

The Modalism inside the guitaristic work of Egberto Gismonti

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Abstract

This research looked into the modal composition procedures in the guitaristic work of Egberto Gismonti through the transcription and analysis of excerpts of a selected set of pieces; wherein it was possible to identify the relations of a “special universe” of musical elements composing his style with the employment of modalism and the recurrence of structures associated with the manifestations of the Brazilian ethnic field “expanded” through procedures founded in Jazz and Classical Music.

Key words: Guitar, Modalism, Egberto Gismonti.

Introduction

Egberto Gismonti is internationally known as a important name of Brazilian music. Operating among multiple formats like song, instrumental pieces and soundtracks; Gismonti has a varied work as composer, arranger, producer and multi-instrumentalist especially the piano and the guitar. This research purposes to study some of his compositions where was possible to identify the confluence of two aspects: the singular style of his work on guitar with instruments of 8, 10, 12 and 14 strings; compound by a “special universe” of musical elements like the larger extension, pedal notes and preformed shapes typing derived harmony¹; and the employment of procedures of modal composing, constituted from a group of notes orbiting a fundamental through the “exploration of the effects given by the different distributions of intervals” and has a typically ethnic strong accent². It was carried out transcription and analysis³ of excerpts selected from the following compositions: “Cego Aderaldo”, “Dança das Cabeças”, “Selva Amazônica”, “Dança dos Escravos”, “Salvador” and “Raga (Festa da Construção)”.

Results and Discussion

The use of elements and themes of cultural manifestations from the Brazilian ethnic field recurs in the work of Egberto Gismonti; some of them of modal structures. We can find in the analyzed excerpts some materials associated to the northwest traditions “coco”, “catimbó” and “cantoria” through the modes like *mixolydian*, *mixolydian #4* and *ionian without leading tone*; and the afro-descendants “capoeira” and “candomblé” through modes like *pentatonic* and *its inversions*. However, considering “a trend to musical material expansion, enriching the creative and dynamic resources for the composition”⁴ present in his work we find a compositional treatment of this material which can be associated

to “modal systems and processes” of nationalist Classical Music like polymodalism and parallelism, and from Jazz like the construction of harmonic discourse starting in the exploration of different contrasts between the modes.

Conclusions

The physical characteristics of guitars used by Egberto Gismonti favors the occurrence of modalism through the pedal note technique involving the use of open strings. We observed that the different tunings are directly connected to the modal structures employed, which seem to be almost exclusive for each composition. Furthermore, it was found a use of parallel movements resulting mainly from the use of preformed shapes of guitar which constitutes polymodal passages when overlapped in a diatonic or modal melody.

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¹ Wisnik, J.M. *O Som e o Sentido: Uma outra história das músicas*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras. 1989. p. 71-78.

² The analyses were grounded mainly the following theoretical references: Miller, R. *Modal Jazz Composition & Harmony*. Germany: Advance Music, 1996; Pereira, M. *Cadernos de Harmonia (para violão), volume III*. Rio de Janeiro: Garbolight Produções Artísticas, 2011; Persichetti, V. *Twentieth-century harmony: creative aspects and practice*. New York, NY: Norton, c1961.; Tiné, P. J. *S.Procedimentos Modais na Música Brasileira: Do Campo Étnico do Nordeste ao Popular da década de 1960*. 2008. Tese (doutorado) – Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, São Paulo.

³Schoroeder, J. L. *Corporalidade musical: as marcas do corpo na música, no e no instrumento*. 2006. Tese (doutorado) Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Faculdade de Educação, Campinas, SP. p.93.

⁴Soares Melo, R. “O ‘popular’ de Egberto Gismonti”. *Novos estud. - CEBRAP* no.78 São Paulo Julho de 2007. p. 191- 193.