

# LIR CLASSICS

## LIR002 - PROGRAMME NOTES

### Sempre amor: Portuguese love songs (modinhas) from the Romantic Age

I discovered the music for the Modinhas in *Portugaliae Musica*, a series of volumes published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and held at Senate House Library in London. The printed song accompaniments are very simple, and transcribed directly from the original song sheets. They would have been intended for Portuguese guitar or piano, although Modinhas were sometimes played by groups of musicians. I decided to arrange them for string quartet with double bass and occasionally an obbligato flute. The idea was to make the accompaniments richer and add a second melody line. This scoring also enabled me to give a flavour of café music or an accordion sound where the music suggested this to me. The songs were recorded in five sessions, as live, and edited and balanced over eight days.

In 1807 the Portuguese Royal Family, threatened by an impending invasion of Napoleon's armies, fled to Rio de Janeiro where they remained until 1821. They continued to maintain a Court in Rio and ruled from afar. There was much cross-fertilisation between European musical forms and local songs and dances, and this continued after 1821.

Modinhas were the most popular of several musical forms created for the salons of the Portuguese/Brazilian society of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and are solo songs in which the charm of the Italian aria cantabile and the canzonetta of Neapolitan opera is combined with the seductive and sensuous melodies originally sung by African slaves and adopted by both Brazilian and Portuguese composers. By the end of the eighteenth century Modinhas were composed by the hundreds and circulated both in manuscript collections and in periodicals such as the *Jornal de Modinhas*, published in Lisbon.

The influence of Italian opera can most clearly be seen in the two Modinhas which use music from Bellini's *Norma*, and in the florid nature of some of the vocal writing. The subject matter however remains resolutely Portuguese, and usually centres on love, betrayal, regret and, occasionally, revenge. Most of the composers of the Modinhas on this CD are anonymous, but we have included the name of composer and/or poet where known.

Several well-known English travellers wrote about hearing Modinhas in Portugal, including the novelist William Beckford:

"This is an original sort of music different from any I ever heard, the most seducing, the most voluptuous imaginable, the best calculated to throw saints off their guard and to inspire profane deliriums."

"Those who have never heard Modinhas must and will remain ignorant of the most voluptuous and bewitching music that ever existed since the days of the Sybarites. They consist of languid interrupted measures, as if the breath was gone with excess of rapture, and the soul panting to fly out of you and incorporate itself with the beloved object. With a childish carelessness they steal into the heart before it has time to arm itself against their enervating influence. You fancy you are swallowing milk and you are swallowing poison. As to myself, I confess I am a slave to Modinhas, and when I think of them cannot endure the idea of quitting Portugal."

**David Chernaik**