



Francisco de Souza Coutinho, alias the Marquis of Valença, alias Chico Redondo (1866-1924): his impact in Brazil

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SIMPÓSIO ROTAS MUSICAIS: A HISTÓRIA DA MÚSICA NO BRASIL, EM PORTUGAL E ALÉM

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Abstract: The Portuguese baritone “Chico Redondo” made a tremendous impact during his extensive 18-month tour of Brazil in 1907-08, as much for his figure and personality as for his exceptional voice. This paper goes into such questions as his itinerary and mode of transport, his care over the question of publicity, the range of his repertoire, his reception as a performer and the many remarkable features of his person: in every respect great.

Keywords: Chico Redondo, itinerary, repertoire, reception, personality

Francisco de Sousa Coutinho, ou o Marquês de Valença, ou Chico Redondo (1866-1924): seu impacto no Brasil

Resumo: O barítono português “Chico Redondo” fez grande impacto durante a sua prolongada tournée do Brasil em 1907-08, tanto pela sua figura e personalidade como pela sua voz excepcional. Esta comunicação debruça-se sobre problemáticas como o seu itinerário e meio de transporte, a atenção dada à questão da publicidade, a abrangência do seu repertório, a sua receção como intérprete e as muitas características invulgares da sua pessoa: em tudo grande.

Palavras-chave: Chico Redondo, itinerário, repertório, receção, personalidade

Introduction

“The Portuguese baritone Francisco de Souza Coutinho, Marquis of Valença, *Chico Redondo*, who is performing at the Teatro da Paz, in Belém, has been very well received” (*Jornal do Commercio*, 30/05/1908, 2).¹ With this simple, matter-of-fact news item, the Manaus public learned something in advance of a figure who had made an exceptional impact in Brazil and was about to arrive in the Amazonian capital, on the last leg of a tour that had lasted some 18 months (1907-08) and had taken him to many parts of the country. It reveals one of the many issues that surround a remarkable personality: that of his name. Baptised Francisco de Paula de Portugal de Souza Coutinho, he was the fourth son of Fernando Luís de Souza Coutinho, 3rd Marquis of Borba and 16th Count of Redondo, and a cousin of King Carlos I. Thus, of noble birth, he was known by the title Marquis of Valença, though formally he had refused it. Indeed, his natural inclination was to turn his back on his pedigree and lead the life of an artist (an exceptionally gifted singer) and bohemian, with the name Chico (a familiar form of “Francisco”) Redondo – an allusion not only to his family but to his own

rotund figure. As his great friend, the journalist João Phoca (pseudonym of José Baptista Coelho), informed the São Paulo public in a text of presentation shortly before his arrival there:

Thus, anyone who, knowing his titles, treated him on meeting him as “Marquis” and “Your excellency”, would put him in a delicate position and force him to ask pleadingly:

“Dear me, for goodness’ sake, cut the Marquis and forget the Your excellency, which drive me to distraction!... come down to earth and treat me as your equal”.²

For Chico Redondo was not born for improprieties and etiquettes. What he loves is fun, revelry, the bohemian existence – vigour, laughter and candour – and to take him away from this would be to kill him (*Correio Paulistano*, 08/05/1907).

In the present text, rather than trying to relate a narrative of his visit to Brazil, I would like to make a brief examination of a series of questions with regard to Chico Redondo (the form of his name that he preferred and I shall use): What exactly was his itinerary and what means of transport did he use? How did he publicise his appearances? What kind of repertoire did he perform? How was he received as a performer? And how was he perceived as a personality? To this end, I will use primarily the newspapers made available online by the Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira, crossing the data of a range of sources to try to come to a critical overall picture of his tour.

The itinerary and means of transport

Chico left Lisbon by boat on 14th January 1907, together with the singer Adelina Colombini (MOREAU 1984, 166) and had arrived in Rio de Janeiro by 4th February (*Jornal do Rio* 04/02/1907, 5). He was to make Rio his base until his definitive departure from the federal capital nine months later, on 9th November (*O século* 09/11/1907, 3). He did, however, make two excursions: to São Paulo, for much of the month of May, and Juiz de Fora, from the second half of October to early November. He himself wrote a short, humorous letter to the Rio newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, describing his overnight journey by train from Rio to São Paulo:

[...] I slept the sleep of the innocent. My comforting *nap* lasted for around an hour, but my bed, which was rather hard, or, who knows, too narrow for a man so voluminous, like your servant Chico Redondo, or perhaps because of a *double bass*, which, without being played, strongly *suonava* a wearisome rhythmic fugue,³ I was unable to continue sweetly embraced within Morpheus’ arms. Through the cracks of the window-frames the wind entered with such fury that it shook the glass panes with a noise similar to that of cymbals in a band, with which to accompany the *fugue* of the *double bass*. A fantastic orchestra, for, thanks to the cold, I kept sneezing, thus contributing to the great ensemble of the *Art of Sounds*, to quote my friend and master Carlos Meyer, distinguished music critic of this paper [...] (*Correio da Manhã*, 17/04/1907, 4).

He returned to Rio via Santos and thus by boat from there. He probably travelled to and from Juiz de Fora by train.

From the time he left Rio de Janeiro for good, all of his travel must have been done by boat: first going south and later up to the north. According to the Rio Grande do Sul newspaper *A Federação*, he gave two successful concerts at Pelotas (*A Federação* 29/11/1907, 2) before going on to Porto Alegre, where he gave two more in early December. From then till mid-January, news of him is sparse. In all likelihood, since this formed part of the usual circuit, he visited Montevideo and Buenos Aires before heading back north again. Though lack of online sources from Bahia have prevented confirmation, the *Diario de Pernambuco* (11/02/1908, 1) asserts that he had performed there a short time before, and he was already in Recife by 20 January, when he visited their office (*Diario de Pernambuco* 21/01/1908, 1). He was in the Pernambuco capital at the time of the Portuguese Regicide (1 February), and both this newspaper (03/02/1908, 1) and the *Jornal do Recife* (04/02/1908, 2) reported his concern and the official contacts he had made to find out more details.

From Recife Chico made a brief trip to Paraíba (João Pessoa) in early March (*Jornal do Recife*, 06/03/1908), returning to Recife, where he then took the steamer “Maranhão”, with his wife, bound for Ceará (Fortaleza) (*Jornal do Recife* 22/03/1908, 2). After concerts in Fortaleza, we can follow his route, through the regional newspapers, to São Luiz (second half of April), Belém do Pará (early May) and Manaus (June-July) – systematically visiting the state capitals that could be reached by ship. The *Jornal do Commercio* (07/07/1908, 2) reported his departure from Manaus together with his wife, on 6th July, bound for Belém and on to Europe aboard the *La Plata*. On his return, he stopped off in Funchal, giving concerts at the Teatro de Dona Maria Pia on 20th August, and reaching Lisbon in September (MOREAU 1984, 166-67).

We see from this that Chico Redondo’s tour consisted of two distinct phases: the first, a period of several months centred on Rio de Janeiro, from February to early November, in which journeys necessarily entailed travel by land; the second, constantly moving by sea from port to port, first in the south during the southern hemisphere’s summer months, and as the year progressed, gradually heading northwards towards the Amazon, returning to Europe via Madeira, taking advantage of the northern summer to cross the Atlantic.

Publicity

Though Chico Redondo was already a public figure by that time, thanks to favourable reports of his presence in the local press and the notoriety that his corpulence and effusive personality attracted, his first appearance in Rio de Janeiro at the Salon of the Parque Fluminense on 3rd March 1907, with Adelina Colombini, was poorly attended (*Gazeta de noticias*, 04/03/1907, 2; *Jornal do Brasil*, 04/03/1907, 4). The audiences rapidly picked up with subsequent recitals, through a combination of advertising, press reporting and word-of-mouth publicity. This first experience, however, evidently served as a lesson, for he subsequently adopted a strikingly effective strategy in the other cities where he performed, that of giving private preview recitals, to which the press and sometimes a few local musicians were invited, leading to reviews (always enormously enthusiastic) in the next day's newspapers, which then also publicised his local debut. From this point on, with rare exceptions, he performed to full, sometimes overflowing, houses.

He first adopted this technique in São Paulo – his first foray outside Rio. The *Correio Paulistano* (15/05/1907, 3), having made a brief reference in the previous issue, announced the preview, on the actual day, in the following terms: “The distinguished baritone Sousa Coutinho, better known by the nickname Chico Redondo, will be singing today at the Conservatorio Dramatico Musical, at 7 o'clock in the evening, in an audition specially dedicated to the capital's press”.⁴ A glowing review followed, the next day, terminating in the full programme of his São Paulo debut to take place at the Salão Steinway that evening. Despite cold and rain, this was very well attended and a tremendous success (*Correio Paulistano* (17/07/1907, 3).

Similar previews were given elsewhere. In Recife, for example, he invited the press and the performers currently engaged at the Teatro Sant'Isabel to a private recital in the theatre's salon on 28th January 1908. Following a euphoric description of the concert, the review next day terminated with: “All that remains is for us to congratulate the Portuguese baritone on his presentation yesterday and advise the public not to miss the concerts of this great Portuguese artist [...]. The first concert of the Marquis of Valença will take place on 8th February next” (*Jornal do Recife*, 29/01/1908, 1).

Much as might a leading sports personality today, he also gained publicity by lending his name to a commercial product, the mineral water “Águas de São Lourenço”. Particularly in the newspapers of the northeast and north, short adverts regularly appeared, looking, at first appearance, like news items. The Manaus paper *Jornal do Commercio*, for example, at different moments, ran two different ones: “The admirable, enchanting voice that the

extraordinary Portuguese baritone CHICO REDONDO possesses is conserved with the use of the celebrated ÁGUAS DE S. LOURENÇO, of which he makes constant use” (03/07/1907, 2, etc.), or the fuller version, which began to appear a little later, and continued to appear for months after he had left Brazil:

CHICO REDONDO who has been admirably applauded in Berlin, Madrid, United States, Portugal and Brazil for his unequalled voice of 1st baritone – if you look for him at this moment, you will find him tasting a São Lourenço, that celebrated water which is found today in the houses frequented by the finest society (*Jornal do Commercio*, 04/11/1908, 3, etc.).

Repertoire and reception

The above advertisement outlines something of Chico’s career prior to coming to Brazil. However, it was wider than that, for he had also sung in Italy, Scandinavia, St. Petersburg, Poland, the Netherlands and, within Portugal, at several Lisbon theatres (including the São Carlos and the Coliseu dos Recreios) and in Porto (MOREAU 1984, 147-164). He had already had, by any standards, a successful career as a singer.



Fig. 1. Postcard of “Chico Redondo”, Lisbon: José Barbosa Braga, ca. 1910, which alludes to his status as guest performer at the “Royal” Opera in Berlin (author’s collection)

His most consistent professional connection, however, was with the Imperial Opera, Berlin, where he was a regular guest performer. The operatic parts that he played included, among others, Tonio in Leoncavallo’s *I pagliacci*, Escamillo in Bizet’s *Carmen* and the title roles in Verdi’s *Falstaff* and *Rigoletto*. From these, respectively, the Prologue, the Toreador’s song, “Quando ero paggio” and the Monologue, were among his standards in his Brazil concerts, as were the *romanza* from Gounod’s *Faust*, “Credo in un dio crudel” from Verdi’s *Otello*, “O du, mein holder Abendstern” from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and as a *tour de force*, at pitch, the tenor *romanza* “Amor ti vieta” from Mascagni’s *Fedora*.

On the other hand, he also catered for a variety of other, non-operatic, tastes – standard international repertoire and luso-Brazilian. He moved freely between French, Italian and Spanish songs, popular at the time, such as Jean-Baptiste Faure’s “Les rameaux”, Paul Delmet’s “Vous êtes si jolie!” and two by Jules Massenet: “Les enfants” and “Ouvre tes yeux bleus”, Francesco Paolo Tosti’s “Ideale” and “Chanson d’adieu”, and Fermín Maria Alvarez’ “La partida”. Of the Luso-Brazilian repertoire, particular favourites were Vianna da Motta’s “A lavadeira e o caçador”, Itiberê da Cunha’s “Souvenance” and especially “Velha história”, José Araújo da Vianna’s “Maria” and “Amor”, and J. C. Oliveira’s *modinha* “Casa branca da serra”.

If many of the operatic excerpts provided opportunities to demonstrate the sheer power of his voice, the songs, being mostly romantic and sentimental in tone, had the advantage of bringing out the subtler side.

It is easy to see how the varied repertoire he adopted would have suited him if we read the description of his singing in the *Jornal do Recife* (29/01/1907, 1): “His extensive voice, full, at times strong and intense, at others extremely smooth and velvety, enchants and delights whoever has the singularly good fortune to hear it in its mellifluous modulations.”

In every concert he was rapturously received, to an extent that reading the reviews in the newspapers becomes rather repetitive. Sometimes there is no more than a single-sentence news item, such as followed his concert in Juiz de Fora: “On Sunday [3 November] the baritone Chico Redondo gave his advertised concert to a good audience, being much applauded in the varied, beautiful things that he sang” (*O pharol*, 05/11/1907, 2). Others, such as a review of his first concert in Porto Alegre, while still rather generic and non-specialised, tell us more:

[...] The baritone De Souza, accompanied at the piano by Cesar Fossati, gave the entire programme, divided into two parts and made up of various compositions in different genres, so as to satisfy everyone.

The public that attended the Portuguese baritone's concert gave enormous demonstrations of their satisfaction, greeting him with vigorous rounds of applause.

Chico Redondo repeated two pieces, one of which was the Brazilian *romanza Velha Historia* by Itiberê da Cunha.

The concert began with the prologue from *Pagliacci* and finished with the Toreador's song from *Carmen*. [...] (*A Federação*, 04/12/1907, 2)

Calls from the public for multiple repetitions of pieces were frequent in his concerts, a particular favourite being “Quando ero paggio”.

Chico was a generous man to fellow artists, regularly offering his services for their benefit performances in the hope of boosting the proceeds for them. For the benefit nights of the artists Izabel Ficke and Joaquim de Oliveira, at the Teatro de Sant’Ana in São Paulo, on 24 May 1907, he went so far as to write a “farça comico-lyrica” in one act, entitled *O tiro* (The shot), in which he himself played the role of maestro Redondo Quico, which provided opportunities for him to sing various numbers (*Correio Paulistano*, 24/05/1907, 3).

The personality

Following what was formally his final recital in Rio de Janeiro, Chico appeared again in two ‘talks’. The first of these, at the Palace Theatre on 14th September 1907, given in conjunction with the above-mentioned journalist João Phoca, was billed as a “lyrical-humoristic talk” with the title “Music and musicians, songs and singers”. Its contents was described in the following terms in a news item that day:

In truth, it is sufficient to know that João Phoca has prepared not only the best kind of jokes, but also a study of habits, in which he specialises, about the music and singing in fashion in the various parts of Rio – Botafogo, São Christóvão, Engenho Novo, Cidade Nova, etc. and that Dom Francisco de Souza Coutinho will sing: 1st, Prologue from “Pagliacci”; 2nd, “Vous êtes si jolie”; 3rd, the *fado* “S[a]udades”; 4th, the aria from “Fedora” (tenor); 5th, aria from “Falstaff” (baritone); 6th, aria from “Mefistofeles” (bass); 7th, “Quand l’amour meurt” (with the text “O povoamento do solo); 8th, “A Casa Branca da Serra” (modinha); 9th, “Si tu m’amassi” (by an off-pitch singer); 10th, “Velha Historia” (humoristic romanzetta) – it is enough to know this much to be sure that the Palace-Theatre will be crammed as full as an egg... (*Jornal do Brasil*, 14/09/1907, 3).

In the review the following day, the same paper declared: “Chico Redondo filled the act with the weight of his body, the volume of his voice, the pedigree of his noble lineage and arms”. His off-pitch singing was absolutely hilarious and when he declined to sing the bass aria, because he had left that voice at home, the audience just broke into laughter. João

Phoca's contribution was no less important and his style described as "fanciful and somewhat extravagant" (*Jornal do Brasil*, 15/09/1907, 3).

As if this did not suffice as a farewell, he then gave a solo lecture-recital entitled simply "Chico Redondo", on 28th September, taking as a theme a journey of his with a hen in Indo-China. In the words of the *Correio da manhã* (29/09/1907, 5):

It is easy to imagine the lecture's success, given by the artist with the *verve* that characterises the Portuguese baritone.

The allusions to his fatness, made by the man himself, in fine spirit, raised rounds of applause from the audience, who killed themselves with laughter.

In all of his performances, whether more formal or lighter, he transmitted both an enormous professionalism and a love of good humour. In particular, he delighted in the humorous implications of his massive figure. In his early days in Rio, comparisons were made with the Portuguese actor Chaby Pinheiro, who had been in Brazil not long before, but quickly it was Chico who became the standard reference where size was concerned, both in everyday conversation and in the press. He was an easy and obvious target for caricature. João Phoca himself wrote an affectionate yet brilliantly funny article in *Jornal do Brasil* (24/04/1907, 3), conjuring up a series of whimsical images alluding to his volume and *bonhomie*. Of the several drawings that appeared in the press, perhaps the finest was by Alfredo Cândido of Lisbon, reproduced in the Rio de Janeiro paper *O pão* (23/03/1907, 3), in which Chico, amid frivolous ballerinas, is appropriately likened to Falstaff, whom he dwarfs! (bottom right-hand corner).



Fig. 2. Caricature of Chico Redondo by Alfredo Cândido *O pão* (23/03/1907, 3)

But let us leave Chico with an anecdote that he himself told when visiting the office of the *Jornal do Ceará*, concerning an incident in Fortaleza:

Speaking to us of Fortaleza, Chico Redondo said:

Look! The impression that I have gained of your city has been very different from what I had expected. I have really enjoyed it!

And then he told us:

The amazement that my figure causes, hasn't been so great here. And so today I really laughed at my hotel, while at table for lunch. The manager drove away a crowd of boys who were spying at me through the window, awed at my 145 kilos of fat. They went away, but one of them remained behind, with bright eyes, very curious. I put down my fork, and went over to ask him:

"Have you never seen a man eat, litt' un?"

"I've seen many, sir. But never one so fat and so ugly!..."

And Dom Francisco Coutinho told us this still laughing, delighted at the urchin's spirit.

And he, Chico Redondo, is like that: good, completely unpretentious, a real artist. Oh, above all a real artist! (*Jornal do Ceará*, 17/03/1907, p. 1)

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Notas

¹ This and all other translations are the present author's.

² Literally "Give me of yourself and treat me as *tu*", i.e. use the familiar you-form.

³ A reference to the snoring of his travelling companion, Cateysson.

⁴ State capitals such as São Paulo are systematically referred to in the regional press as the capital, the federal capital, Rio de Janeiro, often being referred to as the "court", even though Brazil was by this time a Republic.