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# VILLA-LOBOS

**conducts**

**The Violoncello Society**

**in his**

**Fantasia Concertante**

**For Orchestra of**

**Violoncellos**

+

**J. S. Bach:  
Preludes  
and Fugues**

from

**"The Well-Tempered Clavier"**

transcribed for orchestra

of violoncellos

by Villa-Lobos

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## VILLA-LOBOS: Fantasia Concertante for Orchestra of Violoncellos J. S. Bach: Preludes and Fugues from "The Well-Tempered Clavier"

(Transcribed for orchestra of violoncellos by Villa-Lobos)

Heitor Villa-Lobos conducting The Violoncello Society

Probably no man in music today has been as versatile, as active or as productive as Heitor Villa-Lobos. To give only the sketchiest outline of his work in behalf of music would require much more space than these notes will allow.

Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1887, he has pursued simultaneously successful careers as 'cellist, conductor, author, educator and composer. In a recent conversation with this writer, he expressed his unbounded enthusiasm for youth. It is to the youth of today that he wishes to open up the wonderful world of art. To this end, he completely reorganized the system of music education in Brazil. Yet he himself is entirely self-taught. The only instrument on which he ever took lessons was the 'cello. A few years ago, his close friend and compatriot, the conductor and composer Burle Marx, provided some interesting annotations for an all-Villa-Lobos concert by The Philadelphia Orchestra. "Some years ago," Marx wrote, "knowing he played many instruments, I asked which ones he played. He answered, 'I only don't play the oboe.' Since then he has mastered the scale on the oboe."

All his life, Villa-Lobos has written music, much of it inspired by the folk music of his native country—music which he ferreted out by touring every part of Brazil, even into remote jungle areas. He composes constantly, very rapidly and always from an inner urge. According to Marx, a work is often formed complete in his mind before he sets it down on paper, so that when he does write it out, it is in ink. Furthermore, he likes to compose amid the greatest confusion. Radio, television, the phonograph, a piano and animated conversation can be going on around him. He will take part in all this activity, at the same time turning out a new and always highly original composition. His works, devised for every conceivable combination of instruments and voices—even something as weird as soprano, three metronomes and orchestra—are so numerous that even he has no idea of how many he has created.

Like any truly devoted 'cellist, Villa-Lobos has a deep love for his instrument. But as an unusually perceptive and imaginative composer, he has explored new sonorities and new expressive possibilities for the 'cello as soloist, as a member of a small chamber ensemble or as part of an entire orchestra of 'cellos.

Among his works are two 'cello concerti; a Fantasia for 'cello and orchestra; two sonatas for 'cello and piano; four trios in which the 'cello is employed; a *Choros* for violin and 'cello; *Jet Whistle* for flute and 'cello, and of course, the *Bachianas Brasilieras* Nos. 1 and 5 for an orchestra of 'cellos.

Villa-Lobos composed the *Fantasia Concertante* in only two weeks in Paris during the summer of 1958. It was written at the request of the 'cellist Bernard Greenhouse on behalf of his fellow members of The Violoncello Society. Despite the fact that he had already created so much for his favorite instrument, Villa-Lobos was still able to uncover untapped tonal resources in the new *Fantasia*. He warned the Society that the music would be very difficult—which it is—but the Society is full of fine 'cellists, so gave its enthusiastic approval, at which point the composer himself became even more enthusiastic about his assignment.

The *Fantasia Concertante* was given its world premiere by thirty-two members of The Violoncello Society, under the direction of Villa-Lobos, at Town Hall in New York on December 10, 1958, and shortly thereafter, these same artists recorded it for Everest.

The work takes the form of a little four-movement symphony—*Allegro*, *Lento*, *Allegretto scherzando*, and *Molto allegro*—the last two movements being connected. So that there might be no hard feelings among the players, the composer divided his orchestra of 'cellos into five sections, with the music for each section of equal importance and equal difficulty. At times, each section is subdivided into three voice parts, resulting in a complex total of fifteen different parts sounding at once. As you listen to this music, you will discover, too, that there is absolutely no limit to the orchestral sonorities evoked by the fantastic imagination of this endlessly resourceful creative artist. For here are to be heard the sounds not only of 'cellos but also the sounds of clarinets, horns, trombones, even piccolos.

If the 'cello has been Villa-Lobos' favorite instrument, his favorite composer has always been Johann Sebastian Bach. Best-known of his works is his series of *Bachianas Brasilieras*, little suites that seek to fuse the style of the Leipzig cantor with that of Brazilian folk music. In transcribing for an orchestra of 'cellos

the three preludes and four fugues from Book 1 of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Villa-Lobos selected those he happened to like best, then transposed them, when necessary, from the original keys to suit the sonorities of the 'cello ensemble.

The transcriptions, made in Rio de Janeiro in 1941, include the following works, scored for an orchestra of four sections, again often subdivided.

Prelude No. 22 Book 1  
Fugue No. 8 Book 1  
Prelude No. 14 Book 2  
Fugue No. 1 Book 1  
Prelude No. 8 Book 1  
Fugue No. 21 Book 1

—Notes by PAUL AFFELDER

THE VIOLONCELLO SOCIETY was founded in May, 1956, in New York by a group of professional and amateur 'cellists, whose aims are "to promote the art of 'cello playing in this country; to provide a common meeting ground for professional and amateur 'cellists; to promote interest in the 'cello as a solo instrument; to provide opportunity of performances for artist and composer; to develop a broader and more mature understanding of the art of the 'cello, and to further the members' artistic development." Its membership now numbers more than one hundred leading 'cellists from all over the United States.

Thirty-two members of The Violoncello Society participated in this recording. When they assembled in the studio of Everest Records, it was estimated that the aggregate value of the fine instruments they played was in the vicinity of \$300,000. The distinguished personnel of the orchestra comprised the following 'cellists: Bernard Greenhouse, *solo*, Claus Adam, Stefan Auber, Seymour Barab, Jascha Bernstein, Joan Brockway, Thaddeus Brys, Philip Cherry, Mary Hill Doolittle, Sidney Edwards, Madeleine Foley, Emmerich Gara, Lillian R. Goodman, William Jackson, Richard Kay, George Koutzen, Margaret Neal, Marie R. Rosanoff, Daniel Saidenberg, Signe Sandstrom, Jean Schneider, Janos Scholz, Harvey Shapiro, Guelda Sherman, Alan Shulman, Luigi Silva, Ruth Soffer, Evelyn Steinbock, Louise Stone, Joseph Tekula, Emil Weinstein and Martha Whittemore.

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