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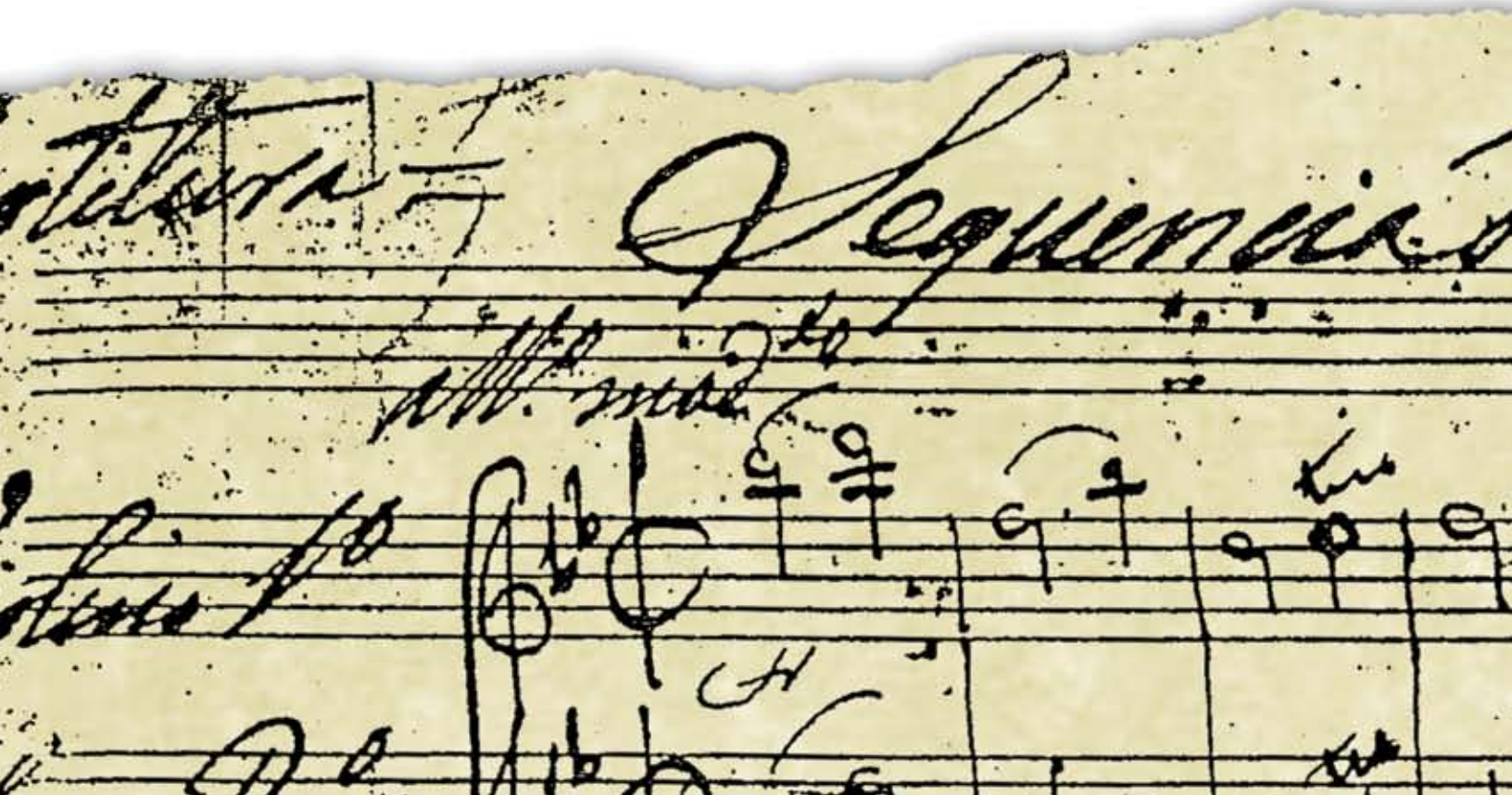
UT Chamber Singers Perform *Missa* in Brazil for First Time Since 1810

IN DECEMBER 1807, NAPOLEON INVADED PORTUGAL. In March 2005, the University of Texas Chamber Singers, Soloists, and Orchestra performed *Missa de Nossa Senhora da Conceição* by Brazilian composer José Maurício Nunes Garcia for the first time ever in the United States and the first time anywhere since 1810. In May 2006, the UT Chamber Singers and the University of São Paulo Chamber Orchestra performed the same work five times in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. What ties these events together? Herein lies a remarkable tale involving Portugal, Brazil, and a wonderful project undertaken by LLLILAS and the UT School of Music.

What connects Napoleon's invasion to the *Missa*? Rather than live under the French occupation, the Portuguese court—the demented Queen Mother, the obese Prince Regent João VI, and a predictable entourage of bureaucrats, courtiers, artists, and sycophants—grabbed whatever they could and headed for Brazil. The Prince Regent proved

a remarkable ruler. He founded libraries, theaters, and academies as well as the Capela Real, the Royal Chapel. He appointed as his first Kapellmeister a young Brazilian priest, José Maurício Nunes Garcia, who composed the *Missa* mentioned above and performed it for his patron in 1810.

So how did the work get to Austin, Texas? In 1998, Ricardo Bernardes, a young Brazilian musicologist and currently a doctoral student in musicology at the UT School of Music, found scattered manuscripts of the *Missa* in Rio archives and managed to stitch together a critical edition. His work was published by FUNARTE (a Brazilian counterpart to the NEA), whose director at the time was novelist Márcio Souza. Souza later came to LLLILAS as a visiting writer-in-residence and told LLLILAS director Nicolas Shumway of the new edition. A musician as well as a scholar, Shumway secured a score from Bernardes, fell in love with the piece, and then asked a simple question: What uni-



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versity has an exceptional choir and a deep commitment to Latin American Studies? The answer, of course, was the University of Texas. Shumway then contacted James Morrow, director of the Chamber Singers, UT's most select choir, and asked him to perform the *Missa*. At first, Morrow had doubts. After all, who was Nunes Garcia, and why hadn't Morrow, an accomplished singer and choral conductor, ever heard of him? After studying the work, however, he became convinced of its beauty and brought enormous energy and artistic insight to preparing it for performance, first in Austin and a year later in Brazil.

Concurrent with the performances in both Texas and Brazil, UT and the USP organized scholarly seminars on the context of the *Missa*, for the work poses many fascinating questions, beginning with the composer himself. Son of a Portuguese functionary and an Afro-Brazilian mother, Father José Maurício was a musical autodidact who probably never left Rio de

Janeiro. After his moment of glory as the Prince Regent's Kapellmeister, he went on to compose a requiem and two other Masses. Like the *Missa*, these are large-scale works scored for mixed choir, soloists, and full orchestra. Sophisticated, melodic, and technically challenging, these compositions pose problems not only for musicians and musicologists, but also for social and political historians. What, for example, were the politics behind João VI's cultural innovations? What contacts existed between Portugal and Brazil during the fourteen years that João nominally ruled in both countries? Who were the musicians? What class and ethnic groups did they represent? How were they trained to perform such challenging music? Was José Maurício's career affected negatively because of his Afro-Brazilian ancestry? How did musical styles cross the Atlantic—and for that matter, how did European culture in general come to the Americas? Is Brazilian music of the period merely derivative, or does it contain something uniquely

"New World"? In sum, how does a musical composition like this serve as a window to a fascinating historical period? Both the UT and the USP seminars brought prominent scholars together to discuss these matters, including Kenneth Maxwell, a widely published historian of Brazil, and Kirsten Schultz, author of an excellent book on the Joanine court titled *Tropical Versailles*.

Ultimately, of course, the most important question is musical: Do the compositions of José Maurício merit musical admiration, or are they merely historical curiosities? From the huge success of the UT Chamber Singers' performances in Austin, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro, there can be no question about the musical worth of his work. José Maurício was clearly the most accomplished composer in the Americas at that time, and his work compares favorably with that of many of his European contemporaries. UT is very proud for having helped resurrect this colonial masterpiece. ✨

