

MUSIC AND HUMAN MOBILITY
REDEFINING COMMUNITY IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT 2016

Guest edited by Maria de São José Côrte-Real & Pedro Moreira
“Henri Coanda” Air Force Academy Publishing House

FROM PARQUE MAYER TO TEATRO MONUMENTAL: VASCO
MORGADO’S EMPIRE IN LISBON

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Abstract: This article aims to introduce the relationship between the mobility of music, symbolic power and urbanism in the context of an Entertainment Industry based on Commercial-Musical Theatre in Portugal. This relation will be shown through a Revista show entitled “Esta Lisboa que eu Amo”, that premiered in September 24th, 1966 in the Monumental Theatre (Lisbon), promoted by Vasco Morgado’s Company, the most prolific Impresario of theatre and music during the third quarter of the 20th Century.

Keywords: Revista Theatre, Entertainment Industry, Music in the City, Mobility, Popular Music Theatre

1. CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL MODEL

The theoretical assumptions of the subsequent argumentation are based on the research model developed in my PhD Dissertation entitled “The Theatre of the People or for the People: I’m the one who Makes it”. Vasco Morgado and the Revista Theatre in Lisbon (1951-1978)”, currently on its final phase, under the guidance of Professor Salwa Castelo-Branco, President of the Institute of Ethnomusicology – Center of Studies in Music and Dance (NOVA University of Lisbon). My initial scope of observation started with the theoretical model developed by John Louis Styan (1923-2002), Professor and specialist in Literature, Theatre and Drama. Considering that in my approach the Impresario is the main focus in the Entertainment Industry (Show-Business Industry), I imported and adapted Styan’s nine dimensions model (Styan, 1975: 14): Genre; 2. Author, Composer, Choreographer, a.o.; 3. Script (text), Music, Dance, a.o. ; 4. Stage; 5. Actor, Musician, Dancer, a.o. ; 6. Theatre; 7. Society; 8. Audience (Public). The 9th dimension, “Producer” constitutes my central element of analysis. Additional layers were added (Entertainment Industry and Cultural Policy of the Estado Novo | New State) to provide the necessary context. Entertainment is defined in this model as

trained, paid group who do nothing else but produce performances which have the sole (conscious) aim of providing pleasure (Dyer, 1992: 17).

In the case-study to be presented ahead, the connection between the dimensions *Theatre* | *Audience* | *Society* will also stand as a fundamental relation for this article. *Theatre* is considered here as a space of sociability, where social conventions of taste are transferred and also negotiated. There is therefore a symbolic power attached to this particular building that will determine the type of *Audience* attending the shows, which will in turn shape and be shaped by *Societies’* consumer lifestyles and values.

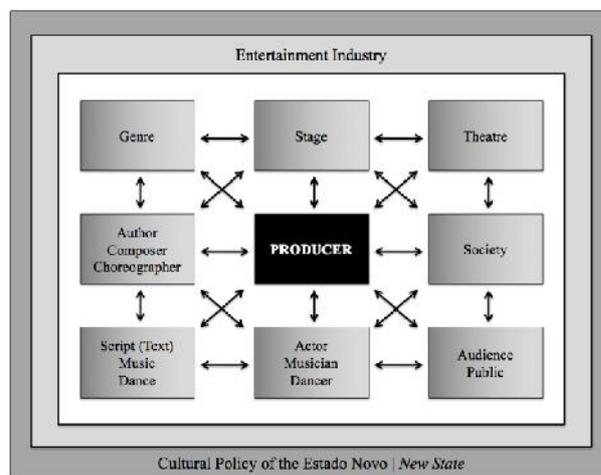


Fig. 1 My PhD’s Research Model

a type of performance produced for profit, performed before a generalized audience (the ‘public’), by a

Although the *Revista* Theatre emerged in Portugal in 1851, the first space that came to concentrate several theatres dedicated to this particular *Genre* was *Parque Mayer*, inaugurated in June 1st, 1922. It was a place of entertainment and sociability that offered its consumers *typical fairs*, cafes, restaurants, clubs, cabarets, games, e.o. By this time, this location had only one theatre – *Maria Vitória Theatre*, ending up to four by the mid-1950's.

This Lisbon area quickly became an attraction point that encouraged the mobilization of population from the whole country, motivated by the desire of fruition of the *Revista* shows, their stars and musical repertoires they interpreted. Lasting over almost thirty years, this context changed in the beginning of 1950's with the arrival of a new *Impresario*: Vasco Morgado (1924-1978).

2. VASCO MORGADO

Vasco Morgado secured a continuous theatrical and music production. His companies and partnerships produced over 400 theatre shows and plays of different *Genres* in more than eight theatres, in Portugal and abroad, during his 27 years of activity.



Fig. 2 Vasco Morgado in London (courtesy of National Museum of Theatre and Dance)

His first project as a *Producer* occurred in 1951 at the Avenida Theatre (Lisbon), with the Portuguese adaptation of J. B. Priestley's "*An Inspector Calls*". But the actual affirmation of his incursion in the Entertainment Industry occurred with the inauguration of the Monumental Cine-Theatre in November 8th, 1951, featuring the premiere of the operetta *Three Waltzes*.

Conceived by the architect Raul Rodrigues Lima (1909-1980), this performative space emerged in the context of the ruling Dictatorship

Government's (*Estado Novo* | New State) strategy of urban development, consisting on a

symbol of recent wealth brought by industrial progress, (...) an obligatory passage for the bourgeoisie of the time, the main investor of this new phase of Industrial civilization (Frétigné, 2005: 25).

This building had a theatre with a seating capacity of 1086 people and a Cinemascope-equipped Cinema with 1967 seats. It was considered a place that privileged cosmopolitanism, where, besides the theatre shows and movies, people could actually see and eventually meet the actors, musicians and other *stars* in the *Cafés* and Clubs that also operated there.

The idea of

(...) developing the Saldanha Square (location of this theatre) and its surroundings to create a new urban position that would relieve the Downtown Area of the city (...) (Frétigné, 2005: 27)

was decided by Mayor Duarte Pacheco (1900-1943), having in mind the

(...) construction of a solid and luxurious building that would be a great house of spectacles, capable of receiving important achievements in the field of theatre and cinema (Frétigné, 2005: 27).

This was directly aligned with Vasco Morgado's business conceptions.



Fig. 3 Monumental Theatre – Duque de Saldanha Plaza (courtesy of National Museum of Theatre and Dance)

In fact, the producer spared no effort in order to obtain the rental of this building (it was hence popularly known as the *Headquarters of his Empire*), thus establishing a distinction regarding the theatres in Parque Mayer. The set I called *Lisbon Series* is a manifest demonstration of this strategy. It consisted on *Revista* shows that always had the word "Lisbon" in their designations, as well as trilingual

programmes that usually had “*Revista for Tourists*” printed. The *Impresario* sought to create a line of *Revista* targeting the *bourgeoisie* and higher social classes. These shows focused on large-scale productions, that stood out by the glamour and sumptuous ambiance that could be seen on a Broadway or a West End Musical, but incorporated in the classic Portuguese *Revista* structure.

At the same time, and following a similar path of its predecessors, Vasco Morgado expanded his operations in Lisbon, Porto and even outside Portugal, namely in Brazil, Angola and Mozambique. Independently, or partnering up with other *Impresarios*, based on the of the shows I've identified through the intersection between the periodicals of the time and the Censorship Processes filed in Lisbon's National Archive (Torre do Tombo), his expansion in Lisbon has evolved as follows: 1954 – Variedades Theatre (Parque Mayer); 1960 – Maria Vitória Theatre (Parque Mayer); 1965 – Capitólio Theatre (Parque Mayer), 1967 – Villaret Theatre and 1968 - Laura Alves Theatre (former Cinema Rex that he converted into a theatre). Accordingly, his *Empire* dominated the entire axis Liberdade Avenue, Fontes Pereira de Melo Avenue and Duque de Saldanha's Plaza, three of Lisbon's most luxurious arteries, a status still existing nowadays.

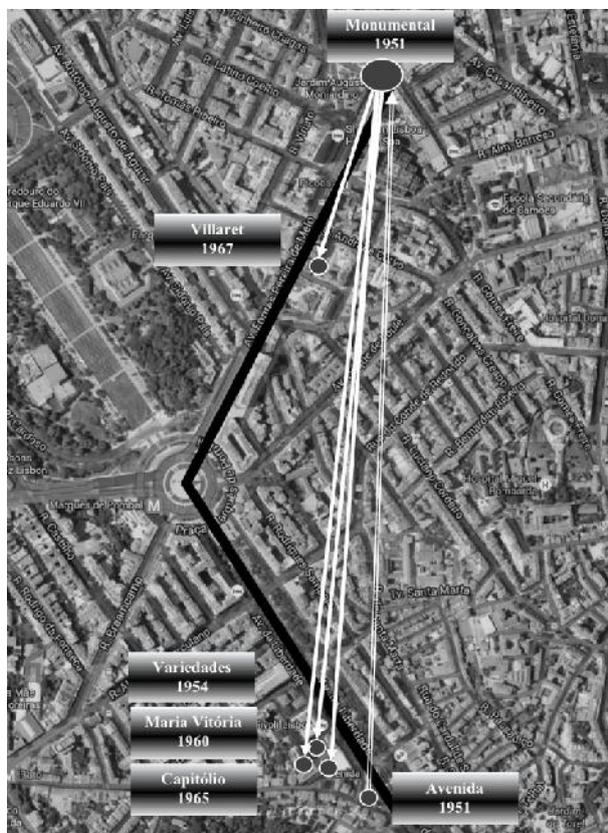


Fig. 4 Vasco Morgado's expansion in Lisbon (made with Google Maps)

The appearance of Vasco Morgado also caused an impact in the *Revista* Theatre. At least as far as his strategy is concerned towards this theatrical genre. In his own words, he intended to be a “pioneer of the music-hall in Portugal. Initiator, without continuators, of the Great *Revista*” (Morgado, 1969), by

deliberately follow the way of the New *Revista*, searching for new processes, finding new solutions of humour but without betraying (completely) the traditional format. Just giving it more suitable perspectives that are more adequate to the day on the calendar today (Morgado, 1972).

He also promoted the idea of

(...) a constant search for different paths and ideas and new forms without betraying (and why would they be betrayed?) the sources and legitimate traditions of the Portuguese-language *Revista* Show (Morgado, 1973).

This avowed promotional discourse ended up being later criticized by the two main *Revista* Theatre Historiographers – Luíz Francisco Rebello (1924-2011) and Vítor Pavão dos Santos (1937) – who stated that Vasco Morgado had fixed a new formula of *Revista* Theatre that was constantly repeated

to a point of exhaustion in Monumental Theatre: a kind of compromise between the French *féerie*, the American Music-Hall and the Traditional Portuguese *Revista* (Rebello, 1984 v2: 132), an uninteresting, hybrid show with pretensions to Music-hall that had some or no success at all (Pavão dos Santos, 1978: 59).

Nevertheless, assuming a commercial logic moved by a strong passion for theatre, Vasco Morgado's approach consisted in selling the *Revista* Theatre as one of several ranges of products oriented to the entertainment of the masses. His business activity was anchored in a *Star System* that created and was itself the result of embodied familiar social and cultural types of actors and music for the general public. By doing so, he guaranteed full-houses and sold-out venues. Furthermore, his company invested heavily in marketing and advertising campaigns based fundamentally on the taste and preferences of consumers in Lisbon, thus attracting tourists to the Capital City as well as people from the less populated and urbanized areas or Portugal.

I always emphasize the phrase 'A Vasco Morgado Show', because my name is a sort of brand just like in the movie companies, Metro or Fox. (...) With all

the problems people have deal in their everyday life, they prefer to go to the theatre to get distracted. I have already done inquiries about genres the public prefers and they are the Revista Theatre and the 'Boulevard Theatre' (Morgado in Porto, Geada, Gomes, 1972: 59).

3. VASCO MORGADO PRESENTS: *ESTA LISBOA QUE EU AMO*

Such is the case of the *Revista Show Esta Lisboa que eu amo* | *This Lisbon that I Love*, that premiered in the Monumental Theatre on September 24th, 1966, between 09h10 pm and 0h55 am.

Inaugurating the Winter theatrical season of 1966/1967, it was, according to the newspaper *Notícias* (8/10/1966), “the largest sum ever spent on the presentation of a show in Lisbon”. Furthermore, the newspaper *O Século* (8/26/1966) announced that this was “an authentic artists' parade with the best team of technicians ever assembled in a show of this nature, making up a total of 150 people” (8/6/1966).

Flama magazine (9/9/1966), stated that:

the cast is indeed more than enough to impress the public: the great *Revista Stars* Camilo de Oliveira (1924-2016), Maria Dulce (1936-2010), Aida Baptista (1929-2008), José Viana (1929-2003), Simone de Oliveira (1938) and António Calvário (1938), the controversial Angolan ensemble The Rock's, leaded by singer Eduardo Nascimento (1944), and a wonderful English Ballet with 14 female and 4 male dancers.

After weeks of intense journalistic coverage, which anticipated the cast and other particulars related to this production, the official posters and statements about of this *Revista Show* issued by the Vasco Morgado Company always stressed the ideas of a “*Musical Superfantasy*” as well as “It’s more than just a *Revista*”. In fact it can be read in the newspaper *O Século* (11/5/1966) that, despite some stumbles in the show,

there is at least one thing we all owe to Vasco Morgado: having taken the *Revista* from the its classic moulds. We understand classics here as dusty and routined moulds in which the *Revista* show has been going on for years (...). Now the *Revista Theatre* has been civilized for the eyes and ears of the audiences. ‘*Esta Lisboa que eu Amo*’ is undoubtedly a standard. A new conception of *Revista*. And hooray for that! The public will be grateful, oh Morgado, by lining up in the box office.

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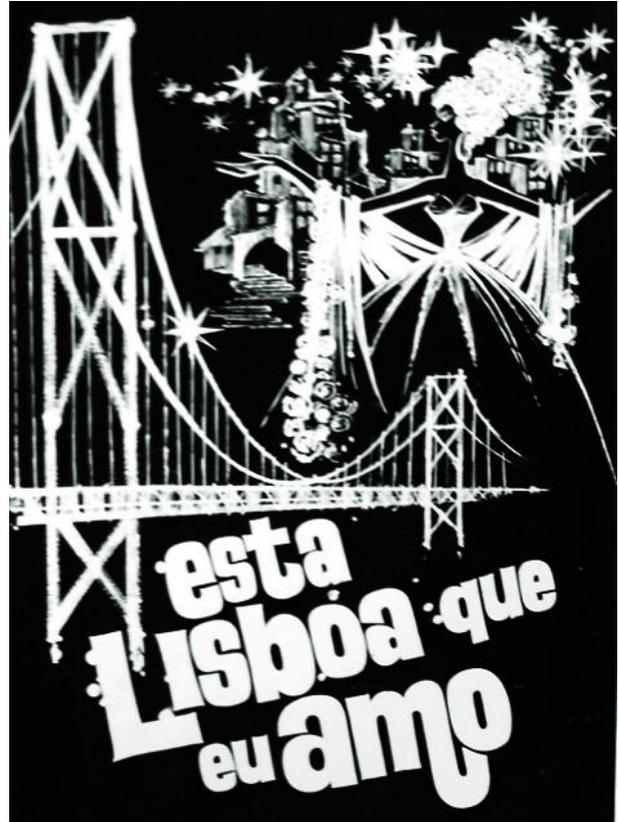


Fig. 5 “*Esta Lisboa que eu Amo*” *Revista* programme cover (courtesy of National Museum of Theatre and Dance)

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The main song, also entitled “*Esta Lisboa que eu Amo*” was composed by Frederico Valério (1913-1982), a maestro “that the public knows well and likes” (*Republica* Newspaper, September 1966) and “performed by the orchestra directed by Fernando de Carvalho” (1913-1967) (*O Século*, 9/25/1966).

Both maestros, alongside with António Luís Gomes and Eduardo Loureiro, constituted the jury of yet another promoting initiative developed by Vasco Morgado: a band contest. This event took place in *Parque Mayer* on the day of the show's premiere. In addition to considerable cash prizes for the winners, all competitors would

parade from the venue to the Duque de Saldanha Plaza where they would perform the song in a march format in front of the Monumental Theatre, almost simultaneously with the opening of the theatre drapes (*Diário de Lisboa Newspaper*, 8/27/1966).

This marketing action had multiple meanings: first, it solidified the strategic image of Morgado as a great promoter of spectacular events; on the other hand, the parade from *Parque Mayer* up to the Monumental Theatre is to be seen as a demonstration of the strength and the extension of the Vasco Morgado Company both in territorial and symbolic levels; and finally, the interpretation in a march format of the *Fado-song* that would be sung by Simone de Oliveira later in show with the same name as the show, would facilitate a more efficient memorization by the public, disseminating this repertoire piece in an extremely effective way throughout the different media. According to the *Diário Popular Newspaper* (10/25/1966), Simone de Oliveira and António Calvário, the Queen and King of Radio, constituted precisely "the specialized singers with whom Vasco Morgado enlivened the phalanxes of admirers of both sexes".

4. CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the distinctive nature of each of the theatres he explored, Vasco Morgado was the creator of several synergetic strategies capable of consolidating and sustaining his dominion until his premature death in 1978. It was not just a question of presenting different shows for different audiences | public. Music, which plays a central role in the *Revista Theatre*, has been a key element in all of his activity.

Rare was the exception amongst the significant number of interviews I conducted over the past few years that had not highlighted Morgado's habit of taking long walks between *Parque Mayer* and the Monumental Theatre. The businessman was a true connoisseur of the shows he had on stage and of the theatres he explored. This logic allowed him to understand how urban dynamics operated in Lisbon, having created situations, such as the one

presented in this article, in which music effectively mobilized people, thus establishing a direct relation between *Theatre, Audience* and *Society*. Curiously, a similar path was carried out after his passing by thousands of people that wanted to pay him an appropriate homage for his contributions to the Entertainment Industry in Lisbon and in Portugal.

The role of media was paramount in this whole process. The fact that he had deliberately pre-announced the initiative, the agents and the route, transformed what could have been a simple premiere of a *Revista* show into a celebration in the city of Lisbon, one that stretched along three of its main and busiest arteries that were, at the time all recently equipped with subway stations, a sign of progress and modernity. Music and passers-by moved along the sound of a march that was to be interpreted in another format by the Queen of the Radio. In a context of innocuous texts stemming from censorship imposed by the Estado Novo | New State's Cultural Policy, this form of Entertainment was not only consented but eventually desired by the regime: people weren't simply having the Vasco Morgado's Empire on display. The grandeur of those new Avenues (*Avenidas Novas*), the investment in the development of Lisbon and the freedom of movement: all arguments of the propaganda strategy of a dictatorial regime with which Vasco Morgado was often connoted and not entirely correct.

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