



ERNESTO NAZARETH (1863-1934)
by Luiz Antonio de Almeida

Ernesto Júlio de Nazareth was born in the city of Rio de Janeiro, on March 20, 1863, in a house identified by n° 9 on Rua do Caminho Velho de Santa Thereza, in the Santo Cristo neighbourhood. He was the son of Vasco Lourenço da Silva Nazareth, a customs broker, and Carolina Augusta da Cunha Nazareth, a pianist.

As a child, he began learning the piano with his mother who was an excellent pianist. At the age of 10, he suffered a violent concussion in the head from falling from a tree. As a result, he developed a series of hearing problems that eventually led to him losing his hearing completely.

In 1874, after the death of his mother, Carolina Augusta, he began to receive lessons from a family friend, Eduardo Madeira for about a year and a half. He later went on the study with the famous black professor from New Orleans, Charles Lucièn Lambert, but had only approximately eight classes. After that, he continued his studies alone, becoming practically self-taught. As for his normal schooling, he was taught by Father Belmonte, at Colégio São Francisco de Paula, at Praça Tiradentes.

At the age of 14, he composed his first song, the polka-lundu *Você bem sabe*, (translated to 'You know well'), which he dedicated to his father. The song was edited in the following year (1878) by Casa Arthur Napoleão & Miguèz, located at Rua do Ouvidor, No. 89.

On October 22, 1879, in the city of Niterói, Ernesto Nazareth, at the age of 16, took part with his teacher, Eduardo Madeira, in a recital promoted by a recreational society called Philharmonica Nichteroyense. This may have been his first public performance, as no other previous performances are known. Flutist and composer Viriatto Figueira da Silva also participated (considered one of the founders of 'Choro') in the event and as well as the legendary Cuban violinist and composer Joseph Silvestre White. In the same year, his polka '*Cruz, perigo!!*' ('Cross, danger!') became very popular and already showed the characteristics of his 'Brazilian tango' genre, a genre that would later enshrine its name.

On March 8th, 1880, just before turning 17, he took part in a recital in the Salão do Clube Mozart, attended by the flutist and composer Viriattto Figueira da Silva. Two days later, on March 10, he performed in a recital promoted by

another young pianist, Arthur Camillo, where he played with his teacher, Eduardo Madeira, a four-handed version of the opera *Le Prophète*, by Giacomo Meyerbeer.

Not long after this recital, Nazareth composed another polka *Não caio n'outra!!!* ('You won't catch me again!'). It became his first major success and had huge numbers of reissues.

Between 1881 and 1884, Ernesto Nazareth participated in four recitals at the following venues: Hall of Congress at Club Gymnastico Portuguez, promoted by Associação Central Emancipadora, in November 1881; Hall of Brazilian Congress at Club Gymnastico Portuguez, also promoted by the Associação Central Emancipadora, in September 1883; Club do Engenho Velho, in April 1884; Hall of the Brazilian Congress, in September 1884.

The famous writer, Machado de Assis commented on one of Nazareth's polkas, *Gentes, o imposto pegou?* ('Folks, is the tax too high?'), which was published by the "Gazeta de Notícias", on September 26, 1884, in his column "Balas de Estalo".

In 1885, he participated in concerts in the following clubs: Rio Comprido, in January; Engenho Velho, in May and June; Riachuelense from Engenho Novo, in July; São Cristóvão in September.

The following year, on July 14, 1886, he married Theodora Amália Leal de Meirelles (1852/1929). They had four children together: Eulina (1887/1971), Diniz (1888/1983), Maria de Lourdes (1892/1917) and "Ernestinho" (1896/1962).

At that time, Ernesto Nazareth made a living through private piano lessons, playing at parties, baptisms and weddings, and also by selling his compositions.

In 1889, he edited his thirteenth polka, *Atrevidinha* ('Audacious') and then *Chile-Brasil* but it was only published 8 years later (1897). In December, of that same year, he was appointed 3rd clerk of the National Treasury. This was the first of his only two paid jobs he ever had during his lifetime, and he remained working there until April 1891.

On June 25, 1893, he performed with other musicians in Petrópolis, at Cassino Petropolitano, in a recital promoted by Escola Santa Cecília. He played Waltz op. 64, in C sharp minor by Chopin and one of his own compositions, the gavotte *Corbeille de Fleurs*, published years later (1899). Also in the same year, one of his tangos and a waltz were printed for the first time: *Brejeiro* and *Julita*. The tango *Brejeiro* and the waltz *Helena* (1896) became Nazareth's greatest hits in the 19th Century.

Around 1894, he started working as a pianist at Casa Vieira Machado & Cia. performing the scores for clients. In 1895, Casa Arthur Napoleão & Cia. Published two more of his compositions: The tango *Myosotis* and the waltz *Crê e*

Espera ('Trust and Wait'). Furthermore, in the following year, 1896, on October 29, he attended the soirée of the Dias da Cruz family, followed by a ball, in which he stood out playing the Grand Fantaisie Triomphale Sur L'Hymne National Bresilien, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

Following an initiative of the Clube de São Cristóvão, Nazareth performed in 1898 at the Salão Nobre da Intendência da Guerra; however, the exact date and the programme performed are unknown. In the following year, 1899, the first edition of *Turuna*, ('Brave') "great characteristic tango", was released.

In 1901, Ernesto Nazareth finished *Batuque*, "characteristic tango". The following year, under the support of Casa Edison (Odeon), Nazareth had one of his composition recorded for the first time on CD, the work was *Está chumbado* ('He is inebriated') and it was recorded by the Fire Brigade Band, directed by Anacleto de Medeiros.

Following this success in 1903, he composed the waltz *Coração que Sente* ('Heart that feels') published two years later. In 1905, he started working as a demonstrator pianist at the music shop Manoel Antonio Gomes Guimarães, at Rua Rodrigo Silva. This establishment published, among many other compositions, the *Expansiva* ('Expansive') waltz, his most well-known piece in the genre for many years.

The following year, 1904, he became acquainted with three celebrities of the music world: the Spanish cellist and composer Pablo Casals (who included in his recitals unidentified works by Nazareth), the French pianist and composer Camille Saint-Saens, and the American pianist, conductor and composer Ernest Schelling.

This meeting was very important for Ernesto Nazareth, as Ernest Schelling returned to his country taking a number of compositions by the Brazilian musician.

In 1905, Casa Edison (Odeon) released, *Brejeiro* "O sertanejo enamorado" ('Playful'). The lyrics were by the poet Catullo da Paixão Cearense and sung by Mário Pinheiro. That year he also saw the main editions of two tangos *Escovado* ('Elegant') and *Ferramenta*, ('Tool') which launched him as the 'king of tango' written below the score title. Nazareth worked at Casa Vieira Machado & Cia., at Rua do Ouvidor until Christmas 1906.

In the following year, 1907, he published his only "maxixe", *Dengoso* ('Bashful'), which later in 1914 became the first success of a Brazilian piece in the USA.

In 1908, at the age of 45, Ernesto Nazareth started to work as a demonstrator pianist at Casa Mozart, owned by Portuguese friend Lino José Barbosa, located at Avenida Central. Between August and November, he was invited by maestro

Alberto Nepomuceno to perform twice his own songs at the “National Exhibition”, an event held at Praia Vermelha in celebration of the centenary of the “Opening of the Ports”, it was a great opportunity for him.

On June 6, 1909, Nazareth participated in a recital held at the National Institute of Music, located at Rua Luís de Camões, in which he performed his compositions: the gavotte ‘*Corbeille de fleurs*’ and the “characteristic tango” *Batuque*. In this same recital, he also accompanied Heitor Villa-Lobos in the piece ‘*Le cygne*’ (“The Swan”) by Saint-Saëns for cello and piano. This may have been Villa-Lobos' first public performance (aged 22) as there are no records of any earlier performances. That same year, Ernesto Nazareth began to divide his activities between Casa Mozart and performances at the lobby of Cinema Odeon at Avenida Central, nº 137, corner with Rua Sete de Setembro.

In 1910, he published with his own resources the “tango” *Odeon*, dedicated to the company that owns the cinema. Two years later, 1912, he recorded for Casa Edson his “tangos” *Odeon* and *Favorite*, with flutist Pedro de Alcântara, plus the polkas *Linguagem do coração*, (“Language of the heart”) by Joaquim Antonio da Silva Callado Jr., and *Choro e poesia*, (“Choro and Poetry”) written by Alcântara himself.

In 1913 he published his “tango” *Carioca* (meaning natives from Rio) dedicated to the actor Olympio Nogueira. He eventually left Cinema Odeon, however, he continued his duties at Casa Mozart. This year he also published the “characteristic tango” *Batuque*, dedicated to the maestro Henrique Oswald, and the waltz *Confidências* (“Revelations”) dedicated to Catullo da Paixão Cearense.

The polka *Apanhei-te, cavaquinho!*... (old expression that means I caught you red handed)...., published in 1914, reached a resounding success. At that same period an edition of a catalogue of Casa Beethoven (Nascimento Silva & Cia.) which included the titles of 19 Nazareth compositions recorded on piano rolls made in the United States of America was published.

On September 30, 1915, at Theatro Recreio, at Praça Tiradentes, interpreting some of his compositions, he also participated in the musical play “Ouro sobre azul” (“Gold on Blue”), written by and starring Maria Lina, actress and dancer born in Italy, considered at the time in Brazil, the “Queen of Maxixe”.

In 1917, he returned to Cinema Odeon, playing piano in a small orchestra, in which Villa-Lobos also played as a cellist. On December 1, his daughter Maria de Lourdes, aged 25, tragically died of anaemia. Eventually in the following year, 1918, he left Cinema Odeon where during this second season there he met Arthur Rubinstein and Darius Milhaud.

In 1919, he started working as a demonstrator pianist at Casa Carlos Gomes, at Rua Gonçalves Dias, nº 75, owned by also pianist and composer Eduardo Souto. At that time, he met the young composer and conductor Francisco Mignone.

At Theatro Lyrico, on June 9, 1920, he participated in an event promoted by Catullo da Paixão Cearense to raise funds for the bass player Mário Pinheiro, with the presence of the tenor Vicente Celestino, the Spanish guitarist and composer Josephina Robledo and the composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, conducting his own work, a “Symphonic Poem”.

Two years later, 1921, Villa-Lobos dedicated to him the piece Choros nº 1, for guitar. And on the 20th of June, he performed his compositions *Batuque*, *Extase* (romance without words) and *Capricho* at a social event held at salão nobre at Colégio da Imaculada Conceição, at Praia de Botafogo. On the same occasion, the young pianist, composer and conductor Walter Burle Marx took part. On September 6, at the Salão Nobre of Jornal do Commercio, he took part in a recital promoted by the Sociedade Brasileira Protectora dos Animais (Brazilian society for the protection of animals), with the purpose of raising funds to build a home for abandoned dogs and a veterinary clinic.

As for the “tango” *O futurista*, finished and first edited in 1922, the author tried to show the “modernist” composers of the time that “even if a song presents dissonances, it does not necessarily have to be devoid of any beauty! ...” And on December 16, at the invitation of Luciano Gallet, he performed at the National Music Institute, at Rua do Passeio, nº 98, his “tangos” *Brejeiro*, *Nenê*, *Bambino* and *Turuna*.

On January 26, 1923, Ernesto Nazareth performed at another event with the presence of the poet Catullo da Paixão Cearense and tenor Vicente Celestino at the Trianon Theater, at Avenida Rio Branco, nº 181.

On the day of his birthday, March 20, 1925, Ernesto Nazareth was celebrated and honoured with a recital organized on this behalf by the composer Alzira Mariath, a childhood friend. At the occasion Nazareth performed the works *Êxtase* (‘Ecstasy’) in a version for singer, violin and piano and *Nazareth* (polka) for piano solo. At the end of that year, he left Casa Carlos Gomes, dedicating himself to preparing for a tour of São Paulo.

In March 1926, he participated in a social event at the Mexican embassy in Botafogo, being received by the ambassador Pascual Ortiz Rubio, who was then elected a few years later as president. On April 10, he left for São Paulo, where he performed in two of the most important venues in the capital of that state: Dramatic and Musical Conservatory, three times (June, September and October), and Theatro Municipal (November). His recital at Theatro Municipal was preceded by a lecture by the eminent writer and musicologist Mário de Andrade, who spoke about Nazareth’s compositions. Ernesto Nazareth became

very enthusiastic about the popularity of his music, and decided to edit some of his unpublished works such as the tangos: *Desengonçado* ('Clumsy'), *Paulicéa, como és formosa!* (Paulicéa, city of São Paulo, how you are beautiful!) and *Quebra-cabeças* ('Puzzles'). He also published more waltzes: *Celestial* (Celestial'), *Dirce* and *Elegantíssima* ('Very elegant').

Nearly a year later, in March 1927, he returned to Rio de Janeiro, bringing a vertical piano of the Zanzin brand, a gift from admirers, and the manuscripts of the tangos *Cruzeiro*, *Cubanos* and *Paraíso* (in milonga style). In that year, he published the tango *Proeminente*, ('Prominent') dedicated to the Polish pianist Mieczyslaw ("Miécio") Horszowski.

In the month of December 1928, taking into account the date of publication of his first song, the polka-lundu *Você bem sabe* ('You know well') (1878), Ernesto Nazareth completed fifty years of artistic activities.

On January 30, 1929, he performed in a program broadcast by Rádio Club do Brasil, with the black lyrical soprano, Zaíra de Oliveira, clarinetist Luiz Americano and singer (and ventriloquist) Batista Júnior, father of singers Linda and Dircinha Batista. A few months later, on May 5, his wife Theodora Amália died of natural causes at the age of 74.

Following the death of his wife, Ernesto Nazareth still continued his musical activities, and at the end of the year, he still composed three carnival marches:

And between the end of that same year and the beginning of the next, Ernesto Nazareth still composed three carnival marches: *Exuberante* ('Exuberant'), *Crises em penca* ('too many crisis') e *Comigo é na madeira* (old expression meaning things are not going very well...).

In June 1930, he finished what became his last composition: the slow waltz *Resignação* ('Resignation'). In September, accepting an invitation made by Eduardo Souto, then artistic director of Odeon-Parlophon, he recorded *Apanheite, cavaquinho!*, *Escovado*, *Nenê* e *Turuna* but only the first two pieces were released.

In the following year, 1931, he appeared on programs of the radio stations Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro (currently Rádio MEC) on the 10th and 19th of March and also on Mayrink Veiga, on May the 19th.

On January 5, 1932, he performed songs of his own in a recital at Studio Nicolas, at Rua Alcindo Guanabara. He also participated in the edition of the radio journal of the Sociedade Rádio Educadora do Brasil (translated as: Society for radio education of Brazil), playing the waltz *Dora* and the tangos *Magnífico* ('Magnificent'), *Turuna*, *Brejeiro* and *Gaúcho*. On that occasion, his tour of the South of the county was announced by this station. And on the 15th, in the

company of his daughter Eulina and friend Maria Mercedes Mendes Teixeira, he left on the ship Itapé to Rio Grande do Sul, coming to perform in Porto Alegre (01/28), Rosário (02/19), and Sant'Anna do Livramento (02/26). On the tour, he took with him his last edited composition, *Gaúcho*, which is what people born at the state of Rio Grande do Sul is called.

He then headed for Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, from where we could return to Rio de Janeiro. However, during a walk through the city, he suffered a serious nervous collapse inside Julio Mousqués' musical instrument house which at the time was situated at Rua (Calle) Ituzaingó, do n° 1377 ao n° 1391.

Once returning to Rio, Ernesto Nazareth showed some improvement in his health. However, a few months later, with the worsening of his neurological condition, he was then diagnosed with syphilis. Given the irreversibility of the disease, he was admitted to the Gaffrée & Guinle Foundation's Neuro-syphilis Service in Botafogo on 10 July, the first hospital in Brazil dedicated exclusively to the treatment of this disease.

On January 19, 1933, he returned to his home but fifty days later, on March 4, he was then admitted to the Colony for Psychopaths Juliano Moreira, in Jacarepaguá.

On February 1, 1934, after fleeing the Colony, he drowned in the waters of a dam located in the forest at the back of the asylum. His body was found on the 4th and buried the next day, at the São Francisco Xavier Cemetery. The composer was aged 70 years.

Ernesto Nazareth's legacy is enormous leaving behind 88 "tangos", 41 waltzes, 28 polkas and more hymns, sambas, marches, gangs, "schottisches", "fox-trots", novels, among other genres, making a total of 212 compositions of authorship confirmed.

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