



THE MANDOLINS COLLECTION AT THE INSTRUMENTS MUSEUM OF THE UFRJ MUSIC SCHOOL: MUSICOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Paulo Sá

The Islamic culture introduced various musical instruments in Spain and in the South of Italy, amongst them the mandolins' ancestor. A result of the Arab culture that enriched the West, its origins go back to a small pear shaped instrument with round bottom, which has been used in Medieval Europe of the 10th Century. Next to the *oud* (which means "arch" or "round shape" and which was later developed in Europe as the lute or *alaúde* with various sizes and numbers of strings), this instrument of small dimensions was known in Europe, at least from the 13th Century on, as *quitaire*, *quinterne* or *guisterne* in French; *gyterne* (and later *gittern*) in English; *quinterne* in German; *guitarra* in Spanish and *chitarra* or *chitarino* in Italian. It's known that up until the Mid-16th Century these terms were used to designate a variety of string instruments. From then on, it has definitely started to be a reference to the *guitarra* family. It's not rare to find some sort of association between the mandolin and the lute family in music dictionaries, but as we can see, recent research has been focusing the story under though another angle, stating that the mandolin has greater relation with the *guitarra*, that is, the acoustic guitar. Only two instruments of that period have survived.

One of them, from the 14th Century, belongs to the Irwin Untermyer Collection, in New York, and the other (c. 1450) is the property of Hans Oth, from Nuremberg.

The name *bandolim*, adopted in Brazil, *mandoline* in Spain, France and Germany, and mandolin in English, has its origin in the word *mandolino*, short for *mandola*, one of the ancestors of the mandolin during the Renaissance. The term *mandolino* appears for the first time in an Italian document before the second half of the 17th Century. Amongst the papers of the famous Cardinal Francesco Barberini in Rome, a bill paid to a luthier was discovered, dated of 1634, when the builder and repairer listed repairs in "*mandolini*", plural of *mandolino*. But important information about the construction and fixation of the word *mandolin* comes from, no one less than Antonio Stradivari. The great violin maker dedicated himself to the making of lutes, *guitarras*, *violas* and mandolins. Fortunately, many of his plants with measurements and detailed observations can be found at the *Museo Stradivariano* in Cremona. Besides, notes with his own handwriting reveal that there were at least seven different models of mandolins in Italy, like, for instance, the *mandolino coristo*.



Museu Virtual de Instrumentos Musicais

The years that corresponded to the so called *Belle Époque* in France, the Wilhelmine Era in Germany and the Victorian and Edwardian periods in England, were times of great popularity for the instrument in Europe, North and South America. Millions of instruments were sold, thousands of songs were composed, arranged and published for the mandolin, and during the first decades of the 20th Century, the mandolin became one of the most played instruments in the cities of Europe. There was a considerable economic interest around it, involving publishing houses for music sheets and methods, crafts and arts stores, not to mention luthiers and musical instruments shops. Many clubs, federations and societies among friends and family dedicated to the mandolin were created, as well as magazines specialized on the instrument for the amusement of enthusiast musicians.

In the Arts, the mandolin also had special repercussion, most of all in the movement known as Cubism. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Georges Braque (1882-1963) and Juan Gris (1887-1927) have frequently used the images of acoustic guitars and mandolins, instruments that were popular in the cafes where these artists used to go. The nostalgic image of *Arlecchino* or *Pierrot* playing a Neapolitan mandolin was a frequent theme, and in addition to this one, a type of painting initiated by painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, (1796-1875) was also common, which represented young women wearing typical Italian dresses holding a mandolin in a silent and contemplative attitude.

All the same, along these periods, there was also an increase of the interest for the mandolin in the midst of the musical concert milieu in Europe. Techniques were innovated and improved, the concert repertoire was being composed and widened, methods were published and near to the end of the 19th Century, great mandolin masters obtained international acclamation. The technical level in the instrument's practice reached a degree never achieved before. Due to this musical and social phenomenon, a great fashion rose in Europe between the end of the 19th Century and the first decades of the following Century, placing the mandolin as one of the preferred instruments of the *dilettante* society. During this period, as it is widely known, the main cities of Brazil, especially Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo tried to follow the fashionable European habits. In fact, Rio de Janeiro, as a cosmopolitan city maintaining a strong link with Europe through a constant fashion and habits updating work, has absorbed the mandolin fashion. To play this instrument has become a real fever, a synonym of elevated status. More than a musical phenomenon, it was a social mobilization. This fashion, born in the country of provenance of the mandolin, Italy, has acquired impressive proportions.



Museu Virtual de Instrumentos Musicais

Since the second half of the 18th Century it was gradually becoming one of the preferred instruments for youngsters and ladies in Europe, often appearing in paintings and small sculptures in gold, silver, copper or in porcelain.

The mandolin's path in Brazil has limited the use of the instrument in an almost exclusive way to the rich musical genre of the *Choro*. However, as mentioned above, the repertoire played by the mandolin in the Rio de Janeiro society has as main reference, the musical habits in vogue in Europe. This way, before the birth of *Choro*, imported genres were played in mandolins of Rio de Janeiro city: Waltzes, Mazurkas, Polkas, Reveries, Berceuses, Meditations, Divertimentos, Fantasias, Serenades, Preludes, Arias, Opera excerpts, amongst other types of characteristic music of the end of the 19th Century and beginning of the 20th Century. As a recollection of that time, there is a collection of 122 music sheets at the Music Division and Sound Archives of the National Library of Rio de Janeiro, all originally written for mandolin with piano accompaniment. It is a very rare and virtually unknown repertoire in the mandolin scope in Brazil. The collection of mandolins of the Instruments Museum of the UFRJ Music School is from this period and from this European fashion imported by Brazilian society.