

NOTES FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MELBA LA ROSE

The presentation you are seeing today is the result of more than 20 years of research into one of my most beloved artists, Aleijadinho. I was enthralled with his work even before I met and married a Brazilian, who took me to see the extraordinary sculptures in the colonial cities in 1989. Since Aleijadinho carved only for the churches, it is rare to see his art outside of the colonial cities: Ouro Preto (literally *Black Gold*), Mariana, Tiradentes, Sabara, Mariana, Sao Joao del Rei, and Congonhas do Campo. We collected books from all over Brazil, as much as possible. However, when I questioned a bookstore owner in Sao Paulo about the lack of actual records of the artist's life, he commented that they had mostly burned or been destroyed by water damage – and anyway, *nobody thought anybody would be interested in the records of a black man*. When I recovered from my horror, we proceeded to dig up as much information as we could. Bringing what books we could find back home, I continued researching on the Internet and communicated with scholars around the world to reconstruct the story. Since his tumultuous life paralleled the development of Brazil in all aspects, I felt the presentation had to be enhanced by multi-disciplinary elements that would support the history of that exciting time in art, literature, politics, poetry, music, dance, rebellion, religion, and the dramatic contradictions of racial barriers.

Poetry is selected from: Oswald de Andrade: Geronimo, Epitaph, Funeral Procession, Mistake of the Portuguese, In the Amphitheatre of Mountains. Cassiano Ricardo: The Other Life, M'orpheus, Zoo, Four Angels, The Hidden Rose, The Banquet, Pastoral Ode, Nightfall. Antonio Tomas Gonzaga: Marilia de Dirceu (completed in exile in Africa). Cecilia Meireles: Ballads of the Conspiracy (*Inconfidencia Mineira/ Minas Conspiracy*): The Flag of the Conspiracy, They Were Many Horses, Thousand Pans Go Running; The Gates of Midnight; Oh, Words; Freedom

Music is selected from: Heitor Villa-Lobos: Bachianas Brasileiras nos. 1-9; Symphony no. 10 – Amerinda, Earth and Its Creatures; Piano Prelude. Antonio Carlos Gomes: Allegro Animato, Allegro Scherzoso, Vivace (Burrigo de Pau); Camargo Guarnieri: Danca Negra, Cancao Sertaneja; Francisco Mignone: Lundu (en forma de rondo).

Masters of Minas or Pre-Classicalists: Of special note are the compositions of *impoverished musicians of mixed race* who were hired by the Church to learn classical European music desired by Portuguese parishioners. These extraordinary musicians added their own sensibilities to the work, which evolved into a new classical music from Brazil. The compositions were recently uncovered and recorded as "Sacred Music from 18th Century Brazil," which plays as the audience enters today. In addition, you will hear selections from "Negro Spirituals no. 1," which are ecclesiastical compositions by some of the same musicians, not at all what are thought of as Negro spirituals today. Some of these brilliant composers and musicians were: Luis Alvares Pinto, José Joaquim Emerico Lobo de Mesquita, Marcos Coelho Neto, José Maurício Nunes Garcia, Francisco Gomes da Rocha, and Ignacio Parreiras Neves. Also not to be ignored is the influence of the indigenous tribes on music, as recognized in the comic operas of Carlos Gomes and in many of the symphonies of Villa-Lobos, e.g. Symphony 10 – Amerinda.

Dance: European dances of the court and high society became influenced by African rhythms and movements, as well as those of local indigenous tribes. In point of fact, these evolved to new forms of dance that traveled back to Europe and became popular with the Royal Court and high society, such as the Lundu, Jongo, Maracatu, Caixambu, and more.

Cordel literature is represented by the line strung along stage left, audience right. Since the Portuguese did not allow printing presses, which would encourage reading and, therefore, education, people communicated by hanging the news of the day on strings in market squares. Often, these writings took poetic form. In interior parts of Brazil, the tradition carries on to this day.

Religion: Roman Catholicism brought to the country by the Portuguese became mixed with African traditions of Condomblé/ Macumba (such as worship of Imanja, goddess of the sea) and with rituals and nature worship of indigenous tribes. It is not unusual to see churches and traveling "oratorios" today, presenting a mix of the three religions.

Politics: Inspired by the American Revolution and the rumored storming of the Bastille scheduled for July, the Brazilian uprising against the Portuguese was organized for February 1789. It was the day of the *derrama* (collecting of an additional 20% tax on the dwindling gold), so Tiradentes and his *inconfidentes* (conspirators) thought the people would already be riled up and ready for a revolt in the town square of Ouro Preto. However, the revolt never happened because of a traitor to the cause. All conspirators were jailed and sent to Africa, except for Claudio da Costa, who committed suicide, and Tiradentes who died a gruesome death after years of trials in Rio de Janeiro. He took responsibility for the entire conspiracy. He was hanged, then drawn and quartered, with his head planned for posting in the town square. However, the body parts disappeared and so he was spared this last humiliation. Today, there is a statue of Tiradentes (a dentist whose real name was Joaquim José da Silva Xavier) in Ouro Preto and he is considered the father of Brazilian independence, though independence didn't actually come until September 7, 1823. Abolition of slavery was enacted in 1888, long after the death of Aleijadinho.