

Choro Tributes: Compositional Process and Performance

Suite in Twelve Movements for Diálogos Duo

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Addendum to Published Version of Article

This addendum includes content from the article as it was originally submitted to the editor. Due to space limitations, the entire article could not be published, including some of the eight primary **COMPOSITIONAL PHASES** I utilized for Choro Tributes.

Although there may be some conflicts in numbered sections between the published version and addendum, it will be made clear where the addendum fits into the expanded form of the article.

6. Diálogos Duo: First Tribute Suites

In October of 2016, I met **Louis Arques**, from Grenoble, France. A new Master's student at Mannes (classical division of the New School), the director of woodwind studies recommended him to play alto saxophone in my Choro Ensemble. He entered the faculty lounge without a saxophone and took out his clarinet— explaining that clarinet was his main instrument and he could borrow a saxophone from Mannes to play in the ensemble.

Although I was a bit disappointed, my intuition told me that I should listen to him play. In June I had composed my first duo for clarinet and guitar, *Valsa azul*. A dark, introspective tribute to Guinga, it was performed and recorded with Lucas Pino as part of Quarteto Moderno's live CD. I happened to have a copy with me and suggested that we play it.

From the very outset, it felt as if Louis and I had been rehearsing together for months. Although he had no prior exposure to Brazilian music, his beautiful tone, expressivity, keen musical instincts and effortless technique was riveting and moving. I was convinced that with some coaching on phrasing, articulation and targeted listening to recordings, he could play any Brazilian genre authentically. So I asked him point-blank: "If I write a new piece for us each week dedicated

to a famous Brazilian composer, would you play with me?”. He enthusiastically accepted my proposal, and thus began our collaboration.

As promised, I wrote seven pieces in seven weeks, loosely calling it a suite, “*Diálogos for clarinet and guitar*”. Since they were written one at a time, there was no predetermined list of tribute composers or a performance sequence. The only guide while composing was to write these tributes in a variety of genres, spanning two or three generations. The movements and eventual performance sequence were as follows, including *Valsa azul*:

1. *Sombras de ontem* (ded. Toninho Horta, toada)
2. *Sempre Jacob* (Jacob do Bandolim, choro)
3. *Valsa azul* (Guinga)
4. *Madrugada em ouro preto* (Sérgio Santos, serenata)
5. *Maracatuque* (Jovino Santos Neto, maracatu)
6. *O Ravel acima, o Guinga abaixo* (Maurice Ravel / Guinga, modinha)
7. *Desafio e recordação* (Hermeto Pascoal, baião)

The following week I asked Louis if he played bass clarinet. Indeed he did. I proceeded to compose seven pieces to form our second suite, “*Diálogos for bass clarinet and guitar*”. Once again, the tributes were written without a preexisting list of composers or genres linked to them. The final sequence of movements determined after rehearsals was as follows:

1. *Diálogos do sul* (ded. Claude Debussy, guarânia)
2. *Retrato de Radamés* (Radamés Gnattali, choro-canção)
3. *Gafieira suingada* (Zé da Velha, samba gafieira)
4. *Saudades do Leblon* (Guinga, valsa)
5. *Chão do batuque* (Heitor Villa-Lobos, batuque)
6. *Marchinha da esperança* (Itiberê Zwarg, marcha, 3/4)
7. *Frevo na praça* (Pixinguinha)

Upon completing the second suite in March 2017, it was obvious that we should plan informal premieres at the New School that spring. Also, our ensemble needed a name. Our first choice was **Diálogos Brazilian Duo**, which soon simplified to **Diálogos Duo**. Rehearsing both suites rigorously for two months resulted in significant revisions for both parts. Together, these first two suites and fourteen tributes represented a diversity of thirteen Brazilian genres.

We premiered both suites in April 2017, then in October, we recorded and shot video. By early 2018, we decided to release these live recordings as our debut CD, “*Homages to Brazilian Masters*”. The CD ended with “*Choro branco*”, a piece I wrote for solo bass clarinet and Louis recorded in the studio.

By the fall of 2017, I had begun composing a third suite for the Duo: *Centenário*— a centennial tribute to my father, Gus Boukas (1917-1965). His introducing me to classical music at a very early age sealed my eventual fate to become a professional musician. The motivation for writing this work was more personally cathartic than borne of artistic necessity. Since the tribute was to my father and not specific Brazilian masters, only three of the eight movements are obviously Brazilian in character and were composed in no particular order. Four of the other five are more subdued and introspective.

The sixth (and longest) movement, *O Caminho escuro* is based on Greek, Armenian and Turkish folkdance rhythms— featuring *taksim* (rubato modal improvised melodies unfolding over different pedal notes), odd time signatures (10/8, 7/8) and Middle Eastern microtonal modes (maqamat). It was the only movement explicitly composed for clarinet. The other seven can be performed on either clarinet or bass clarinet.

Prior to *Centenário* being completed in April 2018, the Duo performed single movements in concerts featuring either our first or second suite. Given the highly personal nature of this work, a definitive premiere or recording remains uncertain. Being that my father passed unexpectedly when I was only eleven, composing a suite in his honor already offered me long overdue closure.

7. Compositional Crossroads and the Genesis of Choro Tributes

With our initial repertoire now at twenty-two pieces and all three suites being composed without a predetermined tribute structure, it was clear that a fourth suite of greater scope would require more pre-compositional planning and stylistic focus. The mandate to establish our **ensemble identity and future direction** virtually hinged on our next work.

This raised legitimate questions regarding the artistic validity of composing tributes which embody the stylistic essence of a legendary Brazilian composer/musician. In my sincere effort to faithfully “channel” the stylistic essence of a master, there is always the risk of crossing an ethical line. A guided creative process could transform into a more conscious and calculated composing strategy– which in the end may not result in a credible, personal artistic statement.

A logical solution became apparent. Since each of our **first three suites** featured a **variety of regional Brazilian genres**, what if I focused on **one Brazilian genre** for an **entire suite**?

Since 1985, considering all the Brazilian repertoire that I had listened to, transcribed, performed, composed and arranged, **Choro** was the most obvious choice of genre for the Duo’s fourth suite. It is a rich tradition spanning an evolution of one and a half centuries; several generations of master players, composers and landmark recordings; a virtuosic repertoire at least five thousand pieces.

Another advantage of Choro is that **its vast repertoire is comprised of several subgenres**: choro ligeiro, polca, tango brasileiro, passo dobrado, quadrilha, schottisch, batuque, maxixe, cortajaca, samba-choro, choro-canção, valsa, valsa brilhante, valsa espanhola, modinha, etc. A rich cross-section of choro subgenres with composers from each era would provide stylistic and historical diversity that could produce an hour-long suite. I embarked on an empirical process which became the blueprint for *Choro Tributes* and the next five Diálogos Duo suites: *Impressões de minas* (12 movements, 2019), *Three choros for bass clarinet and guitar* (2019), *Cantos do nordeste* (18 mvmts, 2020), *Sambistas imortais* (20 mvmts, 2021), and the most recent, *Sarau para o Pixinguinha* (13 mvmts, 2022).

8. Compositional Phases of Choro Tributes

Listed below are the **eight phases** I traversed while planning, composing, rehearsing, performing and revising *Choro Tributes*. The **first three phases** are **pre-compositional**– they establish the broader architecture of the whole work prior to writing a single note.

Phases four and five constitute the **core creative work**, a blend of: 1) inspiration from my clarinetist **Louis Arques** and the **tributed composers**; 2) creative choices informed by my stylistic familiarity and immersion; 3) conscious strategies employed to reshape and expand upon primary musical materials.

Phases six through eight comprise the **final distillation of the work**, marked by **revisions** made during the ongoing process of rehearsals and performances.

Phase One: Primary Suite Focus; Creating a Master List of Composer Tributes

Phase Two: Assimilation of Composer Style Traits

Phase Three: Selecting Model Piece of Tribute Composer as basis of Original piece

Phase Four: Compositional Process and Strategies

Phase Five: Technical Considerations for Clarinet and Guitar

Phase Six: Completion of Engraved Scores

Phase Seven: Movement Titles and Final Performance Sequence

Phase Eight: Score Revisions based on Rehearsals and Performances

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9.6 Documenting Progressive Variations Accurately

The process by which you compose and document your variations of initial materials is a very personal choice. Everyone has their favorite method, with varying degrees of accuracy and efficiency. I will discuss some common methods and their potential problems.

In my experience, the most effective way is to **notate ideas directly from your ear to music paper**. This means you must “**hear**” **which specific instrument is playing your ideas**. In the case of *Diálogos Duo*, it was Louis playing clarinet.

Some composers like to **sing their ideas, then notate them**. There are two serious liabilities:

- 1) There is no guarantee that **what you hear in your head and what you sing will be the same**. The voice acts as mediator between the ear and musical notation. This can be full of discrepancies.
- 2) Unless your **voice has the same range as the instrument** for which you are composing, **you may be limiting your melodic writing to your vocal range**, adjusting octaves frequently when you don’t intend to do so. The **Bb clarinet has a usable range nearly four octaves**: in concert key: D3 (D below middle C4) up through A6 (above four leger lines). I use that entire range because I **hear** it in my ear, rather than relying on **singing** it.

The same is true for **playing variations on your main instrument or a reference instrument such as piano, then notating them**. Again, there is no guarantee that what you hear in your head is going to translate accurately to your reference instrument.

It is possible that at some point **your ears will no longer be the primary source of your ideas**. Instrumental technique can take over, favoring technically-generated “licks”— but lack the integrity of melodic ideas which emanate from deep immersion in the tribute composer’s music.

There are some who choose to **record their ideas first while singing and playing, then notate them**. These can be handy. But the only time you can trust this mode of documentation is **if your notation and transcribing skills are at a level of accuracy to accommodate the complexity of the ideas you are playing or singing**. In summary, **notate your ideas from your ears directly onto music paper**. If you need to verify the key or starting note of your first phrase by using an instrument, that’s fine. But try to avoid the alluring trap of **EAR > PLAY > NOTATE, working a few notes at a time**. This back-and-forth approach 1) invites countless discrepancies with what you are actually hearing; 2) is much more time-consuming; 3) interrupts your intuitive creative flow.

RETURN to PUBLISHED ARTICLE, Section 8.1, p. 195-199 (through Section 8.3).

RESUME ADDENDUM

10. Form: Predetermined vs. Empirical; Verifying Harmonic Clarity in Thematic Sections

Form is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of composing— particularly when we are not writing within a genre which has well-established formal precedents. Fortunately, one of choro's most prominent traditional aspects is its **regularity of form**.

Most traditional choros are composed in (AA BB A CC A) form, consisting of **three sixteen-bar** (or thirty-two bar) **thematic sections**. Derived primarily from eighteenth-century European popular dance genres (ex. *polca*, *valsa*), this ubiquitous form provides a solid structure for composing themes and their harmonic support.

However, in an organic composition, **form should not always be a predetermined decision**. Fitting themes into preset molds supported by formulaic harmonic progressions can become too predictable and lack creative spontaneity. Each choro presents its own set of creative opportunities. If you follow your intuition, the final piece can take unexpected paths. This, above all will manifest the most appropriate **form** for a given piece.

Ironically, it is this **symmetrical phrase structure and harmonic functionality in Choro** that creates **a set of melodic and harmonic expectations for the listener**. The composer decides at each juncture whether to **satisfy** or **withhold** such expectations. For example, the final form in *Sambando na Praia* is AA' B A' C A + Coda. I decided **not** to repeat the **B** and **C** themes. One statement of each provided the requisite melodic, harmonic and modal contrast I was seeking.

After completing the **A** theme of a choro, there is one important thing I do before composing the **B** theme: I **play the harmonies of the A theme** (in tempo) *without* referencing the melody. This is done to confirm that the **chord progressions which support each melodic phrase and their sequence make harmonic sense as a section**.

In all aspects, a choro should flow effortlessly and intuitively. It should have an intrinsic musical logic borne of **keen intuition** and an **improvisational approach to developing thematic materials**. Composing strong melodic ideas without clarity of harmonic direction will not remedy tonal ambiguity. Before composing each tribute, I studied the **harmonic content** of its **model piece**—noting specific progressions, modulations and harmonic surprises which temporarily derail the expectations of the listener.

In **Figure 4, “Form and Harmonic Structure”**, each movement’s **form, phrase structure and tonal scheme between themes** is presented. Features noted include **melodic pickups** (in the clarinet or guitar baixarias), **phrase elision** (contraction of two phrases, thus eliminating one measure) and **harmonic formulas** such as **cycle of fifths**. A legend of these features is explained.

Here are forms used in *Choro Tributes* by type and those movements which illustrate them:

Standard form (**AA BB A CC A**): nos. **1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12**.

Similar to the above but eliminate repeats of **A, B** or **C** themes: nos. **5, 6, 11**.

Use of a fourth (D) theme: nos. **4, 5**

Modified **AA B A** form: no. **7**

Use an “**Introduction and Coda**”/“**Outroduction**”: nos. **3, 9, 11, 12**.

(see **FIGURE 4, “Choro Tributes Formal Analysis”**, next page)

10.1 Composing Second and Third Themes, Tonal Considerations

The decision if a theme's final use is **primary (A)**, **secondary (B)** or **tertiary (C)** is very subjective and intuitive for the composer. As discussed in **Initial Motivic Impulse and Compositional Strategies** (section 9.2), the motivic materials of an **A** theme must be compact, immediately distinct in their melodic contour and rhythmic gesture— a signature by which the mood of the whole piece can be established and maintained. Here is where observing the **model composer piece** can provide guidance for thematic assignments.

While composing *Choro Tributes*, sometimes my first thematic ideas were held for possible use as a **B** or **C** theme. I notated them on separate sheets of manuscript, apart from the main sketch of the score. After composing the **A** theme, without delay I decided on the **tonal center** for the **B** theme and began writing possible first phrases. This activity is similar to the **Progressive Variation Drill** in **Figure 2**— except in this case, I was seeking to create **maximum variety between possible phrases** rather than **incremental expansions of the same phrase**.

One needs to consider these aspects of a **B** and **C** theme:

- 1) Should a **B** or **C** theme preserve certain aspects of an **A** theme— melodic, rhythmic, harmonic?
- 2) In what ways can a **B** or **C** theme provide strong **contrast** to the **A** theme?
- 3) What are the possible **tonal relationships** between themes **A**, **B** and **C**?

Tonal schemes for **A** themes in **major keys** are often (**I – VI – IV**) or (**I – III minor – V**).

Minor keys often use (**I – III – I major**) or (**I – Vminor - I major**).

B themes can present a **marked contrast** to the **A** theme in melodic, rhythmic and harmonic vocabulary. For example, if an **A** theme is built upon short, catchy motives, the **B** theme could feature a more continuous melodic flow of sixteenth notes and harmonic progressions that have different root movements. Pixinguinha's *Um a zero* illustrates a melodically straightforward and highly syncopated **A** theme, followed by more virtuosic, étude-like **B** and **C** themes built on streams of sixteenth notes. If effective contrast is achieved in a **B** or **C** theme, it is essential that the thematic writing remains within the broader stylistic vocabulary of the tribute composer.

The contrast provided by **C** themes is equally important if its modality is the same as the **A** theme (i.e., both are major or minor). Another aspect of a **C** theme is that its final phrase should melodically and harmonically prepare the final return of the **A** theme, projecting a natural inexorability.

Figure 5, “Comparison of A, B and C Themes” (for movements 3, 4 and 9) presents the first phrase from each piece’s themes, including their related tonal centers.

Another notable aspect of **B** and **C** themes is the use of **harmonic surprise**. This occurs most commonly in the **last four-bar phrase** as a **single harmony outside the diatonic structure** (ex. **bII** or **bVI major**) or a **cycle of fifths progression** resolving to such remote harmonies. An **A** theme can also feature a harmonic surprise. For example, in movement 10, *Dois Irmãos no Céu* and its model piece *Chorando baixinho* (Abel Ferreira), **bII major** (Eb major) in measure 15.

I invite the reader to listen to each movement, referencing **Figure 5, Figure 4** and the **complete score**. Observe the piece’s form, phrase structure, thematic tonal scheme, derivative/contrasting aspects among the three themes and harmonic surprises outside the normal diatonic structure.

(see **FIGURE 5, “Comparison of A, B and C Themes, next page**)

10.2 Sustaining Compositional Continuity

One of the most critical issues in composing each tribute piece within a multimovement work is sustaining compositional flow and maintaining stylistic consistency. This applies both on the **local level** (phrase-to-phrase) and proceeding to the **next thematic section**. As previously discussed, I had a brief ten-day window to complete all twelve movement sketches. What initially seemed a daunting deadline turned out to be my greatest asset.

From the very outset, it became clear that **each tribute needed to be composed in one continuous sitting**—all three themes, plus introductions and codas. Every piece presented its own challenges in continuity; the thread of creative inspiration and ease of developing thematic ideas could vanish in an instant. If I stopped in midstream and resumed the next day, my state of mind had already changed from the “zone” that created my initial ideas. I felt as if **someone else** had composed the music.

On the **local level, connecting one phrase to the next within a thematic section** proved to be quite facile. Since choro themes are driven by distinct motives with functional harmonic support and housed within symmetrical phrase structures, I found that **melodic invention and its harmonic support took turns, one surpassing and overlapping the other**. It was like **walking** one step at a time—melody with the right foot, harmony with the left, and always moving forward.

If a melodic idea extended into the next bar and I needed support harmonies, two or more would appear in my ear. I would write down all harmonies, including brief questions such as “use this harmony for second ending?” If a specific harmonic progression was pre-fixed in my mind but the melodic phrase was not yet complete, I approached its continuation much like a jazz player improvising over a set of chord changes. Applying the **progressive variation drill**, I wrote down as many ideas as possible on a separate sheet, knowing that one of them would work.

I recall one day when the inspiration of **three tribute composers** decided to appear **all at the same time**. As bizarre as it first seemed, I composed all three pieces simultaneously, jumping between Anacleto de Medeiros (no. 2, *Anacletozinho*), Jacob do Bandolim (no. 6, *Manhoso*) and

Radamés Gnattali (no. 10, *Sambando na praia*)– in any order that would produce a complete thematic section.

10.3 Thematic Treatment: Exact Repetition or notated Variations

An important decision while composing a choro and preparing its final score is if an **A**, **B** or **C** theme will be **repeated identically** (using **repeat signs** with first and second endings, or ***dal segno*** indication), or **varied** substantially enough to require that it be **notated separately**. This applies to changes in **melodies**, **reharmonizations** and **rhythmic texture of the accompaniment**. It will depend to what extent such variations would be initiated by a player who is intimately familiar with **choro performance practice**.

In the final scores of *Choro Tributes*, I was meticulous in notating the clarinet and guitar parts: phrasing, articulation, embellishments, dynamics. This also included **whole or partial rewrites of thematic sections**. I chose a practical middle path: sometimes using *dal segno* and other times notating rewrites of the **A** theme. Using *dal segno* kept the length of clarinet parts to 2-4 pages and the guitar parts 3-5 pages. For any local variations (one or two bars) I would use an *ossia* below the main staff for only those measures.

In **Figure 3, Summary of Primary Themes and Motives**, there are numerous examples of **articulations** which specify exact phrasing. This is **encoded choro performance practice**.

Note Duration is specified by using **staccato** and **tenuto** marks and **phrasing slurs**. For example, the common rhythm **sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth** can be phrased in a variety of ways. In choro, the eighth note in the middle is usually played **short** (similar in duration to a sixteenth note) without any markings in the score. This is indicated in my scores by a **staccato** mark (Movement no. 1, m. 1). It can also be **full duration**, using **tenuto** (theme 6, m. 2; theme 10, m. 2-3) or a **phrasing slur** (theme 4, m. 1-4). **Accent** marks for note emphasis are used in themes 6 and 10.

Phrasing Slurs are used in all the themes, indicating which notes which should be played under the same attack. The impact of these slurs on melodic phrasing is dramatic if observed

carefully by the player. My decisions are based on what sounds the most natural, stylistically appropriate and technically feasible. Once all phrase markings are completed, I **sing** them, using **scat syllables** for attacks and **long vowels** for notes to be played under a slur. Being a vocalist has been an important asset when I write for any instrument that uses the breath. Even instruments which are not woodwinds (ex. bandolim) benefit from singing phrasing and articulation markings.

11. Choro Performance Practice and its Notation

A main hallmark of **choro performance practice** is the creative resourcefulness of the player when repeating a thematic section. Equally true for both melodic and accompaniment instruments, this is especially crucial concerning the **A** theme, as it will be played **four times** in pieces written in the most traditional form (**AA BB A CC A**).

A **melody player** incorporates melodic embellishments (grace notes, chromatic filler notes, etc.) and rhythmic variations; a **guitar** or **cavaquinho** playing the primary accompaniment “groove” (*levada*) employs continuous rhythmic variations and choice **reharmonizations**; the seven-string guitarist (*violão sete cordas*) invents different *baixarias* to create inversions of the harmonies and different “landing points” for the ends of such lines. Further discussion of such variations will continue in **Phase Five: Technical Considerations for Clarinet and Guitar**.

Fortunately, clarinetist **Louis Arques** had already played choro with me– not only those composed in prior Duo suites. Louis was the clarinetist for the **New School Choro Ensemble** program *Sempre Jacob* (centennial of Jacob do Bandolim) which I produced and arranged for a December 2017 premiere. The instrumentation consisted of three woodwinds, six and seven-string classical guitars, cavaquinho, electric bass and percussion.

For that program, none of my other student musicians had prior Brazilian music experience. For the ensemble to sound authentic and unified, I notated all choro phrasing indications in their parts: articulations, melodic and rhythmic embellishments and variations, *baixarias* and dynamics. I also provided original artist recordings for reference. Complete audio and video is at: <https://www.boukas.com/sempre-jacob>

12. First sketch: Lead Sheet or Complete Score

Returning to 2018 and my ten-day deadline for composing *Choro Tributes*, time was passing quickly. By day four (July 23), I had only four of twelve pieces completed— all with detailed guitar accompaniments. In order to finish all twelve sketches on time, I had to make a practical strategic decision. For most of the remaining pieces, I could forego writing a such a detailed guitar part and concentrate primarily on maintaining melodic and harmonic flow.

Instead, I prepared an enhanced **lead sheet**, containing **melody** and **chord symbols**. As a precursor to written **guitar accompaniment**, I wrote **rhythmic accents above the chord symbols** and a **four-measure levada** as a model for each thematic section. The completely notated guitar accompaniments could be composed after completing the remainder of lead sheet sketches.

13. Phase Five: Technical Considerations for Clarinet and Guitar

Prior to the formation of Diálogos Duo, I had written Brazilian chamber and jazz pieces featuring clarinet (or bass clarinet). After hearing the epic 1992 CD *Dois irmãos* by Paulo Moura and Rafael Rabello, they demonstrated what was possible for a Brazilian music clarinet-guitar duo. However, it was not until I met Louis Arques that the full artistic and compositional potential became apparent.

The two instruments are at once sonically distinct but extremely compatible in all registers. The clarinet's *chalameau* (lower) range is not only a lush option for melodic playing, but allowed the possibility of playing bass lines and other counterpoints while guitar took the melody.

Due to the substantial melody and accompaniment responsibilities of the two instruments, opportunities for such role exchange was limited. There is contrapuntal guitar writing in the **D theme** of no. 4, *O Bandolim sabe tudo*, and in parts of no. 11, *Choro Sussuro*. The remaining thematic guitar writing consists of solo introductions, codas and transitions between sections. In all five suites since then, I have employed more frequent role reversals, expanding and diversifying the range of possible textures.

13.1 The Clarinet

The Duo had been together for almost two years when I began to compose *Choro Tributes*. From the beginning of our collaboration, I was studying clarinet and bass clarinet fingering charts, checking the technical execution of certain melodic lines and large interval jumps. In rehearsals, we discussed melodic passages which did not “lay” particularly well on the instrument. The adjustments I made were slight but made a tremendous difference in the playability of the music.

Regarding **melodic writing**, I was quite aware that unlike plucked string instruments (bandolim, cavaquinho, guitar), the clarinet needed **frequent rest**. Although Louis had tremendous stamina and lung power, some phrases in *Choro Tributes* still required dropping notes to allow adequate rest for breathing. In this and many other respects, he has been a great teacher for me.

With each new suite, I became more informed about avoiding certain note combinations and awkward interval jumps in rapid passages. I also was more confident in writing for the extended upper register, which he executed with great aplomb. While remaining mindful of these technical considerations, today I compose for Louis whatever I am hearing. It is an **earned freedom** which keeps me humble and excited about exploring the limits of the instrument.

13.2 Dancing around the Break

Probably the most important consideration and awareness a composer must have when writing for clarinet is **the break**— i.e., **the point between written B and C above middle C**. Since the clarinet acoustically favors the **second overtone** (a perfect 12th above the fundamental), significant changes of fingering occur as a melodic line frequently crosses above and below. This does not mean one must totally **avoid** composing lines that cross the break— but it is wise to use a modest number of break crossings within a continuous melodic line.

13.3 *Bb* or *A* Clarinet? The Perils of Choro Modulations

The movements of *Choro Tributes* were composed in major keys (Bb, F, C, G, Db, D) and minor keys (C, G, D, B). Initially, they were all intended to be played on **Bb clarinet**. Although the tonal vocabulary was quite traditional for most pieces (exceptions being *Choro Sussuro*, no. 11, and *Som livre*, no. 12), some modulations within phrases and between thematic sections would quickly visit **remote tonalities** in “heavy sharps” that were not very optimal for Bb clarinet.

For example, in no. 3, *Solstício de verão* in D major (ded. Ernesto Nazareth), the **C** theme is in **Gb major** (enharmonically **F#**, **III major**). For this piece, it made more sense for Louis to play the **A clarinet**—so I prepared the part after our first rehearsal. One by one, he asked for more pieces to be written for the **A** instrument. When he showed me the differences in fingering a given phrase (very awkward on Bb, much smoother on A), it was clear that in future suites, I would prepare both **Bb and A** parts— even if the key was just **C major**!

The next suite I composed for the Duo was *Impressões de Minas* (2019), which featured tributes to Milton Nascimento, Toninho Horta, Sérgio Santos and other *mineiro* masters. Given the guitar-centric nature of *música mineira*, several pieces were written in the **sharp keys**: D, A, E and B major. Only two of the twelve movements were well-suited for **Bb** clarinet. The rest were written explicitly for **A** clarinet, and I took advantage of the extra half-step (low C# concert) at choice moments during the suite.

13.4 The Guitar: Accompaniment Texture, Density, Register and Variations

As mentioned previously, several movements in *Choro Tributes* were sketched initially as an **enhanced lead sheet**— chord symbols with rhythmic accents, dynamics and sample *levadas* as a point of departure for further development and variation. The primary goal in solo guitar choro accompaniment is to **capture the rhythmic and harmonic essence of a regional** (choro ensemble): six and seven-string guitars, cavaquinho and pandeiro. The *levada* consisted of the following elements:

- 1) a **chord voicing** articulated by a specific rhythmic figure, partial or complete arpeggiation
- 2) an **independent bass line** which served three functions:
 - a) **rhythmic** support which anchored the *levada*;
 - b) **harmonic** support, creating specific chord inversions and reharmonizations;
 - c) **baixarias** that occur most frequently at the end of phrases and thematic sections.

Having played, studied and transcribed choro extensively, I knew that the guitar parts for *Choro Tributes* had to exemplify key aspects of choro performance practice and some universal principles of accompaniment. Although choro (and other melodically active instrumental genres such as frevo and forró) can support a high degree of rhythmic activity between melody and accompaniment, there is a point in acoustic duo playing when melody can become obscured.

This presents the ongoing conundrum: is the guitar accompaniment “full enough” in this section to express groove, texture and harmony while supporting the clarinet melody? Or should the texture be allowed to breathe more in certain places? For certain, **aggregate density of texture** between the two instruments requires a composer’s vigilant sensitivity. Also, **attention to register** must be engaged to avoid chord voicings and arpeggios which occupy the same register as the clarinet for extended durations.

At a certain point, I had to reckon with the reality that a certain degree of musical imagination is required of **the choro listener** to “fill in the blanks”. The guitar can **convey the spirit** of the pandeiro, tamborim, cavaquinho, violão sete cordas, but it cannot express and integrate **all** of these elements simultaneously. Nonetheless, the feeling of these instruments in a choro *regional* needed to be communicated. To the best of my ability, I wrote the accompaniment as an organic synthesis of choro’s percussion vocabulary. There exists a rich body of accompaniment models as played by brilliant Brazilian guitarists and pianists dating back to Canhoto and João Pernambuco; Ernesto Nazareth and Chiquinha Gonzaga. No shortage of resources if one does their stylistic homework.

13.5 Accompaniment: Improvised Perpetual Development

Much like piano or guitar in a jazz rhythm section, **choro accompaniment is active improvisation in a supportive role**. For true accompaniment to sound organic, not repetitive or mechanical, one must apply a creative ethic of **perpetual development** of initial levadas and contrasting elements within each thematic section. The key as a composer is to capture in notation the **spontaneous interaction** between choro melody and accompaniment instruments.

It is equally important for guitar accompaniment in each thematic section to establish a **clear rhythmic identity**. This is accomplished by contrasts in texture— changing from repeated chord attacks to arpeggiated voicings, to baixarias— the primary glue between phrases and sections.

(see FIGURE 6, “Solo Guitar Accompaniments in Choro Tributes”, next page)

Progressive animation of texture is essential. This figure illustrates two main aspects:

- 1) **Levadas:** variations and *baixarias* in maxixe, choro ligeiro, choro-canção, samba-choro, choro.
- 2) **Reharmonization** and increased harmonic rhythm when the **A** theme reappears.

Movement no. 1. *Não diga agora* (**A** theme) shares the **maxixe** rhythm between chord voicings and bass line. Notice the long *baixaria* pickup and shorter lines in m. 2 and 4. All three occur while the melody is at rest, thus serving two main functions: 1) maintaining melodic activity in the texture; 2) introducing a conversational contrapuntal element. The last phrase of the **A** theme shows a more typical choro levada. All four sixteenth notes within a beat are present as a **composite** of the broken chordal figure and bass line.

Movement no. 4. *O Bandolim sabe tudo* is a traditional choro, in the mold of Lupercio Miranda. After a seven-note *baixaria* pickup, the **A** theme integrates a typical choro figure for the chord voicings (m. 1, 3) using *baixarias* on beat two of m. 2 and 4. Notice the **inverted harmonies** which create a **chromatic bass line**, while supporting a **II-V-I** progression. The **B** theme (m. 1-4) offers contrast with lighter arpeggiated voicings and a softer dynamic marking. Abrupt contrast is used again in m. 5-8 by returning to the basic choro figure and louder dynamic.

Movement no. 9. *Dois irmãos no céu* is a choro-canção based on “*Chorando baixinho*” by Abel Ferreira. The accompaniment of the **A** theme is modeled after Rafael Rabello’s recording of that piece, using a different rhythmic element in each bar of the first phrase. Depending on the situation, Rabello’s playing could be quite eclectic— blending choro, samba, and exogenous influences such as flamenco. The sixth string is tuned to D, which offers rich harmonic alternatives.

Movement no. 10. *Sambando na praia* is a samba-choro. Its solo introduction is harmonically static and comprised of two samba rhythmic elements: chord attacks derived directly from the *tamborim*; quarter-note bass line which alternates the root and lower 5th of each harmony, deriving from the *surdo* drum. The **C** theme levada is a variant of the **A** theme, using syncopated **stop-time accents**. Such stop-time provides textural relief from dense, continuous accompaniment. It also introduces a rhythmic tension/instability which inevitably resolves back to the more stable levada. This juxtaposition of stable grooves marked by stop-time is classic choro.

Movement no. 12. *Som livre* is dedicated to Hermeto Pascoal. It is the most harmonically adventurous piece in the suite. Two aspects are illustrated here: 1) **development** of accompaniment for the return of the **A** theme; 2) **reharmonization** and intensification of harmonic rhythm:

1) The three-note arpeggios of chord voicings in m. 1-2 of the first **A** theme statement is a lighter arpeggiated alternative to all three notes being played at once and repeated. M. 3-4 combine bass notes decorated by upper neighbor tones (sixteenth-note triplets) and a single chordal attack above. In the final statement of the **A** theme, triplets (which are melodically prevalent in **B** and **C** themes) now appear as a rhythmic variation in the **accompaniment**. The actual notes are the same as the chord voicings used in the initial **A** theme statement.

2) The **reharmonization** and **increased density** of m. 3-4 transforms a fairly functional progression in D major (**I – VI – bVI major – V**, in quarter notes) into a dense, chromatic movement of harmonies in eighth notes. All the original bass notes (D, B, Bb, A) are embedded within the more complex variation.

Hermeto frequently uses such dense reharmonizations in all genres of his writing. Such progressions often defy traditional analysis, i.e., each chord does not have to be “functional”. Rather, they are flashes of harmonic color reflecting Hermeto’s genius and total creative freedom.

The **five-note voicings** in m. 3-4 (four note chords plus bass note) require using all the fingers of the right hand to execute them evenly and cleanly. There are numerous Brazilian guitarists of different styles and regions (Toninho Horta and Yamandu Costa among them) who use five-note chords in their accompaniments and solo guitar repertoire.

Finalizing the guitar accompaniments in *Choro Tributes* took more than a year, based on notes I took from numerous rehearsals and initial performances.

13.6 Alternate Tunings

In the first three suites composed for the Duo, I used three alternate guitar tunings:

Diálogos for clarinet and guitar:

no. 5, *Maracatuque* (6 = D); no. 7, *Desafio e Recordação* (6 = D, 5 = G)

Diálogos for bass clarinet and guitar

no. 2, *Retrato de Radamés* (6 = D);

no. 4, *Saudades do Leblon*, no. 5., *Chão do batuque* (6 = C, 5 = G)

Centenário for clarinet and guitar

(6 = D): no. 2, *Enganhoso*; no. 3, *Maxixe de março*; no. 5, *Noturno*; no. 7, *Ascensão*;

no. 8, *Bandeira solene*

When composing *Choro Tributes*, I used alternate tunings for only two pieces, both slower subgenres: no. 7, *Réquiem* (6 = C, 5 = G) and no. 9, *Dois irmãos no céu* (6 = D).

Before composing the theme for *Réquiem*, I knew that the key would be C minor. This implied that any prominent tonic chords would require a low C in the bass. Dropping the 5th string to G was an obvious choice based on previous Duo compositions that used this tuning. I wrote a four-bar introduction which established the main accompaniment texture: sixteenth-note arpeggiations of harmonies over long bass notes. I wanted the guitar to have a dark, somber quality, much like cello *pizzicato*.

This active guitar texture contrasted with the slow-moving, lyrical clarinet melody in the high register. The alternate tuning provided a wealth of chord voicings and harmonic alternatives not available in standard tuning. The generous use of chord inversions lent a Brahmsian aspect that seemed to work well for the mood I wanted to establish.

In *Dois irmãos no céu*, my model piece was Abel Ferreira's *Chorando baixinho*. In the legendary interpretation by Rafael Rabello and Paulo Moura, Rabello uses low D on the 6th string. This feature is used in the tribute composer model, *Dois irmãos no céu*, as well as the D minor tonality. More aspects about guitar accompaniment are discussed in the remaining three phases.

14. Phase Six: Completion of Engraved Scores

I began working on the final engraved scores and parts for *Choro Tributes* in October 2018, two months after completing the original sketches. The first task for each sketch was to confirm the final “road map”: placing directions such as *dal segno*, when to go to coda 1 and 2, and so on.

Then I designed a **master score template** in Sibelius notation software: staff size for score and parts, text and chord symbol fonts, rehearsal letters etc. Note entry was accomplished using an M-Audio MIDI keyboard. For each piece, the entry was done **one theme** at a time: 1) assign a rehearsal letter; 2) enter the notes for the clarinet part, then the guitar part, **without** articulation marks; 3) add chord symbols above the guitar part; 4) enter all articulations and dynamic markings.

Articulation marks for individual notes included: note duration (staccato/tenuto), accents and embellishments (grace notes, portamento). For multiple notes: phrasing slurs, dynamic levels, crescendo/decrescendo markings, ossia staves for small variations within repeated sections, tempo changes (including *ritardando*, *accelerando*, etc.). As previously discussed, precise articulation and phrasing indications were used to “encode” choro performance practice in the parts.

To create the **parts**, I made a duplicate copy of the completed score and increased the staff size. As requested by Louis, I prepared both **Bb** and **A clarinet** parts for certain movements. The goal was to fit his part on a maximum of **three** pages. I also included **guitar cues** (in smaller cue notes) if there was a solo introduction or long *baixaria* pickup. Special attention was given to **enharmonic spelling** in modulatory passages. We looked over problematic areas together in each piece, arriving at the best solution.

Wherever possible, the basic rule is to use **all flats** or **all sharps** for a series of notes (especially scales). The **enharmonic spelling** of notes by their theoretical function (relation to the underlying harmony, non-harmonic tones) is not important for a melody player to know at first reading. They can consult the complete score to verify these kinds of theoretical relationships. There were also some **phrasing slurs** and **articulations** which were technically awkward. For this, Louis would play me the different options and I would make the revisions. It was fascinating.

The **guitar part** took much more time, as I needed to include **position markings** and **fingerings** for certain lines and chord voicings. The more complex the melodic and harmonic vocabulary, the more indications I needed. For clarity in reading, I made **two guitar parts** for each movement: one with all fingering indications and the other without. By the third rehearsal and considerable individual preparation, I no longer needed the indications and could play from the part without indications. Most of the guitar parts were able to fit on **four pages**.

The final process in Sibelius software was to **export the MIDI audio file**. Although the instrument sounds in Sibelius at the time were not very authentic, it sufficed for the duo's basic reference: to become familiar with a piece's form, thematic content, harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary and compare it to the **model piece** used as the guide for the composer tribute.

15. Phase Seven: Movement Titles and Final Performance Sequence

Phase Eight: Score Revisions based on Rehearsals and Performances

These final two phases are **post-compositional**, critical for preparing a work for performances and definitive audiovisual capture. It is also an opportunity to make further revisions based on further rehearsals and performances. Being that Phases Seven and Eight are concurrently interrelated, I will discuss them together as they unfolded.

The creative “heavy lifting” was now finished— it was easier to detach from the intense compositional process and take on the mindset of the **performer**. I could distance myself from the work, approaching the music more objectively— almost as if someone else had composed it.

15.1 Movement Titles

For *Diálogos Duo* and all other Brazilian repertoire I compose, movement titles are in Portuguese. This has been the case for every Brazilian-influenced work I have written in the last thirty-five years. In *Choro Tributes*, movement titles were linked to either the tribute composer, or a pun on the title of another Brazilian music composition. Some titles manifested in the midst of

composing, as the piece's mood and identity with the tribute composer became more salient. Others were determined prior to the composition of the movement.

For example, movement no. 2, *Anacletozinho* (a little like Anacleto) captures his innocent composing of the *schottisch*; no. 4, *O Bandolim sabe tudo* (*the mandolin knows all*, dedicated to mandolinist Luperce Miranda) is a pun on the solo guitar choro by Dilermando Reis, *O Doutor sabe tudo* (*the doctor knows all*); no 5 for Garôto, *Meu violão é o chorão* (*my guitar is the real choro musician*) attributes his harmonic invention to the instrument. No. 6, *Manhoso* (*Sly*, ded. to Jacob do Bandolim) cites his winding, unpredictable themes; no. 9, *Dois irmãos no céu* (*two brothers in the heavens*) is derived from the duo CD by Paulo Moura and Rafael Rabello, *Dois irmãos*; no. 12, *Som livre* (*Free sound*), refers to Hermeto Pascoal's deep conviction that **all sound is music**, and the unbridled freedom with which he composes.

15.2 Rehearsal Techniques

The Duo began rehearsing *Choro Tributes* Tuesday evenings in February of 2019. Given all the detail written into our parts and the intricate rhythmic relationships between clarinet and guitar, we would limit our focus to three pieces per rehearsal. I will summarize our basic approach.

I've always believed that **the first reading of a piece should be at performance tempo**. In a first reading, the goals are: 1) to form a broad initial impression—envisioning the premiere performance, and how the audience might react; 2) to observe the mood, inherent energy, melodic and harmonic vocabulary, rhythmic groove; 3) to establish a creative, personal and emotional connection to the piece. In the more practical sense, playing a piece initially at performance tempo gives the players a clear indication of its technical demands and the individual preparation required. Articulations, dynamics and other performance details were given their due attention in subsequent readings.

15.3 Developing Rhythmic Awareness between Melody and Accompaniment

After this first reading, we would then **practice each thematic section separately** in a series of repeated “takes”. As necessary, we began playing takes at a significantly slower tempo. The result was more accurate and relaxed playing– even if it felt a bit sluggish.

We would then increase the tempo in small increments (2-4 bpm) for each “take” until we reached performance tempo. This process was done at first **without** a continuous metronome. However, some pieces were so syncopated that a metronome was crucial for us to remain “locked-in” to the tempo while navigating the piece’s rhythmic complexities.

Between each playing, we discussed phrasing, articulation, dynamics and technical issues that might require my revision before the next rehearsal. It was in these moments that I learned the most from Louis about writing for the clarinet. Once we played a thematic section cleanly at performance tempo, we moved on to the next theme of the piece.

15.4 Rhythmic Alignment between Melody and Accompaniment, within Accompaniment

Playing at slower tempos cultivated a keen awareness of the rhythmic interaction between our instrumental parts– **which accents were *aligned* or *non-aligned*.**

This is an important issue in all Brazilian music composition and arranging: i.e., **when melody and accompaniment instruments should play rhythmic accents together as an ensemble.** This can apply to a single accent within a phrase, or a series of accents for chord progressions at the ends of phrases or sections. In choro and other genres such as samba, this creates a desired rhythmic tension which then resolves directly back to the groove.

An equally important consideration for **composing guitar accompaniment** is **if the bass note of a chord and the voicing above should be rhythmically aligned (or not).** In choro, samba, bossa nova and other genres, it is very common for **a chord voicing to be anticipated by a sixteenth note, but the bass note is withheld until the next downbeat.** Some guitarists

unfamiliar with this issue may hear this as a rhythmic “clash”. On the contrary, such **independence of rhythmic alignment** between bass note and voicing is what makes Brazilian grooves so exciting to play.

Since our ensemble does not have a percussion instrument (pandeiro, ganzá) to establish a basic groove without accents, there is a compositional liability that **too many unison ensemble accents could obscure the underlying groove**. Like any other musical device used too frequently, ensemble accents can lose their effectiveness. The Duo also could sound like we are exerting too much rhythmic effort, **overcompensating for the absence of a rhythm section**.

15.5 Melodic Phrasing and connecting with the groove

To **phrase a choro melody authentically** and with *balanço* (swing), **it is essential to think of a melody as if it were another percussion instrument in the ensemble**. Melody players need to develop a rhythmic awareness of how their part connects with the underlying groove, along with any subtle changes in dynamics.

This does not mean that the phrasing should be executed mechanically. To the contrary, it should have an **elastic, breathing quality**. Achieving this kind of flexible phrasing is easier for most jazz players than classical players. Although Louis is conservatory-trained, his prior experience playing Afro-Cuban music was crucial to the ease with which he assimilated Brazilian phrasing.

Whether notated or not, it is a good instinct to **play large interval skips with a modest accent on the second note**. Sometimes I would ask Louis to play his line while I played my comping part with hand percussion, or tapping the rhythms with both hands on the guitar. Omitting the accompaniment revealed the rhythmic relationship between our parts: noticing every sixteenth note in the melody and where it was located relative to the basic quarter note pulse.

15.6 Building Musical Continuity- Practicing Transitions

To develop smoother transitions between sections and promote better ensemble continuity, we would **practice eight-bar excerpts which overlapped thematic sections**: e.g., playing the last four bars of the second **C** theme and connecting it directly with the first four bars of the final **A** theme. This type of targeted work helped us maintain rhythmic momentum and energy between sections, and execute such transitions more smoothly.

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RESUME ADDENDUM

20. A Compositional Model for Future Suites

Since Spring 2019 and the completion of *Choro Tributes*, I have composed **five new tribute suites** for the Duo. Our total original repertoire is now **nine suites, one hundred movements**:

Impressões de Minas (2019, 12 movements), music of Minas Gerais

Three choros for bass clarinet and guitar (2019)

Cantos do Nordeste (2020, 18 movements), music of Northeast Brazil

Sambistas Imortais (2021, 20 movements), a century of samba composers

Sarau para o Pixinguinha (2022, 13 movements), a virtual soirée for Pixinguinha's 125th birthday

Each suite features either a major Brazilian **genre** or multiple genres from a specific **region**, utilizing the same **pre-compositional strategy**:

- 1) make a **List of tribute composers**
- 2) link each tribute composer with an appropriate **subgenre**
- 3) Select a composer **model piece** and authoritative recording as a guideline for each tribute.

Since releasing *Choro Tributes* CD in May 2020, we presented several streamed concerts during the pandemic. As of April 2022, we resumed in-person performances. It is tremendously

satisfying to play for live audiences again. Since we now have so much new repertoire composed since *Choro Tributes*, our concerts have a **new format**. Rather than playing *Choro Tributes* in its entirety without interruption, our concerts divide into **three segments**: each consists of four pieces from three different suites— *Choro Tributes* and two of our most recent works.

Each segment has its own micro-trajectory, the last piece reaching a peak in tempo and dynamics. This allows for a more relaxed pacing of performance for us and our audiences. It also provides an opportunity to “break in” new repertoire without performing the entire suite from which those movements are chosen. Presenting *Sambistas Imortais* or *Cantos do Nordeste* in one continuous performance is ambitious but hardly realistic. It makes more sense to present **one suite in two concerts** that are scheduled **one week apart**, complemented by other original repertoire.

21. Diálogos Duo: next Creative Chapter

As of this writing, I am preparing the final Sibelius scores of *Sarau para o Pixinguinha*, in thirteen movements. The suite celebrates two anniversaries: **Pixinguinha’s 125th birthday** and **two hundred years of Brazilian Independence**. We plan to present its premiere either this fall or spring 2023, and make a definitive audiovisual document of the work in lieu of a CD release.

A number of close musical and academic colleagues have asked me what projects are next for Diálogos Duo. I reflect on the six inspiring years of collaboration with **Louis Arques**. What began as a casual meeting developed into an artistic statement of unimaginable magnitude. As the composer for this duo, I have arrived at a creative crossroads.

Preparing and composing each of our nine suites has been a profound journey. Studying the landmark works of each tribute composer and region of Brazil has been an exciting education. Using this **tribute model** as a creative vessel has cultivated in me a stronger awareness of where their legacies stand within the magnificent arc of Brazilian music’s evolution. My most fervent wish is that my works have done justice to their eternal contributions; also, that these suites can be a body of repertoire that musicians can enjoy playing, studying and refining their technical skills.

That being said, perhaps the **tribute model** has served the Duo well and it is time to move on to other vehicles of creative expression. I'd like to begin a new major work in a creative space that is **totally empty**, without any pre-compositional planning other than choice of instrumentation. I will need to develop a renewed courage and faith to follow my raw instincts to their intuitive realization. If the resulting music leans in an obvious Brazilian direction, that is most welcome. If, however, the "style" cannot be easily classified or pinpointed, perhaps such a work will be the beginning of a new phase in my creative evolution— one whose path is uncharted.

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See LINKS (next page)

LINKS

Expanded Article <https://www.boukas.com/choro-tributes-savassi>

Diálogos Duo

Homepage <https://www.boukas.com/dialogos-duo>

Educational Residencies <https://www.boukas.com/dialogos-duo-residencies>

Mannes Residency <https://www.boukas.com/dialogos-mannes-duo-residency>

Quarteto Moderno <https://www.boukas.com/quarteto-moderno>

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Brazilian Music Projects <https://boukas.com/projects>