



## Review

David Ferreiro Carballo. *Luis R. Brage Villar. Obra e memoria*. Santiago de Compostela: Consello da Cultura Galega, 2020.

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“A much-needed act of memory.” David Ferreiro’s decision to give the book’s introduction such a title epitomizes the spirit of this extensive and exemplary work. *Luis R. Brage Villar. Obra e memoria* is not only the vindication of one of the foremost -and unjustly forgotten- twentieth century Galician composers. It is also an account of the Galician cultural and musical landscape during the first decades of the century.

Ferreiro’s work goes far beyond the particular figure of Brage to provide fresh insights into Galician music throughout the first half of the twentieth century. It is particularly noteworthy how the book contributes to the comprehension of the cultural and musical forces operating in Galicia during the years immediately before and after the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, this book addresses the slippery subject of music and national identity, helping to broaden the understanding of such topic. Thus, it brings renewed perspectives into the conflicting views of nationalism and the search for authenticity in music.

It must be highlighted how the academic and artistic goals of this book are successfully met. We should welcome this book not solely for its musicological value but also for its contribution to the musical life of the community. In fact, Ferreiro openly states his effort to regain the music of Brage as part of the standard repertoire of Galician performers—as it had been the case during the central years of the composer’s life.

The compelling portrait that emerges from Ferreiro’s narrative seems more impressive when we consider the scarcity of preserved sources. Also, thanks to his relentless research efforts, Ferreiro should be credited with the discovery of many forgotten documental sources, particularly the composer’s private library found in Ribadavia.

The book is divided into four chapters; the first three delve into the vital and artistic trajectory of Brage, while the fourth explores Brage’s musical identity alongside a catalogue of his output and the edition of three of his works for *banda*. The scores of these three pieces are also appended on a cd. This division in chapters makes it easy to follow the structure of the work; it also allows the book to be used as reference for Brage’s catalogue. Hopefully this catalogue will continue to grow and develop in the future with the discovery of new sources. The very extensive bibliography gives a most complete and up-to-date assemblage of the academic sources on the topic. It should be noted that an analytical index would be welcome to help aid in navigating through the vast array of topics and persons covered in the book.

The biographical account found in the three first chapters is arranged according to the events which constitute a watershed on the composer's life, namely his appointment as musical director of *La Lira* of Ribadavia, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. In fact, the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent regime, which thwarted Brage's personal and artistic trajectory, were responsible for the silence and oblivion of his figure.

The early years of Brage's life are documented and researched through an exemplary handling of sources. The composer's life portrait emerges from the recollection of multiple traces. It is impressive how many indirect and tangential references are pieced together to discover an unknown image of Brage. Also, this biographical account reveals the rich musical life of his hometown, Santiago de Compostela, at the turn of the century.

*Luis R. Brage Villar. Obra e memoria* also reconstructs the earliest professional engagements of the composer which had taken him to cities such as Melilla, Pontevedra, Madrid or Vigo. Despite the scarcity of preserved testimonies, Ferreiro creates a consistent narrative of Brage's professional activities alongside his personal life. The reassembly of crucial vital moments, such as the death of Brage's first wife and the end of his stay in Melilla, reveal the perspicacious approach taken by the author.

The second chapter of the book is devoted to the years of Brage in Ribadavia. This attention is justified not only because this period was amongst the most productive in the composer's career, but also because the impact of the undertakings he developed are still part of the collective memory of the region. This explains why Ferreiro designates this chapter "The Making of a Myth." In fact, as Ferreiro points out, even today the figure of Brage is still remembered among older generations as the conductor of *La Lira* de Ribadavia (name of the town hall banda).

The research done concerning Brage's involvement with *bandas de música*, particularly during his tenure in Ribadavia, is of enormous interest. Such an inquiry aides in the understanding of the vital and artistic trajectory of the composer. Furthermore, his research offers a rigorous study of the *bandas de música* in Galicia, a musical ensemble traditionally neglected in academia but of pivotal importance in the cultural history even up to today. In fact, Ferreiro's meticulous research of news sources helps readers understand the relevance of this musical institution within the web of Galician culture.

The third chapter discusses how Brage's years in Ribadavia ended abruptly with the onset of the Spanish Civil War and continues until his death. Ferreiro's treatment of the prosecution and war trial the composer went through can be described as a meticulous analysis. Because Brage was falsely accused and imprisoned, this painstaking and dispassionate narration becomes in itself an act of justice towards the composer. Such traumatic events literally took a toll on the rest of Brage's life, both professionally and emotionally. Unable to fully recover from this terrible blow, his professional aspirations were never reached and his personality profoundly affected. Removal from his public position as music director plus the shame that came as a result of being publicly signaled by the new regime made for a dismal coda to the composer's life.

Ferreiro also includes in the third chapter excerpts from interviews with relatives who met Brage. These dialogues make for invaluable testimony and provide us direct insight into the

composer's emotional inner world. This chapter also highlights Brage's altruistic and service-minded nature. Even during his darkest years, he never ceased to organize and take part in community and volunteer efforts.

As mentioned above, the fourth chapter explores the musical identity of the composer. In order to understand the cultural milieu where Brage develops his creation, Ferreiro resorts to the scant studies of Galician musicography at the turn of the century. Unfortunately, there is little extant academic literature about such topic. In many cases, what does exist is tinged with subjectivism and entangled with ongoing political debates. Luis Costa's dissertation about nationalist thinking in Galician music constitutes one of the main references of the book to frame Galicia's recent music history. His work addresses the complexity of Galician cultural identity notions operating at the turn of the century. However, it proposes several generalizations which may seem controversial, particularly those concerning the ideological affiliations of Galician artists and intellectuals. Ferreiro acknowledges these academic disputes and encourages any reader who wants more elaboration on the topic to consult the bibliography. In any case, understanding the conflicting views of Galician identity and the search for authenticity in music provides the backdrop against which Brage unfolded his creative output.

Ferreiro also uses this as an opportunity to recover three forgotten pieces for *banda* by Brage: *Boris*, *Botafumeiro*, and *O gaiteriño*. The numerous, albeit incomplete, manuscripts scattered through different musical archives attest to the popularity of these works during the composer's life. Ferreiro provides a detailed account of the preserved musical sources which not only helps understand the story of these works, but also sets forth a very clear and logical planning of the decision-making process of the musical edition. However, future re-editions of the book will benefit from a more detailed elaboration of the editorial process involved in these three pieces. In particular, this should be noted when it comes to the reworking of instrumentation or departing from the composer's original dynamics or articulations, what Ferreiro calls "[the] personal discretion of the author." Although the main goal of this recovery is to bring this music to modern performers and to the standard literature of *bandas de musica* in Galicia, a little critical apparatus would be welcome.

*Luis R. Brage Villar. Obra e memoria* will be known not only as an act of justice to the life and work Luis Brage, but also as a landmark in the academic literature of Galician music identity. Ferreiro's work brings fresh perspectives on the entangled subject of Galician music identity. Hopefully new discoveries and contributions will help to fill the gaps in Brage's catalogue. Such future scholarly additions will address the lesser-known periods of Brage's life, such as his stay in Italy or his professional engagement in Madrid. Knowing more about the composer will lead to knowing more about the recent history of Galician music. Perhaps the best measure of success of Ferreiro's work will be the gradual return of Brage music into the standard repertory.

Buide, Fernando. "Review: David Ferreiro Carballo. *Luis R. Brage Villar. Obra e memoria*. Santiago de Compostela: Consello da Cultura Galega, 2020." *Diagonal: An Ibero-American Music Review* 7, no. 1 (2022): 127–129.