

Piano Music of
Francisco Mignone

**Martin
Jones**



Piano Music of
Francisco Mignone (1897 – 1986)
Martin Jones, piano

1	Lenda sertaneja No. 8 (1938)	2:24
2	Cucumbizinho (1931) <i>Brazilian Dance</i>	2:08
3	Valse élégante (1931)	2:15
	I ^a Sonatina (1949)	4:20
4	<i>Andante moderato</i>	2:19
5	- <i>Allegro moderato</i>	2:01
6	Lenda sertaneja No. 6 (1931)	3:20
7	Serenada Humorística (1932)	2:35
8	Congada (1924/28) <i>Dança Afro-Brasileria</i> from his opera <i>O Contratador dos Diamantes</i>	3:06
	II ^a Sonatina (1949)	4:32
9	I Muito simples – <i>Andantino mosso</i>	2:44
10	II <i>Allegro ma non troppo</i>	1:48
11	Lenda sertaneja No. 4 (1930)	2:35
12	Tango (1931)	3:51
	Quatro peças Brasileiras (1930)	6:42
13	I Moroco	1:58
14	II Maxixando	1:28
15	III Nazareth	1:28
16	IV Toada	1:48

	III ^a Sonatina (1949)	8:05
17	I <i>Andantino - Vivo</i>	3:42
18	II <i>Allegretto – Allegro</i>	4:23
19	1 ^a Valsa de esquina (1938)	3:35
20	Paulistana (1942) <i>People of São Paulo</i>	7:36
	IV ^a Sonatina (1949)	6:16
21	I <i>Allegretto non troppo</i>	4:09
22	II <i>Allegro con umore</i>	2:07
23	12 ^a Valsa de esquina (1943)	4:06

Playing time 67:34

Produced by Adrian Farmer
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 Cover image: José Ferrez de Almeida Júnior (1850-99) ‘Garoto com banana’ (1897)
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Francisco Mignone was born in São Paulo in 1897 to Italian parents who had emigrated to Brazil from Salerno, Italy the previous year. His father, Alferio, was a flautist in the Salerno Opera Orchestra. They had three more children, of which Domingo and Guillermo would also become professional musicians. Francisco's early studies on flute and piano, including foundation work on musical theory and improvisation were entirely under his father's direction until the age of ten after which his piano studies continued with Silvio Motto in São Paulo. By the age of thirteen Mignone was earning his own living playing piano, directing dance bands and eventually playing flute in São Paulo orchestras. Evenings were spent with friends serenading the streets with improvised waltzes and *chôros* - a generic title for a serenade, played by one melody instrument with accompaniment, typically on the *cavaquinho*, a small Portuguese guitar.

Mignone began five years of study in flute, piano and composition at the São Paulo Conservatory in 1912, aged fifteen. His primary tutor was Agostinho Cantú, but he also came under the influence of Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), a fellow piano student, four years his senior, who was teaching music history and aesthetics at the Conservatory. Andrade would go on to become the most influential poet, novelist and 'avant garde' theoretician in Brazil. In time he would bring about a major shift in Mignone's musical direction. Mignone recalled that even at this stage Andrade was preoccupied with ideas on nationalism in Brazilian artistic life. Some early compositions, pieces in a popular style, won recognition at this time, including *Romance in A major* for orchestra (1914) which won first prize in a regional music competition.

After graduation Mignone continued to compose, preparing a series of orchestral works for a concert on September 16, 1918, conducted by his father, which marked his debut as a professional composer and pianist – he also played part of the Grieg Concerto. The success of this debut won him a scholarship from the São Paulo Commission on Artistic Pensions to study in Europe. He left Brazil on August 4, 1920 headed for the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi in Milan. There his principal professor was Vincenzo Ferroni (1858-1934) whose own studies had been in Paris under Massenet. Ferroni remained strongly attached to his French models, and used the same materials with his students in Italy.

Although he had made frequent trips back to Brazil for performances of his own works Mignone stayed in Europe after his period in Italy had finished, conducting, presenting his own music and going to the opera as often as possible. His first opera *O Contratador dos Diamantes* was written at this time. He spent 1927-28 in Spain, composing Spanish songs, piano pieces, and another opera *L'Innocente*. It was this opera, performed to great acclaim on September 5,

1928 in Rio de Janeiro that caused Mignone to be hailed as the successor to Brazilian composer Carlos Gomes (1836-96). Gomes opera *Il Guarany* (1870) had made him one of the very few non-European musicians to make it to the first rank of opera composers.

However, Mário de Andrade, had a different response. In 1928 he had crystallized his ideas on a revolutionary artistic movement, and in the process had become a powerful advocate for national music. He wrote: “A national art already exists in the conscience of the people. The artist has only to give those existing elements a more erudite transposition which transforms popular music into artistic music”. He was now gently at odds with Mignone, and issued a public rebuke:

“No one appreciates this artist more than I. I support him as I support all whom I consider great. But I must recognise that the actual situation of Francisco Mignone is very sad and we are running the risk of losing a great Brazilian talent. His music has great dramatic power, endowed with an exclusively European feeling and developed in an Italian setting. Francisco Mignone is in a sad situation; we can find no Brazilian librettists who will furnish him with national topics.”

Mignone took this to heart and reconsidered his position in relation to Brazilian music, leading to a period in which folklore was his principal source.

In 1929 he returned to São Paulo, and to the Conservatory as a teacher of harmony. However, the



instability and loss of opportunity in that city following Getúlio Vargas' armed revolt, saw Mignone relocate to Rio de Janeiro. In 1933 he took up a position as conductor and teacher of conducting at the Escola Nacional de Música where he would remain until retirement in 1967.

Alongside his teaching and composing Mignone accepted invitations to conduct in Europe and the United States, conducting the NBC Symphony twice. In Brazil he continued to earn the acclaim and affection of his countrymen. He was music director for Radio Globo (1945-47), the Teatro Municipal (1949-51), and the radio station of the Ministry of Education and Culture from 1962-64.

Mignone married in 1931, Liddy Chiaffarelli, daughter of Luigi Chiaffarelli, piano professor at the São Paulo Conservatory. Liddy had cooperated with Villa Lobos on his education projects and taught piano at the Brazilian Conservatory in Rio de Janeiro. She was killed in an airplane crash in 1962. He married again and with his wife Maria Josephina Mignone, a celebrated pianist in her own right, he regularly performed and recorded piano duets and duos. Mignone died in Rio de Janeiro, age 88. His wife remains an interpreter of his music to this day.

In her essay *The solo piano music of Francisco Mignone and Camargo Guarnieri*, Columbia University 1971 Sister Marion Verhaalen included the following general assessment:

“Mignone’s many years of association with the Escola Nacional, his frequent appearances as a composer-conductor in Brazil and in Europe give one the impression of a composer who was very much in the public eye, one who used his many talents in a great variety of ways...The strong sense of identification which even the music critics feel towards him has tended to tint their evaluation of his music. What might look like a musical weakness to an outsider, they will turn to a virtue...Thus, one must see the composer in his own setting to understand how his contemporaries have viewed him.”

Another friend and colleague at the Escola Nacional de Música was Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo, he wrote:

“(his art) has nothing cerebral about it – it is instinctive...His is a singular spirit, practical and shrewd, capable of perceiving and adapting himself to the more subtle variations of popular taste. The enormous musical facility which he possesses gives to all his works a certain quality of improvisation...”

The Piano Music

Although Mignone wrote a large number of pieces for piano solo, his preference had always been for the orchestra, and for solo song. In his works for the piano the search for orchestral colour and texture is clearly evident in his use of ornamentation, spaced chords and explorations at the extreme ends of the keyboard. His focus on piano composition tended to be sporadic, producing many pieces in the 1940s, almost nothing in the 50s and early 60s, and eventually a return to larger forms, in particular the 2nd, 3rd and 4th sonatas.

His works for piano solo fall into some natural groupings, the four sonatinas and four sonatas, more than thirty waltzes, and the nine *Lendas sertanejas*. Of the remaining pieces two-thirds are written in a predominantly 19th century European language, and the remainder reflect the influence of Brazilian folklore, in rhythm and form.

In this recital the Sonatinas are presented complete. There are two examples from the *Valses de Esquina*, and three from the *Lendas sertanejas*. The ‘European’ group is represented by *Valse Elegante*, *Tango*, and *Serenata Humorística*. The ‘folklore group’ by *Cucumbizinho*, *Congada*, *Paulistana*, and *Quatro peças Brasileiras*.

The four **Sonatinas** were all written in 1949 and published separately by Ricordi. Each is in two movements, none of which use the expected ‘sonata’ form, preferring instead a less rigorous plan. As the composer wrote in 1934 “...for me, contents generates and justifies the elasticity and adaptation of form.” The textures do have a certain classical transparency, which is married with syncopated Brazilian rhythms and regularly shifting meters. In 1954 Renzo Massarani summed up his response to these charming, straightforward works.



“...in the four sonatinas we note a distinct homogeneity of style, not only in the harmonies, sometimes traditionally French or end-of-the-century and in the sudden accents and a few Brazilian clichés, but also in the effortless flow, logic, equilibrium, and tonality which is a little sweet and popular in feeling but free of the easy effect or cheap sentimentality.”

For Massarani, Mignone in these works seems to have achieved the ‘more erudite transposition’ of popular musical material suggested by Andrade.

The *Valsas de esquina* have become inseparable from Mignone’s name, and they remain popular in Brazil. Tending towards the sentimental, and without the high spirits of the European Waltz, these Brazilian counterparts are deliberately nostalgic serenades, and always in minor keys. The title means literally ‘waltzes of the street corner’, and takes us back to the composer’s teenage improvisations in the alleyway of São Paulo. Mignone himself expressed the idea that the Brazilian waltz is a distinctive, pure form, not commercialised elsewhere, and originating as an urban form. Francisco Acquarone (1898-1954) gave the following poetic description:

“The *Valsas de esquina* of Mignone evoke from his musical environment the charming poetry of the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo of thirty years ago. Hearing them we are filled with an emotional suggestion of the streets and the slopes without pavement, illumined with gas lights threaded in the little garden gratings and protections under the leaves of the magueiras, the almonds, and the sopotiseiro trees. On the corner, at the crossing of the streets for an instant a group of Bohemian singers command attention under the balmy moon and fill the calm air with their soulful message.”

The *Lendas sertanejas* – the title means ‘country legends’ – are pianistic settings of serenade melodies (mostly Mignone’s own tunes) with a distinct ‘guitar’ style. They have in common rhythmic ostinatos in the accompaniment, a modal quality in the melodies, and gentle syncopations. They form another aspect of the composer’s unique ability to give expression to specifically Brazilian folklore.

Of the remaining short pieces, *Tango* was one of three piano pieces Mignone wrote while travelling in Spain, the scherzo-like *Serenata Humorística* was dedicated to fellow composer Francisco Braga (1868-1945), because, Mignone said, “he was a funny man”. The title *Cucumbizinho* comes from the ‘Cucumbi’ dance that was popular in both Rio and Bahia. The *Congada* is a transcription from Mignone’s opera *O Contratador dos Diamantes*. The *Quatro Peças Brasileiras* are neatly written, contrasted miniatures: Maxixe is a dance in duple time,

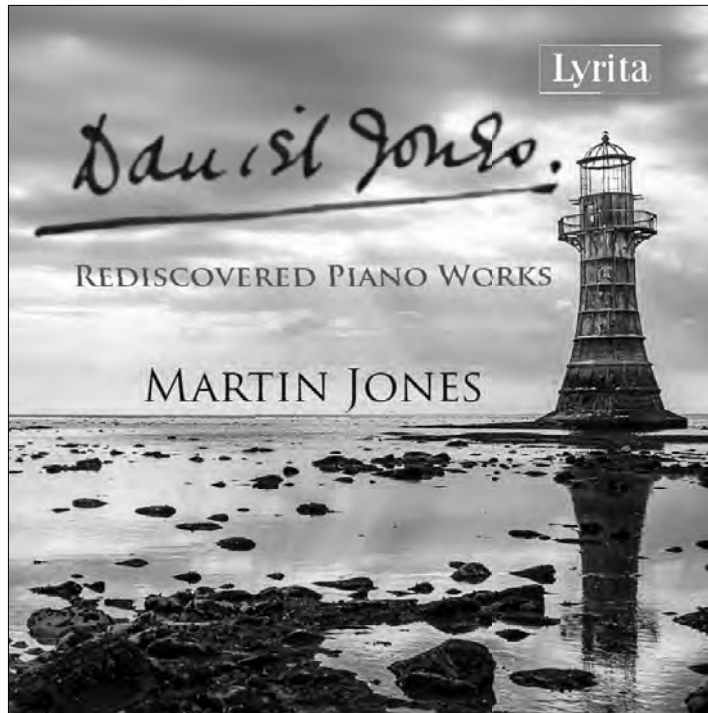
precursor of the tango, and Toada means ‘tune’.

The final piece, and the longest single work in this recital is *Paulistana*. It is not present in Verhaalaan’s catalogue of Mignone’s piano compositions when it was compiled in the 1970s. Perhaps it was not found, certainly not published then, and possibly only existing in manuscript today. It is multi-sectional, a Chopinesque nocturne framed by energetic syncopated material, some of which is shared – particularly the grotesque minor second dissonances. It would seem to be an improvisation, blending the styles of Europe and Brazil in a wild journey in praise of the inhabitants of that most cosmopolitan of all Brazilian cities.

Adrian Farmer, 2023

Based on extracts from *The solo piano music of Francisco Mignone and Camargo Guarnieri*, Columbia University 1971 by Sister Marion Verhaalen.





Alan Richardson

The Piano Music

Martin Jones is, as always an estimable and clearly enthusiastic guide to this repertoire, while the Lyrita piano sound is of a very high order. British music and Lyrita die-hards will want this disc. Hats off to the label for keeping a good man's name and legacy alive.

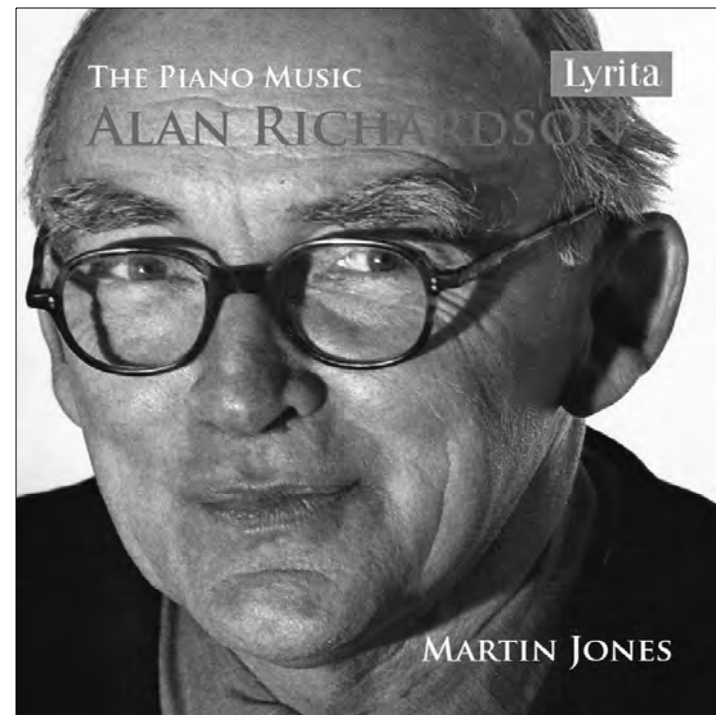
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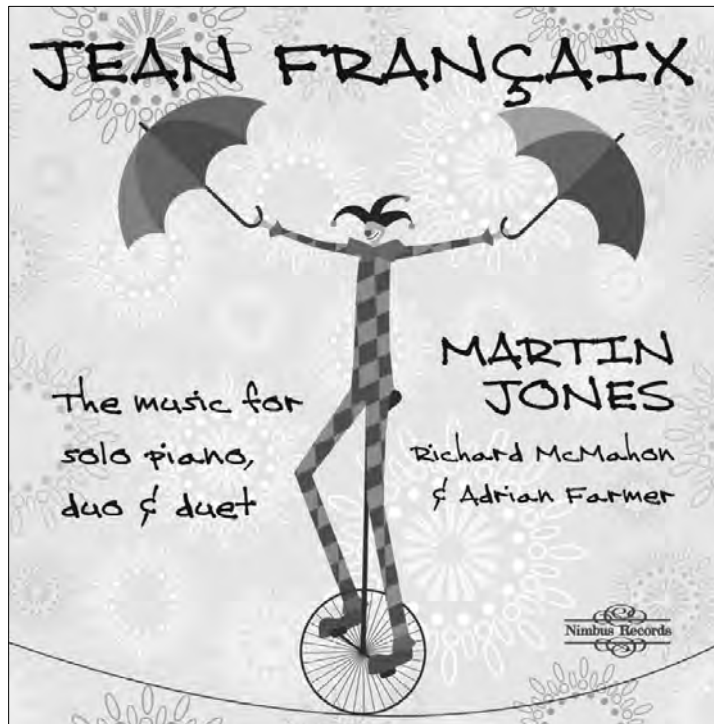
Daniel Jones

Rediscovered Piano Works

The depth and range of the works presented on this release suggest that Jones was a natural composer for the piano and until his symphonic odyssey had begun, he used this medium, along with that of the string quartet, for some of his most profound utterances.

Paul Conway





Jean Françaix

The Music for solo piano, duo & duet

All the music is played with dazzling wit and style by Martin Jones.

Nimbus's sound is excellent throughout.

The warmest possible recommendation.

Bryce Morrison, Gramophone

An absolute delight and, in repertoire

terms, a real find. Peter Lynan,

International Record Review

Jean Roger-Ducasse

The complete piano music

Goodness, this favorite pupil of Fauré's and Ravel-contemporary knew how to write tenaciously charming music and Martin Jones communicates it marvellously well, with a felt touch and color-rich palette that give Roger-Ducasse the full impressionist treatment.

Forbes Top 10 Classical Recordings of 2016



Martin Jones has been one of Britain's most highly regarded solo pianists since first coming to international attention in 1968 when he received the Dame Myra Hess Award. The same year he made his London debut at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and his New York debut at Carnegie Hall, and ever since has been in demand for recitals and concerto performances in Europe, Russia, Australia, Canada, North & South America. He has made over 90 recordings with Nimbus Records exploring music that is not often played including the complete works of 18 composers. This year will see the release of 4 discs of newly discovered manuscripts of Daniel Jones. Also, together with Adrian Farmer, 3 discs of French music for 4 hands. During next year, as well as giving concerts, he will complete 3 discs of the first recordings of all the piano works of Elizabeth Lutyens for Resonus Records, and continue his American Piano Series with Volumes 6 & 7 for Prova Recordings which will include several new works especially written for him, and, for Nimbus a collection of Brazilian music by Mignone, Gnatalli & Lorenzo-Fernandez.

