," and "Rudepoema" for orchestra, had been heard in North America.

To have these numbers played by 80 musicians inured to complexities by familiarity with contemporary music directed by Janssen and having film studio experience under all kinds of conductors and conditions was a break for Villa-Lobos and for the large audience.

Los Angeles welcomed the visitor warmly through the S.C. Council of Inter-American Affairs, the music section, Motion Picture Academy, Occidental College and many Latin-American citizens.

The concert began with the anthems of the two countries, conducted by Villa-Lobos.

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[5] *Naufrágio*, symphonic poem lasting 18 minutes [1916]; *Caixinha*, 30 minutes, premiered at Rio de Janeiro December 8, 1932; and *Chôros, No. 9*, lasting 30 minutes [1929], premiered at Rio de Janeiro July 15, 1942, planned for the Philharmonic program, were the items that because of their length had to be replaced with *Chôros, No. 6*, and the orchestrated *Rudepoema*.

The "Ascension" Symphony, an hour in length, came as a surprise to most listeners who had known the essentially Brazilian compositions of this self-taught master. There are five symphonies and five operas to his credit but these forms are not characteristic of Villa-Lobos for he has written more than 1400 works. He is prodigal with his musical ideas, pouring them forth in a torrent, until there is the immensity of a sea of sound, overwhelming and overpowering.

The surprise is in the orchestration. It is French-impressionistic. Some of the instruments are strange but these are scarcely heard unless he makes a place for the flutes and whistles, the co-co and the cuica (lion's roar) to sing their individual songs.

Horns and trombones, horns and basses, horns and seven tympani combine in various duos but the golden sheen of horns is never out of vision. The symphony has four movements but there is nothing rigid in its structure. The first is an allegro, the second a similar allegretto, the third an andante that seemed to want to be allegretto but the composer would not allow it, and then came another brilliant allegro that made one think of tropical birds.

The viola was used as most composers use the violin and the cellos had strong passages that could have been found in Bach but were not. Villa-Lobos writes in a state of musical compulsion that comes from within. He has combined the native (Indian, Negro, and Portuguese) elements and the influences he has absorbed, under protest perhaps, from his constant study, have resulted in music that is unique and his own.

The "Chôros" is an ensemble of rural singers and instrumentalists. "Chôros, No. 6" was full of popular song, even Carmen Miranda's type of Brazilian melody. It had notched bamboo sticks, two special vellum box-drums (made for him at Universal), hollow barrels, seven kettledrums with percussionists led by Miss Nancy Moyer, ace tympanist, and a saxophone solo so sweet that it would have melted the heart of the loftiest.

"The Rude Poem," briefed by the composer into one word, "Rudepoema," has become an upheaval of the whole wide earth. The instrumentation is extremely rich and varied, with two saxophones, two harps, four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, tam-tam, cachambu [caxambú], tambors of many kinds, piano, celesta, strings and so forth.

The tempo is extremely varied and the tone-texture changes rapidly from a velvet depth to the harshest dissonance but it is all expressive of a man and a people. Villa-Lobos has gone to the source of all inspiration for his ideas. He is a nature-worshiper—the nature of man and birds, races and jungle beasts. He has brought these things to the city. Los Angeles is proud to be the first to receive him.

As prelude to his 1944 Los Angeles apotheosis, Occidental College awarded Villa-Lobos an honorary LL.D. at a ceremony Tuesday evening, November 21, in Thorne Hall. President Remsen Bird conferred the degree, Occidental music professor Walter Hartley read the eulogy, and John Anson Ford delivered the address of welcome on behalf of the sponsoring Southern California Council of International Affairs.[6] To round off the ceremony with music, the London String Quartet played Villa-Lobos's *Quatuor Troisième* (1916) and the Occidental Women's Glee directed by Howard Swan sang his *Canção de Saudade* (1933).

Having represented Brazilian music so notably in November, Villa-Lobos thereby broke the ice for other Brazilians to follow during that same concert season. In a review of the Philharmonic pair of December 14–15, published in *Pacific Coast Musician*, XXXIV/1 (January 6, 1945), page 9, Ross Vernon Steele gave Camargo Guarnieri (*b* Tiété, São Paulo, February 1, 1907) this salute:

> The remaining orchestral number[7] was a suite of Brazilian dances by Guarnieri, having its first hearing in Los Angeles. The Brazilian composer, unlike many of his contemporaries, has the happy faculty of writing music in the contemporary mode, but which makes sense. His melodies go somewhere and his dissonances mean something. Mr. Guarnieri appears to be a young composer worth watching.

None other than Otto Klemperer conducted the Philharmonic pair February 8 and 9 (reviewed in *Pacific Coast Musician*, XXXIV/4 [February 17, 1945], page 6) that included in addition to Schoenberg's *Second Chamber Symphony*, Op. 38a (1906–16; 1939)[8] and Beethoven's Fifth, Brazilian pianist Bernardo Segall's first West Coast performances of Francisco Mignone's *Brazilian Fantasy, No. 1*, for

[6] "Occidental Honors for Villa-Lobos," *Pacific Coast Musician*, XXXIII/22 (November 16, 1944), p. 9.

[7] The rest of the program comprised Bach's Brandenburg Concerto, No. 3; Beethoven's Symphony, No. 7; and Wieniawski's Concerto, No. 2, played by youthful violinist Saundra Berkova. Relying on Charles Seeger, Bruno David Ussher included such data as the following in his Program Notes (*Symphony Magazine*, December 14–15), pp. 22–24: "The *Three Brazilian Dances* given their first performance in Los Angeles at these concerts, had their North American premiere March 23, 1944, at Philadelphia. Reviewers confirmed him as the outstanding follower of Villa-Lobos. . . . His father (of Sicilian birth) was his first music teacher. His mother is of old Brazilian lineage."

[8] Premiered at New York December 15, 1940. Klemperer conducted these West Coast first performances "in observance of the composer's seventieth birthday."

piano and orchestra (1931).[9] The other leading Latin American personality much on display (apart from Villa-Lobos) during the same 1944–1945 Los Angeles concert season was Carlos Chávez.[10]

MAGDALENA

Villa-Lobos's first opera mounted in the United States, *Magdalena*, awaited July 26, 1948, for its world première. Given at Los Angeles's Philharmonic Auditorium—the scene of his United States first appearance as composer-conductor on November 26, 1944—the première of *Magdalena* far outdistanced the 1944 event in Los Angeles community interest. Albert Goldberg[11] discussed the upcoming world première in a lengthy article published in the *Los Angeles Times* of July 25, 1948, Part III, pages 1 and 6. Headed "'Magdalena' Will Defy Light Opera Precedents, Old Rules Discarded by Producers of Work Composed by Famed Brazilian," Goldberg's article accompanied a drawing by Times Staff Artist Howard Petersen showing, at left, Irra Petina as Parisian adventuress, feeding delicacies to conquistador gourmet Hugo Haas, against a background of native pantry. In the center of the drawing, the unconverted bus driver, John Raitt (of *Oklahoma!* fame), pleads with the Christian convert, Dorothy Sarnoff, for her affections.[12] At their right, one of choreographer Jack Cole's breech-clad dancers sways with a tree that sings.

Goldberg's article remains informative enough to merit extensive quotation.

> Practically everything will be different about "Magdalena," the new musical which will be given its world premiere by the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera in Philharmonic Auditorium tomorrow night. All the standard formulas are going to be conspicuous by their absence.

[9]Segall also played Liszt's *To[d]tentanz* at the same concert. Steele praised Segall's virtuosity but liked neither the Liszt nor Mignone items, as music. For Bruno David Ussher's Program Notes, quoting Charles Seeger's comments on Mignone, see Philharmonic Orchestra of Los Angeles, *Symphony Magazine*, February 8–9, 1945, pp. 16–17, 20.

[10]Steele published a full-page rhapsody on Chávez's greatness (as both a conductor and composer) in *Pacific Coast Musician*, XXXIV/2 (January 20, 1945), p. 6. Steele reviewed the Philharmonic pair of January 11 and 12 conducted by Chávez that included his *Suite from "H.P."* in the same issue at page 10. Still further emphasizing Latin America, the same issue, p. 5, included Everett Helm's "Hail Colombia!" telling of Cali's musical preeminence.

[11]Born at Shenandoah, Iowa, June 2, 1898, Albert Goldberg continued as *Los Angeles Times* music critic from 1947 until succeeded by Martin Bernheimer in 1965—thereafter, however, continuing to write criticisms for the *Times* to 1987.

[12]Concerning Irra Petina (*b* Petrograd, Russia, April 18, 1914) who sang the role of Teresa; John Raitt (*b* Santa Ana, California, January 29, 1917) who sang the part of Pedro; and Dorothy Sarnoff (*b* New York City, May 25, 1919) who took the part of Maria, see *Notable Names in the American Theatre* (Clifton, New Jersey: James T. White & Co., 1976), pp. 1043–1044, 1064–1065, and 1106.

Magdalena cast, left to right: Irra Petina (Parisian adventuress), Hugo Hass (conquistador gourmet), John Raitt (bus driver), Dorothy Sarnoff (Christian convert), one of the dancers. —*L.A. Times* artist Howard Petersen.

It will have the first light opera score ever to be penned by Heitor Villa-Lobos, distinguished Brazilian composer, one of the most esteemed figures in contemporary music. It will have for its theme a subject hitherto reserved only for the most solemn treatment—the conflict between paganism and Christianity.

Its locale will alternate between the extremes of gay Paris and the primitive Magdalena River jungle of Colombia. Its dances will be neither of the Russian ballet nor the Agnes De Mille school, but will be Jack Cole's version of native folklore, based upon strange and intricate rhythms. Most amazing of all, it will have a cast each member of which bubbles with enthusiasm over what he or she considers the fattest part ever written.

"There is no star," says John Raitt. "Every role is a stellar part. I have as juicy a role as those I had in 'Oklahoma!' and 'Carousel.'"

"I get to sing, dance, and act," chips in Dorothy Sarnoff, who knows her way around the grand as well as the light opera stage. "What more can you ask for?"

"I am a toughee from Paree," rejoices Irra Petina, the Russian girl who stopped off in Philadelphia on her way from China to Paris, unexpectedly won a scholarship at Curtis Institute and then fell headlong into a career at the Metropolitan Opera. "I also am the best cook in Europe—I, who can't even get my own breakfast. I had to ask Johnny Raitt what it means to baste."

"Me? I am what you call it—a heel—with the biggest stomach in Europe or South America," says Hugo Haas, who, as the conquistador gourmet, suffers a fate undreamed of even by the most lurid of previous opera librettists (boiling in oil was one of their milder inventions)—that of literally being fed to death by Miss Petina.

Robert Wright and George Forrest[13] wrote the lyrics and made the adaptations. These are the youthful gentlemen who applied to a Broadway producer to write the scripts, only to have him then and there pick up the telephone and call the front office of Metro to verify their statement that they had already written 27 movies.

"I thought you were phonies," he afterward apologized, "you look too young." Now Wright and Forrest no longer have to explain themselves to producers—it was they who concocted the super-successful "Song of Norway."

"It was wonderful working with Villa-Lobos," say Wright and Forrest. "He was always adaptable. He fell right in with our plans. We only had to suggest the pattern of the music we wanted to fit the book by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan and Homer Curran, and he often came through with original suggestions of his own."

Lest anyone get the impression that "Magdalena" may be merely another arrangement of a famous composer's music, Wright and Forrest hasten to assert that every note of the score is original and exactly as Villa-Lobos wrote it. He has even written the complete orchestration—ordinarily not a task undertaken by light opera composers of the conventional stripe.

Prominent in the instrumentation will be a large array of native percussion instruments, some of which have been sent on from Brazil by the composer, and others of which have been designed from his drawings and descriptions.

There are other interesting odds and ends of facts about "Magdalena." When Villa-Lobos accepted Edwin Lester's[14] commission to write it he said he would do it for a birthday gift to his wife. He did not know then that the premiere performance would actually fall on her birthday tomorrow.

John Raitt, who made his big-time debut as Curly in "Oklahoma," is going to feel perfectly at home in "Magdalena." He plays the part of a bus driver, and his cherished "gasolina" comes right on the stage with him—the jungle counterpart of Curly's surrey with the fringe on top.

Another mechanical contrivance, a pianola, plays an important part in the show. The big dance scene of the score is done to music supplied by a battered player piano.

Whatever else "Magdalena" may be, it is certainly going to be different.

Albert Goldberg's review of the opening night performance occupies four columns on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*, Part II, July 27, 1948. The historic importance of the occasion justifies quoting lengthy excerpts.

Boasting one of the most glittering and expensive productions of recent stage history, "Magdalena," the new operetta with music by the Brazilian composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos, had its world premiere in a Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Association offering in Philharmonic Auditorium last night. The audience was one of the most brilliant that a celebrity-inhabited city could assemble, and interest and excitement ran high as the new work unfolded.

"Magdalena" is difficult to classify. Viewed from one angle it becomes grand light opera; from another, light grand opera. It aspires to follow in the path of "Show Boat," "Oklahoma!" and "Carousel" in establishing a more serious blend of drama with music.

As a sheer musical venture it seemed to be an undoubted success with the opening night audience. Villa-Lobos has written a fascinating score that, like the play

[13]Concerning Robert Wright and George Forrest, see *Notable Names*, pp. 1244 and 737–738.

[14]Biography in *Notable Names*, p. 918. Lester, founder of the San Francisco Civic Light Opera Association in 1937 and of the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Association in 1938, served as managing director of both until retirement (aged 81) after the 1976 season.

it decorates, moves between the serious and the lighthearted dextrously.

Some of the music, like "Teru, Teru," "The Emerald," the chafing dish song, "Food for Thought," "The Singing Tree" and numerous other numbers, has an original and exotic tunefulness and a rhythmic complexity that is immediately ingratiating.

Other passages, that delve into such modern devices as polytonality are no less attractive but are apt to leave an operetta audience wondering just where it is. Certainly from a musical point of view, the score is one of the most interesting experiments the modern theater has attempted.

But like many another operetta, the book of "Magdalena" is its greatest weakness. It seeks to cross too many bridges at once. Either of its main themes, the conflict between the precepts of Christianity and the sensuality of paganism, and the revolt of workers against exploitation and oppression, is a large subject in itself. . . .

But if you are not too critical in such basic matters the show holds the diversion of brilliant spectacle, novel and gorgeous scenic effects by Howard Bay, gay costumes by Sharaff and brilliant singing by the entire cast.

The singers all have grateful and difficult chores to perform and they acquit themselves with a display of vocal prowess that would shame many a conventional grand opera performance. John Raitt is likable and vocally powerful as the pagan bus driver who blames the new religion for the difficulties of his people. Miss Sarnoff sings like the real prima donna she is and gives a fiery impersonation of the Indian princess. Miss Petina sings her complex and difficult role with dazzling aplomb.

Gerhard Pechner [1903–1969], the Metropolitan Opera's Indispensable Beckmesser in "Die Meistersinger," also gives a sympathetic portrayal of the missionary priest. Likewise decidedly on the credit side is Henry Reese as an Indian boy.

Hugo Haas is much too petulant and easygoing to be a convincing dictator. Jack Cole's dances are vivid but hardly convincing in authenticity; the choral and orchestral work, with Arthur Kay conducting, are both uncommonly expert. Frederick Hazlitt Brennan and Homer Curran wrote the book and the good lyrics are by Robert Wright and George Forrest.

The *New York Times* report of the Los Angeles première appeared in the July 28, 1948, issue (27:2). Under the heading, " 'Magdalena' Makes Bow in Los Angeles," the reporter classed it as "one of the most pretentious theatrical undertakings in many months," and placed the production costs at $300,000. Calling the work an operetta, the *New York Times* placed its action in the year 1912. In that year, the leader of the Muzos tribe inhabiting the upper reaches of the Magdalena River (Dorothy Sarnoff) sees no alternative to the continuing rule of a dictator (Hugo Haas). But she is not enamored of him. Instead, she seeks to proselytize Pedro, a wayward bus driver (John Raitt), by whom she is being wooed. A "miracle" convinces him that he should return a stolen madonna. However, his doing so does not prevent his bus from being blown up.

After Los Angeles, *Magdalena* opened Monday night, August 16, for a three-week run at San Francisco's Curran Theater. A three-column review by John Hobart, "A Spectacular, Successful Experiment, 'Magdalena' Is Exciting Theater," appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of August 18, 1948 (9:1–3). In it, he called *Magdalena* a work of "unrelieved magnificence, the daring of which can hardly be underestimated," and categorized the score as "opulent and luxuriant as the Colombian jungle itself." For Hobart, "Villa-Lobos's music for 'Magdalena' is the most fascinating aspect of a fascinating show." To conclude, Hobart decreed *Magdalena* to be "a triumph for West Coast producers [Homer Curran and Los Angeles Civic Light Opera], and if the New Yorkers do not like it when it reaches Broadway next month, it will be the New Yorkers' loss."

Opening September 20, 1948, at Billy Rose's Ziegfeld Theater, for a Broadway engagement lasting through 88 performances,[15] *Magdalena* encountered serious opposition from Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times* drama critic, 1925–1960 (September 21, 31:2–3). What he most decried was the book, which for him belonged to the bygone epoch of Gilbert and Sullivan—or, at best, to that of Sigmund Romberg's *The Student Prince* (1924). He did concede the excellence of certain musical numbers.

It includes a fine meditative poem about a jungle river and several ruefully beautiful religious songs, written for several voices and chorus. It also includes a pleasant Spanish waltz and an amazingly orchestrated burlesque of a broken-down piano. Disentangled from the appalling libretto, and lyrics of "Magdalena," the score might be stimulating, especially since the orchestrations are unhackneyed and an accomplished singing actress, like Irra Petina, can give her numbers brilliance and eloquence.

[15]Ken Bloom, *American Song, The Complete Musical Theatre Companion* (New York/Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1985), I, 438–439 (item 1765).

To counteract Brooks Atkinson's extremely destructive review, the producers of *Magdalena* argued their cause with favorable judgments excerpted from reviews appearing in other New York newspapers: *News* (John Chapman, "A Bold, Fascinating, Dazzling Musical!"), *Journal American* (Robert Garland: "A Musical in a Million!"), *World-Telegram* (William Hawkins, "An All-Around Hit!"). According to Louis Biancolli, music critic for the *World-Telegram*:

> The score of Villa-Lobos's "Magdalena" is one of the most vital and refreshing to hit the Broadway market in years. One might call it the Brazilian "Oklahoma" . . . studded with a whole galaxy of tunes. The ingenuity is breath-taking . . . great art and great fun.[16]

Evidently somewhat repentant for his scathing review, Brooks Atkinson did himself return to *Magdalena* with a few kindlier remarks in the September 26, 1948, issue (II, 1:1). In this same issue, Howard Taubman wrote as follows concerning the music (II, 7:1-3):

> The music of "Magdalena" is unquestionably one of the most complex and fanciful a Broadway show has ever had. It is a rare thing for so brilliant and imaginative a craftsman to be called upon to do the whole score for a Broadway show. And Villa-Lobos has written with a subtlety and variety—for principals, chorus and orchestra—almost unparalleled on a Broadway stage.
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> His restless imagination evidently would not permit him to turn out just a few tunes. Even in the songs that were meant to be the equivalent of the hit tunes of the average presentation, he could not resist the temptation to write with freshness and boldness in the sketching of a melodic line. His harmonies and rhythms have not only the exotic flavor of South America but the personal profile of a composer of originality.
>
> There are many delightful things in this score. In "The Emerald" Villa-Lobos has written a love song of haunting beauty that avoids the clichés of the Broadway theatre. In "Food for Thought," which serves as a tour de force for Irra Petina, a fine singing comedienne, the composer proves that he can write with wit. One had the feeling that in this number Villa-Lobos was also doing a take-off on the "Habanera" in "Carmen."
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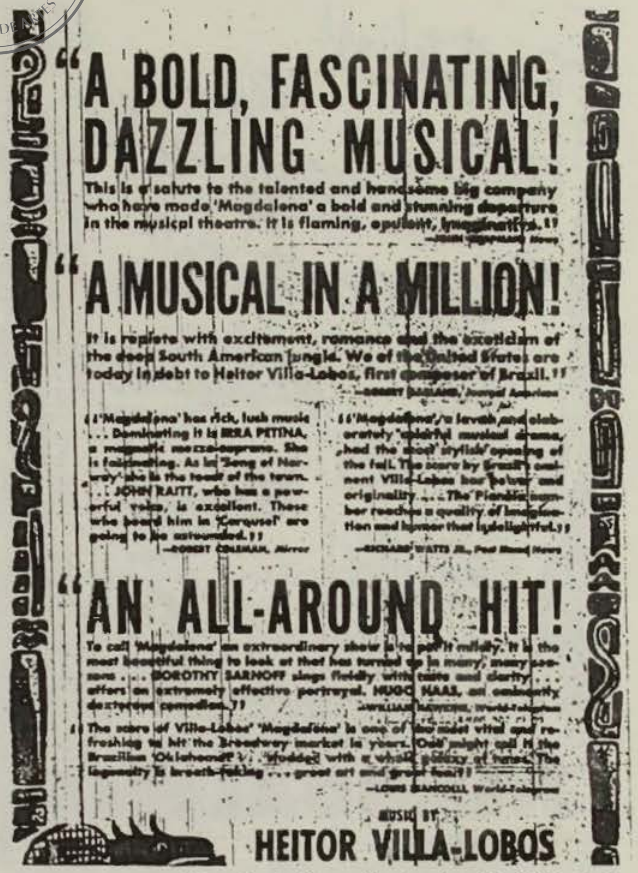
> There is a fiesta for which Villa-Lobos has written music of exotic rhythms and flaming colors. He has created striking effects with his contrapuntal writing for chorus and he has used the orchestra creatively. The gem



—*New York Times*, September 26, 1948, II, 2.

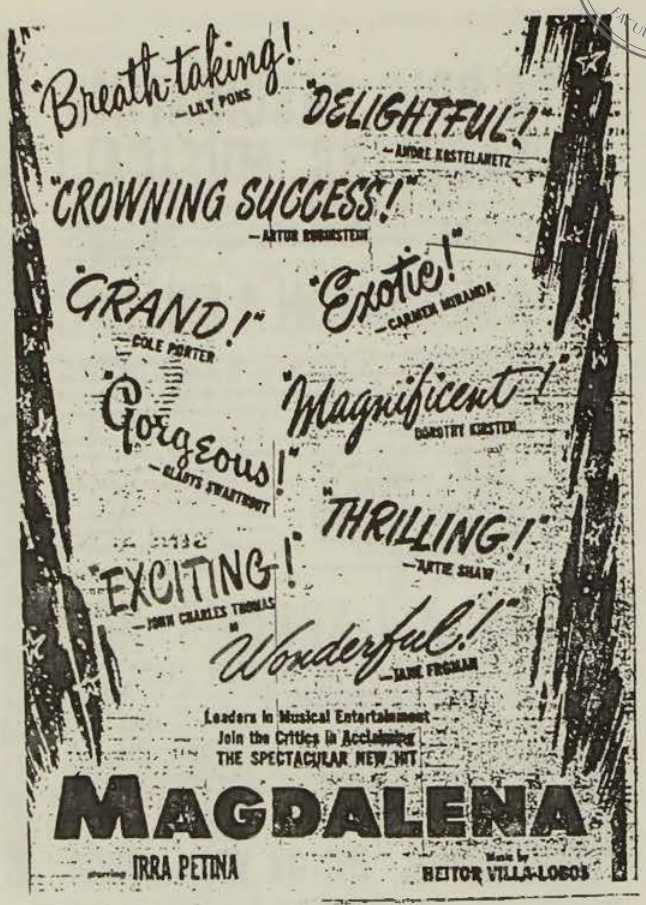
of the score is "The Broken Pianolita," where he has contrasted and intertwined a moony, sentimental tune sung by an old man and the brazen, angular and strident beat of an old piano-player that runs as fitfully as a jalopy.

And yet the music does not carry the show. The truth is that the music seldom will in the theatre. No matter how good the music there must be a story of some credibility or imagination to make it go.

By October 10, a whole cohort of musicians had come to the defense of *Magdalena* with a barrage of adjectives volleyed in the *New York Times* advertisement (II, 1), that classed it thus: "Breathtaking" (Lily Pons), "Delightful" (André Kostelanetz), "Crowning Success" (Artur Rubinstein), "Grand" (Cole Porter), "Exotic" (Carmen Miranda), "Magnificent" (Dorothy Kirsten), "Gorgeous" (Gladys Swarthout), "Thrilling" (Artie Shaw), "Exciting" (John Charles Thomas), and "Wonderful" (Jane Froman).

In the *New York Times* of November 7, 1948 (II, 6:5), John Martin sought to make further amends

[16]Reprinted in the advertisement for *Magdalena* appearing in the *New York Times* of September 26, 1948, II, 2.



—*New York Times*, October 10, 1948, II, 1.

for Brooks Atkinson's surly remarks with an article lauding choreographer Jack Cole's dances.

"Magdalena" at the Ziegfeld is strongly to be recommended, for in it he [Cole] has staged some of the finest dance ensembles to be seen in these parts in many a season. "Magdalena" may be something less than the perfect musical comedy, but for those who are interested in dancing, it has more than ample compensations.

The 1948 Broadway season included the openings of 19 musicals (three of which were revues). Kurt Weill's *Love Life* lasted through 252 performances, Frank Loesser's *Where's Charley?* through 792, and Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* through a record total of 1077.[17] Compared with these, *Magdalena*'s 88 performances rate as puny. But ten of the 19 opening that season lasted through only 14 to 46 performances.

[17]Bloom, I, items 1720, 3138, and 1534 (pp. 427, 781, and 380).

If *Magdalena* did not come close to matching the 583 performances racked up by Robert Wright and George Forrest (lyricists for *Magdalena*) with their show-stopper that opened on Broadway December 3, 1953, *Kismet* (music adapted from Alexander Borodin), there must have been a good reason. Opening August 21, 1944, *Song of Norway* (music adapted from Edvard Grieg) lasted even longer than *Kismet*—a total of 860 performances. But these shows, like others with lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest—from *Gypsy Lady* (September 17, 1946) quoting Victor Herbert, to *Dumas and Son* (August 1, 1967) levying Saint-Saëns—were all adaptations of known composers' music.

In retrospect, Villa-Lobos scored as much of a triumph with *Magdalena* as was possible, given the framework within which he was called to operate. For a South American composer dealing with a South American subject, *Magdalena*, originating in Los Angeles, can rightly be said to have won an epochal victory on Broadway.

The New Yorker of December 7, 1987, contains at pages 163–164 Andrew Porter's warm review of the revival of *Magdalena* (in concert version) at Alice Tully Hall in New York City, November 23, 1987. As Porter rightly observes at the outset, *Magdalena* was not only rated the costliest Broadway production of the 1948–1949 season but also ran the respectable length of almost three months. Like Taubman in 1948, Porter in 1987 gives the musical score very high praise indeed. Evans Haile conducted the Orchestra of New England at the revival, Connecticut Choral Artists sang the choruses, and Judy Kaye (Teresa), Faith Esham (Maria), Kevin Gray (Pedro), and George Rose (General Carabaña) took soloists's parts. Only John Raitt from the 1948 cast reappeared, and he now in the role of Tribal Elder.

Donal Henahan, who reviewed the revival in the *New York Times* of November 25, certified that Villa-Lobos's music for *Magdalena* was "an entirely new score"—and not any mere rehash of earlier tunes fitted to lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest (both of whom attended the November 23 performance). One number excluded from the 1948 Broadway run after opening night, but restored at the revival, particularly caught Henahan's attention, "The Broken Pianolita." According to Henahan, Judy Kaye's "Pièce de Résistance" could be dropped into Bernstein's "Candide" without seeming out of place.