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Brazilian Music: Art Music Composers and the Artistry of Popular Musicians

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Charles Perrone. *Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Song: MPB, 1965-1985*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989. 253 pages.

David P. Appleby. *The Music of Brazil*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989. 209 pages.

In *Balanço da bossa e outras bossas [Examination, or Oscillation, of New Wave and Other Waves]*, Augusto de Campos concludes his essay "João Gilberto/Anton Webern"—a textual collage of concrete poems, quotations, poetic observations, musical scores, and letters by and about the composer Anton Webern—with the question, "*E o que é que isso tudo tem a ver com João Gilberto?*" ["And what does all of this have to do with João Gilberto?"]. The answer Campos provides is "*uma sílaba*" ["one syllable"], an apparent reference to both the formal laconicism Gilberto shares with Webern, and the Brazilian singer-songwriter's well-known interpretation of Newton Mendonça's metatextual bossa nova "*Samba de uma nota só*" ["One Note Samba"].

Campos's question is clearly rhetorical as well, referring not simply to the essay comparing Gilberto to Webern, but also to the entire collection of essays that comprise the book, treating bossa nova, as they do, within the context of contemporary poetry, various currents of modernism, and *música erudita* [art music, literally erudite music]. A predominant theme of the essays by noted cultural critic and poet Campos, musicologist Brasil Rocha Brito, and composers Julio Medaglia and Gilberto Mendes is that bossa nova, especially as developed by its foremost composer, Antonio Carlos Jobim, and articulated by its principal interpreter, João Gilberto, effectively dissolved the existing boundaries between *música erudita* and

música popular [popular music] in Brazil. Thus, the approach employed by Campos and the other writers in this collection is to treat bossa nova and early expressions of subsequent Brazilian popular music movements, such as *tropicalismo* [tropicalism], as artistic traditions that are highly evolved formally and aware of themselves as traditions.

Charles Perrone, in *Masters of Brazilian Contemporary Brazilian Song: MPB, 1965-1985*, employs a similar approach in his analysis of the works of several of the most important composers and interpreters of the post-bossa nova generation: Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Milton Nascimento, and João Bosco and Aldir Blanc. Absolved in part by Campos and his co-writers of the necessity of demonstrating the seriousness of his subjects' works, Perrone simply assumes a high degree of aesthetic sophistication and proceeds with close readings of a large number of contemporary Brazilian popular music texts by these artists. This assumption is amply rewarded and reinforced by Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna's critical literary readings of the songs of 1930s *sambista* [composer of samba] Noel Rosa, Antonio Riserio's perspectives concerning the African-Brazilian aesthetic of Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, Fred de Goes's writings on Bahian carnival, Gerard Behague's seminal ethnomusicological studies of Brazilian music, and various other works.

A brief introduction offers background and context to the novice listener and an outline of contemporaneous artistic, literary, and social developments for the informed scholar. The analysis of Chico Buarque focuses equally on his contribution as a stylist and his role as the social conscience of Brazil during the military dictatorship between 1964 and 1984. There is, at times, a tendency to read Buarque's texts in excessively allegorical terms, thus implicitly undervaluing his contribution as a stylist. Buarque's works, however, seem to invite such allegorical readings, and his artistry consists in large measure in his ability to deliver a message, unpalatable to censors, by means of indirection, parable, and various rhetorical strategies. Perrone convincingly demonstrates the confluence of formal concerns and social message in his readings of such Buarque compositions as "*Pedor Pedreiro*," "*Construção*" ["Construction"], "*Vai passar*" ["It Is Going to Occur"], and "*Cálice*" ["Chalice"] coauthored by Gilberto Gil.

The readings of the texts by Caetano Veloso strikingly demonstrate the advantages, and several of the shortcomings, of Perrone's close reading approach. As a producer of densely intertextual, metapoetic songs that self-consciously transcend genres, historical categories, and national and linguistic boundaries, Veloso engages in an ongoing critical dialogue with musical, cinematic, and literary texts produced by him and his contemporaries, and artistic antecedents such as the Brazilian Modernist poets. His

"*Batmacumba*" on the *Tropicália* album, represents, according to Perrone, "an intentional fusion of concrete poetry and artistic 'deglutition' à la Oswald de Andrade." (With the lyrics constructed to produce the shape of a bat, it also recalls Heitor Villa Lobos's "New York Skyline," which the composer created by producing a score developed by tracing notes from the silhouette of Manhattan skyscrapers.) The song "*Tropicália*," on the same album, considered by many to be the manifesto of the *tropicalismo* movement, echoes Oswald's *Manifesto pau Brasil* [*Brazilwood Manifesto*]. Its textual "construction of a monument," asserts Perrone, "symbolizes a contradictory Brazil," with juxtapositions of airplanes and straw huts, Ipanema and Alencar's *Iracema*, Carmen Miranda and bossa nova, American western films and samba, and a swimming pool and Bahia's blue waters. Perrone's allegorical reading, although incisively delineating the web of literary and cultural allusions, has the result here of devaluing the figurative aspects of the text, especially since, as he indicates, the text was not originally conceived as a manifesto.

Veloso and Gil, principal developers of *tropicalismo*, have repeatedly emphasized that it was less a movement with a definite style than a series of aesthetic tactics, an anti-style like Dada ("da-da" is the final refrain of "*Tropicália*"), developed with the intention of exposing the inadequacies of existing genres and clearing a space for the emergence of new aesthetic forms in Brazil. One must remember that unlike Buarque, whose texts were repeatedly censored, Caetano and Gil were jailed and exiled by the military not for any specific actions but, apparently, because the very existence of producers of such undefinable texts posed some vague yet ominous threat. As Perrone points out, Gil and Caetano were also subjected to severe criticism by the "cultural patrols" of the Brazilian left.

Thus, another perhaps more constructive theoretical approach to the songs of Veloso and Gil would be to read them as carnivalesque texts that express an anti-generic urge—what Robert Stam, following Mikhail Bakhtin, terms "subversive pleasures"¹—employing the parodic as a means to overturn existing order and create the "novel." Perrone recognizes Veloso's "vanguard aesthetic" and his intent to create a "permanent revolution," but the close reading approach he employs, with its reliance on supposed real world referents, minimizes the dense dialogism of Veloso's texts and the extent to which the revolution proposed is socio-linguistic.

Veloso and Gil—and also the previously neglected post-tropicalist lyricist Aldir Blanc, whose texts Perrone incisively analyzes—are adroit rhetoricians, who foreground the figurative in their works. The readings of Gil's "*Geléia geral*" ["General Jam"], "*Refavela*" ["Remake in the Image of a Favela"], and "*Oriente*" ["Orient"] skillfully configure the spiritual,

social, and national and international musical roots of the songs with the composer's penchant for invention of Joycean neologisms. The literary alignment of Veloso with Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa is convincingly revealed in the readings of such songs as "Os argonauts" ["The Argonauts"] and "Língua" ["Language" or "Tongue"].

Perrone's translation of Veloso's texts and those of the other writers represented displays an extraordinary reverence for the originals coupled with a delightful inventiveness, especially considering the profusion of puns, alliterations, polysemea, and the performative aspects of the songs. Just one example, chosen from many, of the playful precision of the translations is the rendering of Gil's "Refazenda" as "Refarmulating." The skillful translations, however, simply underscore the regrettable absence of the originals. Perhaps the absence is the result of cost considerations by the publisher, and every attempt is made to include pertinent portions of the texts in Portuguese. Nonetheless, in a text such as "Língua," which is "more or less untranslatable," the entire original is indispensable to an understanding of the "vertiginously rich . . . dialogical resonances."² The reader is reminded of Fernando Pessoa's line, cited in Veloso's song "Minha pátria é minha língua" ["My Homeland is My Language"]. The *pátria* of these popular composers is the Brazilian language, and its absence in a book devoted to the artistry of their texts is sorely missed.

David P. Appleby, in *The Music of Brazil*, has created a detailed and well researched survey of the development of *música erudita* in Brazil, providing a historical framework for understanding some of the roots of contemporary music analyzed by Campos and Perrone, and revealing various discernibly Brazilian versions of European art music traditions dating from colonial times. Working with admittedly fragmentary evidence, Appleby, utilizing the research of Behague, Rogério Duprat, Mario de Andrade, and others, attempts to piece together the story of *música erudita* as it evolved in various locales such as Bahia, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, and Rio de Janeiro.

Beginning with the earliest extant transcriptions of indigenous music, reproduced from Jean de Lery's *Historie d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brasil* [*History of a Voyage Made to the Land of Brazil*], Appleby traces the introduction and development of European musical styles. The Jesuits, whose policy included active *deculturação* [deculturation of indigenous styles], initiated formal musical training in the Western sacred tradition, and introduced musical drama in the form of *autos sacramentales* [morality plays]. Although the Jesuits were eventually expelled, European-style music continued to thrive in the guild-like religious *irmandades* [brotherhoods] under the direction of *mestres de capela* [chapelmasters], priests who became church music directors. Appleby shows how the patronage of

the Braganças, after their arrival in Brazil, nurtured an already thriving musical tradition through the support of composition and production of numerous large-scale sacred works. He provides biographical sketches, musical scores, and formal analyses of the works of composers such as the *mestre de capela* of the Rio cathedral in the early nineteenth century, the mulatto composer José Mauricio Nunes Garcia, and the composer of the Brazilian national anthem, Francisco Manuel da Silva.

"The change from chapel to theater as the center of Brazilian musical life," took place, Appleby asserts, in the late nineteenth century with the increasing production of operas and the appearance of musical salons. These salons, he indicates, blurred the distinction between European art music, opera arias, the *modinha* [sentimental lyrical song], and the *lundu* [Afro-Brazilian song and dance form]. The introduction of various European dance forms such as the waltz, polka, schottische, and the Latin dance and music forms, the habenera and tango, produced "a new kind of Brazilian music," as exemplified by the *maxixe* [Brazilian dance and music form with elements of waltz and *lundu*].

It is at this point in the text that the well documented historical and textual analysis, with its hierarchical generic implications, becomes problematic. One can ignore the text's title, because the author explicitly denies any attempt at an all-inclusive approach by stating that his goal is to provide an outline of the development of *música erudita* in Brazil. Nonetheless, the excellent discussion of Villa-Lobos's role as a great early twentieth-century synthesizer of the various strains of Brazilian folk, popular, and art music is considerably undermined by establishing him and several other modernist art music composers, such as Luciano Gallet, Lorenzo Fernandez, Francisco Mignone, and M. Camargo Guarnieri, as the only composers producing self-consciously artistic texts.

No one would dispute Villa-Lobos's central place in the history of Brazilian music and modern music generally, and Appleby's analysis of his formal strategies—the use of various non-Western scales and indigenous instruments, delayed downbeat, dissonance, and refigurations of folk melodies—indicates clearly why the composer represents to Brazil what Johannes Brahms does to Germany or Béla Bartok to Hungary. Appleby is particularly passionate about Villa-Lobos's selfless role in institutionalizing musical training in Brazil. There is, however, an uncritical acceptance of Villa-Lobos's statement that, "I am folklore; my melodies are just as authentic as those which originate from the souls of the people." Appleby frames his analysis by asserting that "the roots of the music of Villa-Lobos and other nationalist composers lie in the fertile soil of Brazilian folk and popular music," thus giving the disquieting impression that, from his perspective, all contemporaneous musical productions (folk and popular)

not falling within the framework of *música erudita*, constitute so much raw material for the art music composer. Appleby's acceptance of dominant cultural values is reinforced elsewhere in the text by his definition of *candomblé* as an "animistic cult" and his description of Indians as "natural actors."

As Claudia Matos shows in *Acertei no milhar [I Hit the Big One]*,³ her excellent study of *sambistas* in Rio in the early twentieth century, composers such as Moreira da Silva, Geraldo Pereira, and Wilson Batista—contemporaries of Villa-Lobos—created a self-conscious tradition of highly figured popular music, informed by various modern and folk, Western and non-Western, musical and literary sources. In their songs, they utilize syncopation, African polyrhythms, dissonance, and in certain instances elaborate orchestration; as working class Afro-Brazilians, they would seem to have at least an equal claim that their melodies originate from "the soul of the people."

If Appleby's theoretical approach inadequately treats ethnographic elements related to art music and composers in the modernist period, it seems untenable in his discussion of various post-modern movements, if only because many of the composers in this period no longer accept the distinction between *música erudita* and *música popular* that Appleby rigidly maintains.

Música viva [literally, live music], a movement of serialist composers influenced by the works of Schoenberg, had as one of its principles the absorption—as opposed to the quotation—of national music, and *música nova* [new music], had a "commitment to all aspects of musical language—including impressionism, polytonality, atonality, experimental music, and electroacoustical media." Appleby chooses not to discuss the role of many *música nova* composers in the critical and musical elaboration of bossa nova and *tropicalismo*. Rogério Duprat was one of the principal architects of *tropicalismo*, and Julio Medaglia arranged several songs on the album *Tropicália*. Gilberto Mendes, in *Blirium 9* and other works, incorporates citations of popular music, and in the essay "De como a MPB perdeu direção e continuou na vanguarda" ["How Brazilian Popular Music Lost Direction and Remained in the Vanguard"] in *Balanço da bossa*, he provides a critical assessment of a number of popular music trends.

Since these composers clearly did not view their participation in popular music as incidental, Appleby's study would have benefitted from some analysis of this generic cross-germination, which has come to be seen as a characteristically Brazilian phenomenon in cultural works in this century. Such an analysis might provide the basis for a reading of the shared African elements in such works as Carlos Alberto Pinto Fonseca's

Missa afro-brasileira [Afro-Brazilian Mass], Milton Nascimento's *Missa do quilombos [Mass of the Slave Maroons]*, and the sacred works of the colonial composer from Minas Gerais, José Joaquim Emerico Lobo da Mesquita; or the use of silence as a formal strategy in the works of Villa Lobos, Gilberto Mendes, and João Gilberto.

Whatever the shortcomings of Appleby's study, it provides a wealth of interesting anecdotes and an astute analysis of formal aspects of *música erudita* in Brazil. His descriptions of the works of Jorge Antunes, Marlo Nobre, and José Antonio de Almeida Prato underscore the protean inventiveness of Brazilian composers and the continuing vitality of Brazilian music in every sphere. The descriptions and scores of eighteenth and nineteenth-century composers create a desire to experience previously unknown music. The analysis of the life and work of Francisca Hedwidge "Chiquinha" Gonzaga provides an example of the kind of scholarly work that remains to be done concerning the role of women in Brazilian music.

Why are there so few critical studies of the work of Elis Regina, Gal Costa, Nara Leão, Sylvia Telles, Aracy de Almeida, and Beth Carvalho and composers of African origin such as Cartola, Pixinguinha, Paulinho da Viola, and Moreira da Silva? What do they have to do with Brazilian music? The answer—as Perrone and Appleby have ably demonstrated in the cases of Villa-Lobos, M. Camargo Guarnieri, João Gilberto, Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso, and Gilberto Gil—is everything.

NOTES

1. Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
2. *Ibid.*, 194.
3. Claudia Matos, *Acertei no milhar: Samba e malandragem no tempo da Getúlio*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1982.