

EPTA Portugal: Growing Pains and Progress

by Nancy Lee Harper with Luís Pipa



Introduction

Portugal has always been associated with the piano, even if the instrument is not its first predilection. King John's court (reigned 1707–1750) was the seat of frequent concerts on the early pianoforte (fig. 1). This King's brother was the dedicatee of the first published volume of pianoforte sonatas (fig. 2). As well, the growth of the piano as a cottage industry is verified from a 19th-century register where it was noted that 12 pianos were found in Lisbon in 1809 compared to 500 just twelve years later in 1821. Soon afterwards, Portugal's National Music Conservatory was founded in the midst of this growth in Lisbon in 1835 with João Domingos Bomtempo (1775–1842) as its first director. Bomtempo is attributed to writing one of the first piano "methods" in Portugal - *Elementos de música e methodo de tocar forte piano* of 1816 (fig. 3). Liszt's sojourn in the capital city of Lisbon in early 1845 (fig. 4) and subsequent legacy of his Boisselot grand piano - especially convenient for playing chamber music with its two desk stands on each side (fig. 5) - reflected still a growing interest by the populace in the instrument. "To play the piano and to speak French" were considered measures of cultural attainment by the early 20th century, to the point that at least one medical doctor advised young women not to take up the study of the piano, which he called a "disgraceful instrument", until the age of twelve; nor should they practise too much before the age of fifteen or sixteen for fear of creating nervous disorders in them.



Fig. 1. Extant Grand piano, Manuel Antunes, Lisbon, 1767, now in National Music Museum, Vermillion, South Dakota.



Fig. 2. Lodovico Giustini di Pistoia, *Sonate*, the first keyboard sonatas with the words "piano" and "forte" to appear, 1732.



Fig. 3. Early piano "method" by Domingos Bomtempo, 1816.



Fig. 4. Caricature of Franz Liszt performing a benefit concert in Lisbon in 1845.



Fig. 5. Liszt's Boisselot piano from Marseilles brought to Portugal and later bought by the Queen of Portugal.

Fortunately, not everyone followed this advice. Piano teaching and playing in Portugal has thrived since the early days of King John V's court when the innovative sounds of the great virtuosos Carlos Seixas (1704–1742) and Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757), to name only a few, were heard. Notable pianists undertook Herculean challenges, such as the performance of all the Beethoven sonatas:

- José Vianna da Motta (1868–1948), in 1927, for the centenary of Beethoven's death - Vianna da Mottawas one of Liszt's last pupils;
- Fernando Laires (b. 1925), one of the youngest in piano history, in 1944–1945;
- Florinda Santos (1907–2005), in 1977, for the 150th anniversary of Beethoven's death; she also performed Albéniz's *Iberia*, Schubert sonatas and Portuguese music.

While there is no formal Portuguese school of piano playing, the Portuguese piano sound is a strong and clear one, similar to the German school. Interesting approaches to piano pedagogy have resulted in sometimes unique offerings, such as Fernando Corrêa de Oliveira's (1921–2004) reading system (Fig. 6), a Portuguese–Russian notational system without accidentals, only oblique crosses for the black keys and a tonic sol-fa system of: Do Lo Re Te Mi Fa Ra Sol Tu La Di Si.



Fig. 6. Sample of Corrêa de Oliveira's reading system, without the need for the use of accidentals.

Divulgation of new music or new editions were often made through music magazines, popular at the beginning of the 20th century. An example is seen here:



Fig. 7. "The Musical Week", a weekly Portuguese music magazine featuring music scores of Portuguese and non-Portuguese composers and articles.

Creation of EPTA Portugal (1998–2013)

In spite of its long association with the piano, no national association of pianists and piano teachers ever existed in Portugal before EPTA. In 1998, Carola Grindea asked Nancy Lee Harper to establish an EPTA association in Portugal, thus becoming the 34th country to join the EPTA ranks. From the country's early origins in the 12th century with capital cities first in Guimarães in the north and soon followed by Coimbra in the centre of the country, it seems only befitting that the first seat of EPTA Portugal should have been between these two cities, in Aveiro.

In 1999, Nancy, with several interested pianist-pedagogues, launched the first National Conference at the Universidade de Aveiro. This four-day Conference attracted many participants from around the country and the islands. EPTA Portugal's legal constitution as a non-profit organisation was incorporated in 2000.



Fig. 8. President Nancy Lee Harper, EPTA Portugal.

Hard work continued and was ably assisted by such members as Otilia Sá, Constantin Sandu, José Parra, Maria Teresa Macedo, Nelly Santos Leite, Rui Pintão, Isabel Rocha, Patrícia Lopes-Bastos, Maria Lurdes Sousa Álvares Ribeiro, Isabel Cristina Castro, and many others (fig. 9). All members received the *Piano Journal* as part of their membership. An independent electronic newsletter in Portuguese was created that lasted until 2005. A webpage was also created.



Fig. 9. Left-right: José Parra, Constantin Sandu, Maria Teresa Macedo, Isabel Cristina Castro, Francisco Monteiro, Sofia Lourenço.

Three honorary members were appointed over the years:



Fig. 10. Left-right: Honorary EPTA Portugal members: Helena Sá e Costa (1913–2006), Fernando Lares (b. 1925), and Artur Pizarro (b. 1968).

National Conferences were held annually in various cities, such as Braga, Porto, Aveiro, Coimbra, Castelo da Paiva, Viseu and others. These conferences were always a stimulus to the local music schools and conservatories. Electing to discontinue specific themes, the Board decided to focus on Piano Pedagogy and Portuguese Music because of the variety that this title allowed.

EPTA Portugal's activities ranged from Masterclasses, Festivals, Conferences, Workshops, Seminars, Concerts and Recitals to Competitions. From 2000–2004, EPTA Portugal joined with the Universidade de Aveiro's *Celebrando Grandes Pianistas*, an international summer festival. This event was a complement to the annual national conferences. It offered young pianists an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of performance practices of the times and with internationally known pianists and pedagogues such as Igor Lebedev, Daniele Alberti, Marcella Crudeli, Diane Andersen, Mariann Abraham, Alberto Portugheis, Bertrand Ott, Nina Kazimirova, Malcolm Troup, Carola Grindea, Nadia Lasserson and others. The following programmes were offered:

- 2000 – "Homage to Vladimir Horowitz"; 2001 – "Ignace Jan Paderewski and the St. Petersburg Tradition";
- 2002 – "Chopin and the French School of Pianism";
- 2003 – "Franz Liszt";
- 2004 – "Cultural Intersection".



Fig. 11. Left-right: Roy Howat, Martino Tirimo, Radoslav Kvapil, all performers in the 2002 *Celebrando Grandes Pianistas*, watching the European World cup.

In 2005–2006, Nancy became the EPTA European President and consequently organised, with the invaluable assistance of Robert Andres and his wife Honor O’Hea, the international EPTA Conference, which took place in Funchal, Madeira Island, in July 2006.



Fig. 12. Left-right: Artur Pizarro, Robert Andres, Honor O’Hea and Nancy Lee Harper at the 2006 EPTA Conference in Funchal, Madeira.

This conference, “Music in the Spirit of the Portuguese Discoveries”, was a great success with participants coming from all over the globe, including China, USA, South Africa and Europe.



Fig. 13. Programme book cover from the 2006 EPTA Conference, held in Funchal, Madeira.

Throughout the years, several internationally known pedagogues were invited to give conferences and workshops for EPTA Portugal. Some of these include Christopher Norton, Paul Sheftel, Marilyn Lowe, Nelita True, Joseph Banowetz, David Dubal, Adam Wodnicki and others.



Fig. 14. Christopher Norton at the Universidade de Aveiro in an EPTA Portugal workshop on Improvisation in 2012.

Publications were also a hallmark of EPTA Portugal. The first one resulted from the first national conference and was published as its proceedings, *Actas do 1º Congresso da EPTA Portugal*.

EPTA Portugal’s members also published works of piano pedagogy and related topics. Some of these are:



Fig. 15. Pedagogical texts and editions by EPTA Portugal members.



Pupils of EPTA Portugal members often received accolades in national and international competitions. Just one example is that of 16-year old Raúl Costa, who became a finalist in the 1st European Union International Piano Competition.



Fig. 16. Raúl Costa, third from right, with members of the jury, 2009, Prague, Czech Republic.

EPTA Portugal also has encouraged young pianists in their careers. One such example is the co-sponsoring of an all-Russian recital by André Roque Cardoso.



Fig. 17. Russian recital of young EPTA Portugal member, André Roque Cardoso.

EPTA Portugal (2013 to present)

Nancy Lee Harper retired from the Universidade de Aveiro. In the ensuing year, a search was made for a new president and was found in the figure of Prof. Luís Pipa of the Universidade do Minho in Braga.



Fig. 18. Prof. Luís Pipa at the piano.

For administrative purposes, a new national association had to be created that is called EPTA-LUSA. However, for all practical purposes this non-profit association still functions as EPTA Portugal and has as its objectives:

1. To contribute to the professional development of interpreters and piano teachers by conducting training;
2. To enhance the dialogue between teachers and interpreters, promoting the reflection and the exchange of specific knowledge of musical practice through conferences, lectures, workshops and musical recitals;

3. To promote research in relation to its various aspects of pianistic practice;
4. To disseminate knowledge of new principles and techniques of pianistic education, and to this end, promote contacts at the international level.

To date, several activities have been realised. Amongst them are:

- Creation of a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/eptaportugal);
- Piano Festival & Masterclasses (fig. 18);
- 1st national Conference (fig. 19).



Fig. 19. Piano Masterclasses in Ponte de Lima, July 2015.



Fig. 20. First National EPTA-LUSA conference, to be held in November of 2015.

Future events of EPTA Portugal include a series of evening recitals in the *Museu de Artes Decorativas de Viana do Castelo*:

- **20 November 2015**
Vera Fonte, piano
António Oliveira, violoncello
- **4 December 2015**
Natália Ferreira, piano
Filipa Andrade, piano
- **18 December 2015**
João Araújo, piano,
Virgínia Lis, clarinet
- **8 January 2016**
Filipa Andrade, Piano
Sara Barros, Viola d'arco

In closing, we wish EPTA Portugal continued success and growth. May it be an inspiring example for pianists, piano teachers, and music educators in Portugal and abroad.

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