

Oswaldo Lacerda's Choral Legacy: Shaping the Sounds of Brazilian Choral Music

by Matheus Cruz

Oswaldo Costa de Lacerda (1927–2011) was a distinguished Brazilian composer, educator, and advocate for a national musical style that merged regional influences, such as Brazilian folklore and popular music, with broader twentieth-century art music. His choral compositions are influenced by Catholic liturgical traditions, Afro-Brazilian musical elements, and Brazilian poetry. Lacerda's body of work reflects Brazil's nationalist movements, drawing inspiration from his mentor, Mozart Camargo Guarnieri (1907–1993), who encouraged the integration of folk and popular music elements into his compositions.¹ In addition to compositions, Lacerda's contributions to the musical field include founding several artistic societies and authoring several music theory textbooks.²

Understanding the Brazilian cultural influences in Lacerda's choral music is crucial for conductors to provide a truthful interpretation of his compositions. This involves recognizing his use of specific harmonies, rhythms, and instrumentation derived from Afro-Brazilian traditions and folklore. While much of Lacerda's choral music is available only in Brazil, there is an effort to publish it in the United States,³ including three choral works discussed in this article, "Candeiro," "Ofulú Lorêê," and "Pai Nosso."

Overview

Born in São Paulo in 1927, Oswaldo Costa de Lacerda began his musical studies with an emphasis on

performance before pursuing composition under Camargo Guarnieri, who fostered his interest in Brazilian nationalist music. Lacerda's initial training included piano and vocal techniques, and by the age of twenty, he was already instructing students in music theory, harmony, and orchestration. His career as an educator flourished; he held faculty positions at prominent institutions, including the *Santa Marcelina* school and the *São Paulo Municipal* School of Music. He furthered his studies through a Guggenheim Fellowship awarded in 1963, which enabled him to attend the Tanglewood Music Center to study under Aaron Copland.⁴

Lacerda also ardently advocated for Brazilian music through leadership roles in organizations such as the *Sociedade Pró Música Brasileira* and the *Centro de Música Brasileira*. He made substantial contributions to the cultural development of Brazilian music, serving as both a composer and educator, integrating classical styles with Brazilian elements in his compositions. His extensive catalog encompasses works for orchestra, choir, chamber ensembles, and solo performances.⁵

Lacerda's choral compositions embody a distinctive synthesis of religious and nationalist influences, drawing upon a multitude of cultural and spiritual traditions. His musical works integrate elements from Catholic liturgical practices and Afro-Brazilian religions, including *Candomblé*,⁶ *Quimbanda*, and *Umbanda*.⁷ This integration signifies a profound cultural amalgamation in which Lacerda uses music as a medium for personal expression while addressing broader social themes.

The inclusion of these diverse musical elements highlights Lacerda's dedication to capturing the intricate fabric of Brazilian identity.⁸

Lacerda's work centers on Brazilian nationalism, which goes beyond a political or ideological stance. It reflects a deep devotion to Brazil's cultural heritage, a sentiment shaped by Mário de Andrade (1893–1945), a key figure in Brazilian musical nationalism. Andrade's influence on Lacerda and his teacher, Camargo Guarnieri, was pivotal in shaping Brazil's nationalist musical movement. Lacerda himself expressed a strong, inherent connection to Brazilian music, claiming that nationalism was embedded in his musical identity from the very first piece he composed.⁹

In his choral compositions, Lacerda exemplifies this sense of nationalism through active engagement with Brazil's popular music, notably *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB). MPB comprises genres such as *samba*, *baião*, and folk music, and serves as a crucial medium for the cultural and political expression of the Brazilian populace. Lacerda's integration of these musical genres into his choral works enabled him to forge a distinctly Brazilian sound. The texts of Brazil's eminent poets and writers are frequently incorporated into his compositions, anchoring Lacerda's music within the broader literary and cultural landscape of the nation.

Syncretic Roots

David Appleby and Mário de Andrade each explored the development of Brazilian music through acculturation, in which European, African, and Indigenous musical traditions converged during the colonial era.¹⁰ This began in the 1550s with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries, who systematically introduced European instruments and music theory to the indigenous peoples. Additionally, they established Brazil's first music conservatory in 1559, marking the beginning of a complex evolution of musical forms in which European styles integrated with local traditions, predominantly African and Indigenous elements such as melodies and

rhythms.¹¹

The influence of European music became even more pronounced when the Portuguese court relocated to Rio de Janeiro in 1807, establishing the city as the cultural nucleus for European arts within Brazil.¹² Following Brazil's independence in 1822, European musical structures such as the suite, sonata, symphony, and variations began to interweave with Brazilian folk music. This synthesis produced a distinctive Brazilian adaptation of European Romanticism, combining classical forms with the emotional intensity characteristic of the Romantic era and integrating uniquely Brazilian melodies, harmonies, and rhythms.

By the early twentieth century, Brazilian musical nationalism had begun to transition away from European influences and embrace diverse folk traditions. Alberto Nepomuceno (1864–1920) emerged as a significant figure who integrated Brazilian folk rhythms and melodies into his compositions. The 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Week of Modern Art) in São Paulo marked a crucial milestone for this movement, serving as a platform for esteemed composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959), Oscar Lorenzo Fernández (1897–1948), and Camargo Guarnieri. Guarnieri exerted considerable influence over Oswaldo Lacerda, ensuring that Brazilian folk and popular music remained central to the aesthetic discourse of tradition and thereby shaping the future trajectory of Brazilian music.

Brazilian Folklore: Candieiro

Brazilian folklore is deeply connected to the nation's musical identity, and traditional songs passed down through generations play an essential role in this cultural fabric. Composers such as Oswaldo Lacerda have been instrumental in safeguarding and adapting these traditional melodies, particularly those originating from northeastern Brazil, including *Cirandas* and *Cantigas de Roda* (children's singing games). Lacerda's incorporation of these folk elements into his compositions has contributed significantly to preserving Brazil's rich cultural heritage within its art music.¹³

Ciranda, a traditional musical and dance form originating from the state of Pernambuco, occupies a cen-

tral position in Brazilian folk music. Historically, it was performed by women awaiting the return of fishermen. The participatory nature of *Ciranda*, characterized by its rhythmic beat and synchronized movements, reflects both the dance itself and its communal action. Similarly, *Cantigas de Roda*, which are children's singing games, incorporate African, European, Indigenous, and Portuguese influences, exemplifying Brazil's syncretic cultural roots. Lacerda's choral folk adaptations integrated traditional elements with a classical style, promoting Brazil's nationalist movement while preserving cultural authenticity.

Oswaldo Lacerda's "Candieiro" (Figure 1 on the next page), composed in 1958 and published in 1972, is a distinctive choral work that blends cultural influences from northeastern Brazil, particularly from the *Cantigas de Roda*. These songs are deeply embedded in Brazilian folklore and skillfully incorporate elements from African, European, and Indigenous cultures. The work is written for an unaccompanied SATB choir, in which the vocal lines convey folk-traditional melodies while maintaining artistic sophistication, primarily through the harmony.

Figure 1 shows the opening refrain of "Candieiro" (mm. 1–9), which features a folk-inspired melody derived from the *Ciranda* dance mentioned previously. The composition begins with a soprano and alto duet that expands into a homophonic four-part texture, establishing the dance's collective spirit. In section A (mm. 9–21), the soprano voice assumes the primary melodic role, while the remaining voices sustain an ostinato accompaniment, maintaining rhythmic vitality despite a change in tempo. The use of Portuguese text accentuates the work's cultural roots, while the inclusion of an English translation enhances its accessibility.

Candieiro [candlestick] translation:

Cocoroco lamp Sinha,

I am not a Candlestick Sinha lamp.

Candieiro enters the circle and enters the loop without stopping;

whoever takes the lamp, the lamp will stay.

Lacerda revisits the refrain in an altered form at

measures 21–29, designated as A', transferring the initial duet to the tenor and bass voices. Section B (measures 29–41) further develops the material by assigning the melody to the tenor line, accompanied by a soprano-alto duet that functions as a countermelody. The final statement of the refrain (measures 41–54), functioning as a coda, presents the melody in the bass line before culminating in a unified homophonic texture. Throughout "Candieiro," Lacerda's manipulation of tempo, texture, and vocal distribution mirrors the *Ciranda*'s cyclical juxtaposition of reflective moments with energetic passages.

Sacred Music:

Catholic and Afro-Brazilian

Lacerda's sacred music can be classified into two principal categories: compositions for the Catholic Church and those influenced by other religious traditions, notably those rooted in Afro-Brazilian practices. While Afro-Brazilian music is often regarded as part of the broader Brazilian folkloric heritage, a significant portion of it derives from specific religious customs, such as *Candomblé*. These traditions are profoundly linked to the forced African migration to Brazil during the colonial era, wherein enslaved Africans brought their cultural practices and religious convictions, including forms of ritual music and dance.

Lacerda's works "Ofulú Lorêrê" and "Xangô" exemplify his admiration for Afro-Brazilian religious practices by integrating rhythms and melodies from *Candomblé* and other Afro-Brazilian traditions into his sacred compositions. In these two examples from Marc Meistrich Gidal's *Ethnomusicology* article,¹⁴ *jéje* and *macumba* (Figure 2 on page 37) illustrate the connection between African rhythms and Lacerda's "Ofulú Lorêrê," particularly in the melody's rhythms, first presented in the baritone solo (Figure 3 on page 37).

Lacerda demonstrates the lasting influence of the African diaspora in Brazil through the incorporation of *Yoruba*, *Bantu*, and *Fon* languages, which are associated with *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. His compositions integrate African linguistic elements with Brazilian folklore and Western classical music, illustrating a synthesis of diverse influences that define twentieth-century Brazil-

Allegretto ♩ = 92

mp *f*

Soprano
Có - có - có - có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! *f* Có - có - có -

Alto
Có - có - có - có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! *f* Có - có - có -

Tenor
f Có - có - có -

Bass
f Có - có - có -

Allegretto ♩ = 92

Piano

Menos movido ♩ = 80

S
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Can-di - ei - ro en - trai na ro - da en - trai - na

A
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Oi en - trai, en -

T
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Oi en - trai, en -

B
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Oi en - trai, en -

Menos movido ♩ = 80

Piano

Figure 1. Oswaldo Lacerda, *Candieiro*, mm 1–11.

ian classical music.

“Ofulú Lorêrê” represents Osvaldo Lacerda’s distinguished synthesis of Afro-Brazilian musical traditions and Western choral practices. Based on a *Candomblé* melody collected by Camargo Guarnieri in Bahia, the composition incorporates elements such as syncopation, ostinato, and layered vocal textures to evoke the ritualistic, trance-like qualities of Afro-Brazilian religious music. Lacerda’s treatment of the melody—initially presented as a baritone solo and subsequently redistributed among the voices—reflects the ceremonial call-and-response and stratified sonorities central to

Candomblé practice. The use of a hybrid Afro-Brazilian text further reinforces the work’s cultural authenticity and spiritual resonance.

Formally, the composition unfolds through contrasting sections that intensify rhythmic and textural complexity. In the B section (mm. 19–25), rhythmic tension is heightened through contrasting patterns between the upper and lower voices, while the C section (mm. 37–41) shifts melodic focus to the tenor line against a sustained ostinato in the remaining voices. An *accelerando* leading into the coda amplifies momentum and culminates in a powerful closing sonority. Through these compositional strategies, Lacerda integrates Afro-Brazilian rhythmic vitality expression within a refined choral framework.

Lacerda’s sacred music reflects a deep engagement with Catholic and Afro-Brazilian traditions, shaped by Brazil’s historical synthesis of European, Indigenous, and African influences. By integrating these elements within a nationalist framework, his religious works unite spiritual devotion and cultural identity.¹⁵

The National Commission for Sacred Music

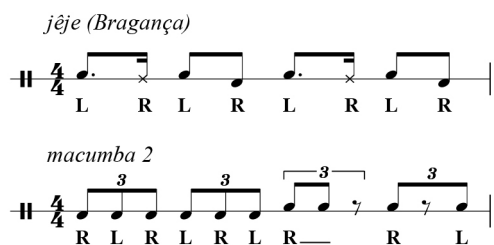


Figure 2. African Rhythms: *jêje* and *macumba*

Figure 3. Osvaldo Lacerda, *Ofulú Lorêrê*, mm. 1–5.

(NCSM) in Brazil was active during the 1960s and played a vital role in advocating for the integration of Brazilian popular culture into the ecclesiastical music repertoire, thus moving away from restrictive European traditions. This transition enabled composers to develop sacred music that more accurately reflected Brazil's national identity by incorporating elements from folklore, popular music, and Afro-Brazilian traditions, making the music more pertinent to the country's cultural and social milieu.¹⁶

In 1965, the 1st National Meeting of Sacred Music took place in Valinhos. Four fundamental principles for this musical renewal are observed: the faithful's participation, the ministerial function of sacred music, the creation of liturgical chant in the vernacular, and the expression of our people.¹⁷

Through his compositions, Lacerda contributed to the development of a distinctly Brazilian sound within the sacred music canon, which is both authentic to the nation's musical heritage and deeply intertwined with its spiritual life. As a distinguished member of the NCSM, Lacerda's efforts supported the integration of folk traditions into sacred music under the conviction that these elements conveyed authenticity and fostered a connection with the community.

Following the Second Vatican Council's reforms, which permitted the integration of vernacular languages and regional musical elements, Lacerda recognized the opportunity to incorporate Portuguese and regional Brazilian elements into his sacred compositions. While adapting to these modifications, he preserved the core of traditional liturgical music, as exemplified in his 1978 piece "Pai Nosso" (Our Father), which features unaccompanied voices and counterpoint lines (Figure 4).

Moderado $\text{♩} = 62$

mf

Soprano
Pai nos - so, que es - tais no céu, san - ti - fi -

mf

Alto
Pai nos - so, que es - tais no céu, san - ti - fi -

mf

Tenor
Pai nos - so, que es - tais no céu,

mf

Bass
Pai nos - so, que es - tais no céu,

Moderado $\text{♩} = 62$

Piano

Figure 4. Oswaldo Lacerda, *Pai Nosso*, mm. 1–3.

“Pai Nosso” exemplifies Lacerda’s capacity to harmonize musical innovation with liturgical intent, culminating in a composition of substantial spiritual and expressive profundity. The alternation between 3/2 and 2/2 meters introduces rhythmic versatility that reflects the natural prosody of the Lord’s Prayer, while the recurrent utilization of 3/2 may symbolically indicate the Holy Trinity. Primarily set in D minor, the work establishes a contemplative tone that intensifies with a crucial harmonic shift in measure 22, where an F7 chord resolves to F minor at the start of the B section, heightening emotional tension during the invocation for forgiveness.

This harmonic and rhythmic disruption emphasizes the prayer’s urgency and penitential character. Reflecting the liturgical reforms following the Second Vatican Council, “Pai Nosso” combines vernacular text and textual clarity with elements reminiscent of early sacred music. As André Guimarães Rodrigo observed, Lacerda’s perceptive treatment of meter, dynamics, and harmony closely interlinks musical structure with textual significance.¹⁸ Through this synthesis, “Pai Nosso” represents Lacerda’s notable contribution to Brazilian sacred choral music and underscores the enduring influence of Catholic tradition on Brazil’s cultural and musical identity.

Nationalism

Oswaldo Lacerda’s compositions are profoundly shaped by Brazilian nationalism and modernism, reflecting the nation’s cultural identity through folk traditions, regional rhythms, and vernacular texts. While Lacerda may have rejected the nationalist label, his works unquestionably embody key aspects of the movement, as musicologist Vasco Mariz emphasizes, noting that Lacerda’s music is inherently linked to his Brazilian heritage.¹⁹ The nationalist movement in Brazilian music, championed by figures such as Mário de Andrade, sought to establish a distinct Brazilian aesthetic by integrating folk and indigenous music into classical compositions. This shift gained considerable momentum following the Week of Modern Art in 1922. As a disciple of Guarnieri, Lacerda was significantly influenced by this fusion of folk traditions with

classical techniques.

Lacerda’s works were also influenced by prominent Brazilian literary figures such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902–1987)²⁰ and Manuel Bandeira (1886–1968),²¹ whose writings mirrored the nationalist and modernist currents in literature. Lacerda’s “Oração para Aviadores” (Prayer for Aviators), set to a text by Bandeira, exemplifies his ability to fuse personal and collective dimensions of Brazilian culture through music (Figure 5 on the next page). The dedication to Marcos Julio Sergil on the title page further underscores the work’s connection to literary and national contexts, reflecting the broader intersection of modernism and nationalism in twentieth-century Brazil.

“Oração para Aviadores” (1997) demonstrates post-Vatican II experimentalism by integrating Brazilian poetry and sacred choral music within a modernist aesthetic. Through the utilization of changing meters, homophonic textures, and meticulous attention to text prosody, Lacerda enhances the expressive potential of Bandeira’s poem. A partial English translation of the poem appears below:


Saint Clare, make clear;
These skies.
Grant us steady winds,
well aligned.
These seas, these skies,
make clear.
Saint Claire, grant us sun.
If the fog descends,
Illuminate
my eyes within the mist.
These mountains and horizons,
make clear.
Saint Claire, make clear.

Rhythmic flexibility mirrors natural speech patterns, while techniques such as text painting, voice pairing, and a concluding modulation from D minor to D major emphasize the work’s emotional development, moving from uncertainty to clarity and serenity.

Conclusion

Oswaldo Lacerda's contributions to choral music, deeply rooted in Brazilian culture and modernist aesthetics, merit widespread international recognition. His compositions were produced during a period marked by cultural nationalism and the ascendancy of modernism, and go beyond merely integrating traditional Brazilian elements with innovative compositional techniques. Lacerda's choral works skillfully incorporate Brazilian folk melodies, rhythms, and literary references, complemented by influences from Catholic liturgy, especially following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. This synthesis exemplifies his artistic vision and stands as a testament to his significant contribution to Brazil's cultural heritage, offering a distinctive and profound voice in choral music.

This article aims to explore how Lacerda's vocal compositions integrate Brazilian folk and Western classical elements, thereby capturing the essence of Brazil's cultural evolution during a significant period. As an increasing number of Lacerda's works are published and performed internationally, his contributions to the choral repertoire of the twentieth and twenty-first cen-

turies will be suitably recognized. In addition, it is hoped that a study of Lacerda's compositions will lead to further investigation into the diverse nature of Brazilian choral music. 

Matheus Cruz is the director of choral activities at the School of Performing Arts, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and the artistic director of Monteverdi Chorale. mcruz@uwsp.edu

NOTES

- ¹ André Acastro Egg, "Fazer-se compositor: Camargo Guarneri 1923–45" (DMA thesis, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, 2010).
- ² Lacerda wrote four textbooks: *Compêndio de Teoria Elementar da Música*, *Exercícios de Teoria is Elementar da Música*, *Curso Preparatório de Solfejo e Ditado Musical*, and *Regras de Grafia Musical*. He is also a member of the *Academia Brasileira de Música* and the *Centro de Música Brasileira*.
- ³ A significant portion of Oswaldo Lacerda's choral works, initially published in Brazil by Irmãos Vitale, are cur-

The musical score is for the first four measures of 'Oração para Aviadores'. It is written in 2/4 time with a tempo marking of 'Andante lento' and a metronome marking of 48. The score is divided into three parts: Soprano Alto, Tenor Bass, and Piano. The Soprano Alto and Tenor Bass parts have lyrics underneath the notes: 'San-ta Cla-ra cla-re-ai es-tes a-res. Dai-nos ven-tos re-gu-la-res de fei-'. The Piano part provides harmonic support with chords and some melodic lines. The dynamics are marked with a forte 'f' for the vocal parts.

Figure 5. Oswaldo Lacerda, *Oração para Aviadores*, mm. 1–4.

- rently out of print and no longer readily available. This limited accessibility underscores the need for publication and distribution in the United States to ensure broader availability for performers and scholars.
- ⁴ Osvaldo Lacerda's Short Biography. See: Gerard Béhague, "Lacerda, Osvaldo," Grove Music Online (2001); accessed April 15, 2025.
- ⁵ Osvaldo Lacerda's full catalog of works can be accessed at: https://abmusica.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/catalogo_o.lacerda_v2_web.pdf.
- ⁶ In Salvador there is a long history of recontextualizations of *Candomblé* musical elements and symbolism into carnival, capoeira, popular music, jazz, and art music. J. D. D. Meneses, "Listening with the Body: An Aesthetics of Spirit Possession Outside the Terreiro," *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 1 (2016): 90, <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.1.0089>.
- ⁷ Umbanda and Quimbanda are spirit-mediumship religions that were formed by combining Kardecist Spiritism, folk Catholicism, and local Afro-Brazilian religions such as Macumba in Rio de Janeiro, Candomblé in Bahia, and Batuque in Rio Grande do Sul. Marc Meistrich Gidal, "Musical and Spiritual Innovation, Participation and Control in Brazil's Umbanda and Quimbanda Religions," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 22, no. 2 (2013): 236.
- ⁸ Since the early twentieth century, Brazilian composers have engaged in ethnomusicological exploration of Afro-Brazilian religious practices and Indigenous musical traditions to incorporate these diverse sonic elements into their work as part of a broader project to construct a distinctly national musical identity.
- ⁹ Andréia Anhezini da Silva, "A Relação Poesia e Música nas Obras Corais de Osvaldo Lacerda sobre Poemas de Carlos Drummond de Andrade: Uma Abordagem Analítica-Interpretativa" (Master's thesis, University of São Paulo, 2009): 333.
- ¹⁰ David P. Appleby, *The Music of Brazil* (The University of Texas Press, 1983); Mário de Andrade, *Ensaio sobre a música brasileira*, 3^a ed. (Vila Rica; Brasília: INL, 1972).
- ¹¹ Maria José Bernardes di Cavalcanti, "Brazilian Nationalistic Elements in the Brazilianas of Osvaldo Lacerda" (Monograph, Louisiana State University, 2006).
- ¹² The Portuguese court with Queen Maria I, Prince John, and the Braganza royal family moved from Lisbon, Portugal, to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, because of the threat that Napoleonic forces were attacking other countries in Europe.
- ¹³ This practice of collecting tunes from different cultures within Brazil goes back to Nepomuceno, later Villa-Lobos, Guarnieri, then Lacerda. Those composers traveled and stayed with those tribes and participated in religious rituals to better understand and collect the tunes and the particularities accompanying them, such as dance, prayer, and ritual.
- ¹⁴ Marc Meistrich Gidal, "Musical Boundary-Work: Ethnomusicology, Symbolic Boundary Studies, and Music in the Afro-Gaucho Religious Community of Southern Brazil," *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 1 (2014): 83–109. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.58.1.0083>.
- ¹⁵ Carlos Eduardo Audi, "Osvaldo Lacerda: His Importance to Brazilian Music and Elements of His Musical Style" (DMA diss., The Florida State University, 2006).
- ¹⁶ Marcelo Urias, "Osvaldo Lacerda's Mass of the Holy Cross (1967) in the Historical Context of Brazilian Sacred Music and the Second Vatican Council" (DMA diss., Indiana University, 2014): 95.
- ¹⁷ Eduardo Manoel Lustosa Reis, "Missa Diligite de M. Camargo Guarnieri: Aspectos Interpretativos" (MM thesis, University of Campinas, 2018).
- ¹⁸ André Guimarães Rodrigo, "Quatro peças religiosas de Osvaldo Lacerda: uma leitura interpretativa para performance." [Four sacred pieces by Osvaldo Lacerda: an interpretative writing for performers] (Master's diss., University of São Paulo, 2016).
- ¹⁹ Vasco Mariz, *História da Música no Brasil*, 6th ed. (Nova Fronteira, 2005).
- ²⁰ Carlos Drummond de Andrade explored themes of identity, modernity, and the Brazilian experience. Lacerda frequently set Drummond's poetry to music, drawn to its lyrical clarity and emotional depth. See: Humberto Werneck, *Vida e Obra: Carlos Drummond de Andrade*. [Life and works] (2016), <https://www.carlosdrummond.com.br>.
- ²¹ Manuel Bandeira was known for his lyrical explorations of sorrow, love, death, and national identity.