

BRAZILIAN POPULAR MUSIC

By Renato Almeida.

The music of Brazil was formed from the fundamental elements which gave rise to the nation - a large part of Lusitanians, later Negroes and lastly Indians, besides others who in the course of Brazilian life have been incorporated into them. This great blending, however, was accomplished in the warmth of a different atmosphere, of which the action should be highly modifying of the primitive shortcomings. Besides, the conditions under which the country was gradually developing determined, physically and spiritually, the most profound changes in the intense miscegenation brought about.

For this reason then, the Brazilian people, although faithful to their origins, have made entirely national what they have created and this specific differentiation - has been accentuated with time, thus marking already defined characteristics. The phenomenon is not a musical one. Music is merely an aspect of the general process of the formation of the nationality. The Europeans brought to Brazil the fundamentals of civilization that, in the blending with contributions from other peoples, acquired its own structure, of which the process is still being effected, by now within a definite plan.

The main lines and the greatest diuturnity of Brazilian music are Portuguese, for we have received from there, together with the greater dose of our blood, the religion, the language, the customs and learning. In it, the native Lusitanian mark is intense and very deep. Melodic forms, rhythms, harmonic tonality, instruments, folkloric forms, in chanting, prayers, songs, romances, dances and autos, all this, very often readapted here by others, particularly by the Negroes, has come down directly to us from the colonizers.

Afterwards, the African contribution is worthy of special mention for what the Negroes brought and for the distortion they accomplished in our musical material, imparting to it a special colouring, above all in the rhythmical variety, through their numerous percussion instruments, their peculiar and lascivious way of dancing and principally by the facility with which they would adapt to their imagination the foreign elements in prodigious synchronisms. Besides instruments, the Negroes gave us the batuques (round dances), some melodies, several dances and the fetichistic songs. The elements of Negro music are permanent, though not determinative.

From the Indians we have little. Their influence in music, as in everything else, was small notwithstanding it has evident marks which survive, though profoundly modified by its contacts with the Portuguese and African. Besides the inspiration from another instrument, like the maracá (1), perhaps from the discursive rhythm that blended a large number of indigenous motifs, especially with the popular dances, as Mario de Andrade observes, the Amerindian reminiscences are very difficult to determine, although there is manifested a strong desire to discover them.

In addition to the three basic influences, reference must be made to the Spanish, through the boleros, malaguenas (2), fandangos, habaneras, etc.; to the Italian, that was brought about through the erudite opera music, but which reached the people by way of the modinha, some other European ones, such as the French, in certain children's songs to be sung in rings, and recently, the American, by way of Jazz, which has a marked preponderance over Brazilian urban music. This, naturally, without mentioning artistic music, which has imbibed itself in the fountains of universal culture.

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- Translator's Notes: (1) Maracá - A rattle, used by Brazilian Indian medicine men. It is a gourd filled with pebbles and dry seeds.
- (2) Malaguena - The name of three different types of Southern Spanish folk music, all localized in the provinces of Malaga and Murcia.

With these elements, improved in the Brazilian atmosphere, there was created in Brazil a music, rich and varied, of which the forms may not be characterized in any one determined way, but which has a perfectly nationalized fixity. The songs, dances of every kind, religious songs, Catholic or fetichistic, already possess specific constancy. It is what was said by Mario de Andrade, the greatest figure in Brazilian musicology, besides having been a great artist and notable writer, when he construed the problem with assurance and in its exact aspects by writing: "Both in the country and in the cities there flourish with great abundance songs and dances that present all the characters required by science to determine the folkloric validity of this manifestation. It is true that these melodies are born and die rapidly and that the people do not keep them in mind. But if the musical record in itself is not preserved, it multiplies within certain norms of composing, of certain processes of singing, constantly assuming determined forms, manifesting itself always within certain instrumental combinations, containing a certain number of melodic regularities, rhythmical motifs, tonal tendencies, ways of cadencing, all of which are already traditional, perfectly anonymous and autochthonous, at times peculiar, and always characteristically Brazilian. It is not such and such a song that is lasting, but all that with which it is constructed. The melody may, in six or ten years, be obliterated from public memory, but its constitutive elements remain familiar with the people and with all the requirements, appearances and weaknesses of the traditional.

Brazilian popular music already constitutes an artistic source of great wealth. Since Basilio Itiberê da Cunha who, in 1869, utilized a fandango of the State of Paraná as a motif for his Sertaneja (Rustic) rhapsody, till the modern composers, it has been nourishing our erudite music, giving it characteristics and directives of its own, on the path towards a national music. Several peculiarities already distinguish Brazilian musical folklore, such as the constancy of the binary form and the major key, certain features of cadencing and the common use of syncopation and its varied consequences, the diversities between poetic metre and the song, the discursive process, which makes some songs mere recitatives, the usual employment of the major key, in spite of the inconsistent modulation of many urban tunes, the irregular transitions, the diminishing of the seventh chord, the character usually descending of the melody, the conclusion of songs outside the tonic, in the mediant and in the dominant, harmony based on modal and defective scales - pentatonic and hexachordal, by the absence of the leading tone, in short, typical and differential processes of cadencing, modulation and harmonizing. Besides this, it is necessary to stress the importance of the typical instruments of which the influence upon the song has already been sufficiently pointed out. Other problems preoccupy erudite persons to a great extent in ascertaining how far certain peculiarities may become indicative of the genuine expression of Brazilian music. Thus, for example, the fantasy of rhythm which permits of abundant polyrhythm, certain "placements" of the voice, the freedom that the singer has to adapt in his own manner the words to the melody, so that the latter is prolonged or diminished according to the whims of the verse, even being able to drop some notes, the way of singing nasalizing constantly and the intonations with that peculiar liaison, with such a lazy glissando, that Mario de Andrade came to imagine that the people of the Northeast employ the quarter-tone.

From the sentimental point of view, Brazilian music, despite the constancy of the major key, is sad and languid, gloomy love being the favourite motif of its ditties. Olavo Bilac, the poet, in a famous verse, called it "amorous flower of three gloomy grasses". Nevertheless, fanfaronade, historic and warlike events and feats, malicious topic, chronicles of events and social satire are equally put to use, besides the persistent and inevitable suggestion of magic, in religious and fetichistic jumbles.

It would be interesting to classify the Brazilian songs and, through some types, it is believed that the following table could be adopted:

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| Sentimental | - <u>Modinhas</u> |
| Malicious | - <u>Lundús</u> |
| Religious | - Catholic - Litanies and Benedictus -
- Fetichistic - Candomblé songs (3) |
| Satiric | - <u>Desafios</u> (4) |

Children's - Songs to be sung in rings.
Work - Pregões (5)
Lyrical narrative - Romances and popular ditties.

The wealth of songs in Brazil is great, though pure solo singing is not a preference of the Brazilian. He hardly ever sings for the sake of singing, but he will sing for praying, for dancing. It is true that solo singing is more urban in nature, but even in the cities it dominates dance music to an extraordinary degree, and even the chronicle itself of events is made in it. In the cities, the carnival march and the samba (6) itself and, in the interior, the decimas (7), the modinhas sung to guitar accompaniment and the recortados (8). Brazil has never had a Stephen Foster, but an Ernesto Nazaré, who has perpetuated one of the kinds of popular dances: the maxixe. The innumerable forms of alternate singing, the desafios and martelos (9), in which the poetic vein of the participants is developed with an eloquence worthy of the great troubadours, do not represent a greater musical wealth, for they are little more than recitatives with interposed chords on the accompanying instrument, generally a guitar. The work songs are very numerous, there being found in them some indigenous features, while in rural festivities, such as sowing-time and harvesting-time, there are generally no special forms as in certain festivals, which create them with soothing rhythms. The cowboy tunes, with their extensive melodic lines in which a certain Arabic reminiscence is mingled with Gregorian chant, sung when leading cattle, are beautiful in the North-Eastern region of Brazil. There are the Cradle songs, children's ring songs, in which a trace of French influence appears, the songs of beggars asking for alms and, above all, the religious songs. Of the latter, the Catholic songs are generally deformities of sacred chant, frequently suffering profane influences, even from dance music. The fetichistic songs of the macumbas, xangôs and candomblés (Negroes rites), of the catimbós (Afro-Indian rites) are often endowed with great and profound beauty and full of a grave suggestion. Even by taking away the force of the rhythm that favours possession and that reaches the point of hallucination, for the effects of the black art, there are melodic lines which have, besides, already served Brazilian erudite music in a surprising way. As regards pajélança (Amerindian rites), the music no longer presents the same splendour.

There is not space enough within the limits of this Survey for the study of these diverse forms, of which the modinha seemed that it would one day be the Brazilian lied, but it never even succeeded in enduring on account of its artificialism, and to-day it has disappeared from the drawing-rooms and from the collection of popular lyrics, of which it is a mere reminiscence.

A sentimental and mournful aria, based on a love motif, beautifully modulated and with a strong influence of the Italian contabile, the modinha passed from the romance of the drawing-room to the mouth of the people, where it was in vogue during the last century. The poetry of our best bards, from the Arcades of Minas Gerais of the 18th. century to the romantic ones, constituted the favourite material for the modinhas of the time. This class of song, however, was never unmistakably popular, though it had dropped from the erudite forms.

This ephemeral destiny was not peculiar to the modinha. The modalities of our musical folklore are not lasting. They often change from dances into songs, and end by being extinguished, though their mission is perpetuated in new expressions. The lundú, for example, was once a Negro dance, lascivious and ardent, later making its way into the drawing-rooms as a malicious song, finally only to be lost in the

Translator's Notes: (3) Candomblé - A religious secret ceremony of the Negroes, accompanied by song and dances.

(4) -Desafio - Rustic pastime in which people sing and dance vying with one another.

(5) -Pregões - These are street cries.

(6) -Samba - This is the urban samba, a dance in couples, derived from the maxixe. It is the most characteristic music of the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro.

(7) -Decimas - Songs composed of stanzas of ten verses.

(8) -Recortados - A kind of ring dance (sung) of the Central region of Brazil.

(9) -Martelo - This is a kind of desafio, in 6, 8, 10 - lines stanzas, in ten syllable lines.

ceaseless transformation of fresh forms. This transformation is brought about in such a way that it can be said that the popular dances and songs of our day constitute a synthesis of all those elements which, in the course of time, have nourished the various modalities of Brazilian musical and choreographic folklore. The constancy is retained, evidently, but it is expressed in a different way, in accordance with the contingencies of the atmosphere and of the time. The phenomenon in America is, besides, easily explained, because this transmutation is being rapidly accomplished in all spheres of life, including in customs, which constitute the vitalizing climate of folklore. For this reason the expressions change and the characteristics remain.

Thus, not only by their quantity and variation, but also by their characteristics are the Brazilian dances the most genuine expressions of our musical spirit. And in erudite music itself, the influence of choreographic music is manifest to a very appreciable degree and already well pronounced. From the open-air places to the drawing-rooms, the Brazilian has been an adapter and a creator of dances and it is through the dance that Brazilian popular music is winning its place in the world. And some solo songs have originated from dances such as the lundús, formerly, and, nowadays, the emboladas, that are no more than the strophes of the côcos of the Brazilian North-East, which are dances to be performed by partners embracing each other.

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Among the innumerable Brazilian dances, in which African influence is accentuated, - for the Negro has always been a dancer and has imparted an exceptional lassitude and voluptuousness to choreography, while their rhythms are urging forces of an exceptional mobility, - that of greatest evidence is the samba, primitively the round dance and later the "civilized" form for the drawing-room. And within these limits there are the most important modalities of Brazilian choreography. The round samba or batuque is a dance which the Negroes of the Congo and of Angola introduced into Brazil, of which the most common variety consists in forming a circle in the centre of which a figure will dance, and who will, after many languid inflexions of the body, bump his or her umbilical region against that of one of the other sex in the circle, who will eventually take his or her place. It is an agitated and breathless dance, lascivious at times, resorting to percussion instruments and the clapping of hands for beating the measure. The singing may be performed either by the dancer or by those in the circle. In this scheme the variety is infinite and there is above all a large number of choreographic figures. The dance acquires various names and forms, but retains its substance.

Other country dances, besides the batuque, which came with the Portuguese, at times with certain Hispanic influence, are those of the fandango, this denomination comprising not only the dance of this name properly speaking, but also the collection of dances, of which the geographical area is the Southern part of the country, Paraná, where it is most firmly radicated, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. The best known are chimarrita, quero-mana, dao-dao, anu, etc. In the central region of Brazil the open-air dances are also numerous, such as the cateretê or cati-ra, the recortado, the vilão, the cururú, the ciranda and many others, while some of them have a religious character despite profane forms of licentiousness, and others, in their verses, register the chronicle of events, in short, they generally localize a centre of interest. The latter is drifting more and more towards the simple pastime. Besides, the open-air dances are very often deformations, with multiple variations, of the drawing-room dances.

The quadrille, for example, when it descended to the people, assumed innumerable forms throughout Brazil, such as the mana-chica, the palminha, the dance of the old man and others. The mazurka and the polka have retained many of their original features, acquiring only local colour, whether by the verses or whether by the way itself of being composed and played. These forms of artistic descent are very numerous; which has often led people to an excessive generalization as regards its determining factor in popular art.

The modern Brazilian dances have come from the people. In the beginning there was the maxixe, later the samba, the marchinha and the frevo, to mention the best known and without speaking of the international ones which have become popular,

from the contredance and waltzes to the tango, the fox-trot, the swing and the boogie-woogie. From the end of last century until the second decade of the present the maxixe was outstanding, although it never made its way into the salons openly and decisively. This was natural, because it concerns a dance requiring great agility, with a rather lascivious choreography of figurations, besides being difficult and tiring. It was the dance in vogue and it was even believed that it would become a Brazilian standard, a privilege which was later to be taken away from it by the samba, which is a prolongation of it. In the maxixe there is to be found something of the habanera, of the polka and of the lundú in an exquisite characterization, with a syncopated melody of which the rhythmical base is the gruppetto semiquaver, quaver, semiquaver, typically characteristic of our popular music. Its movement is simple binary form and it is intended for playing in moderate speed. Generally the maxixe is instrumental and singing is only exceptionally found in it. The fixation of the maxixe was achieved by the composer Ernesto Nazaré in beautiful pages with prodigious pianistic zest, revealing a certain Chopinesque influence. Villa Lobos has said that this composer is the genuine incarnation of the Brazilian popular soul and if he cannot be included among the erudite musicians, his work, on the other hand, has not the vulgarity of popular music. He called his works tangos, though they are pure maxixes.

The Brazilian samba is today an international dance. It was born in the hill-side slums of Rio de Janeiro, drawing its basic elements from the rural samba and blending them with those of other national and foreign dances. It is a drawing-room dance, for partners embracing each other, to be sung, in 2/4 moderate time with syncopated accompaniment. Usually it has an introduction, a strophe and a refrain, but this model is changed. In the hill-side slum districts it appears with one part only, which serves as the strophe, and when it is intoned in a chorus, it takes the place of the refrain. It is the samba, as it is sung in the hill-side slum areas, which is cultivated in the so-called "samba schools" that make up the Carnival processions, that supplies the entire and abundant source of this music which is sad in the beginning, with amorous, sentimental and melancholic notes, generally signifying complaints against woman's infidelity, but, with its great vogue, it now endorses all motifs, chronicles of events, criticism, satire and even patriotic and civic matters. Urban and international music suffer the most varied influences among which those of the rumba and of jazz dance music are accentuated, being characterized, however, by its rhythmic richness and by the resources of syncopation. Its melody is poor in structure and its descending note is in only one tonality, never modulating. To-day the samba is the most diffused expression of Brazilian music.

The marcha, also a native of Rio de Janeiro, used for accompanying Carnival processions, has become a drawing-room dance. It is humorous and graceful, in its vocal part registering the chronicle of events. In 2/4 binary rhythm, the melody is its predominant part, making use of old popular themes and adapting them. The form is that of an instrumental introduction, strophe and refrain and the choreography is very simple, no more than a rhythmic walk accompanied by turns.

The frevo of Recife, capital of the State of Pernambuco, is a dance to be performed individually and in the street, which has later become a drawing-room dance. In the former variety it is characterized by its rapid and vigorous rhythm, with a syncopated melodic fabric and its motifs are always dialogued between trombones and pistons with clarinets and saxophones. The popular dance possesses a marvellous and varied choreography, with steps that require exceptional agility and skill. In the salons, however, it is now danced by partners embracing each other as in the samba, although in the North-Eastern region of Brazil there is retained the individual choreographic characteristic.

These, then, are the great Brazilian dances, notwithstanding the country has adapted international dances, while the polka and the waltz, for example, had perfectly characteristic native forms.

The dance is the great expression of Brazilian popular music, whether in its simple form, or whether in the dramatic dances, which are ballets with a story, generally concerning traditional motifs.

Our popular ballets are of three origins; Portuguese, African and indigenous. Here there was a convergence of those factors, determining, so to speak, a recreation of them. The blending was complete and these dramatic dances

have been entirely remoulded, some of them, such as the Bumba-meu-boi, being transformed into a clearly national expression.

The European contribution was the most accentuated and its modalities are the most extensive and persistent. The motifs which the Portuguese brought with them were those of their tragico-maritime history, having as the centre of interest the ship in perpetual struggle with the sea and the elements, and those of war against the Moors, a Hispanic ingredient, besides, and which enhances ballets in every Iberian country of the hemisphere. The principal of these ballets are the Nau Catarineta (The Vessel Catarineta), the story of a ship lost for seven years and a day, drifting at the mercy of the waves. Famine makes itself felt and when the captain is about to be sacrificed, having been chosen after the drawing of lots to serve as food for the crew, they decry lands of Spain, shores of Portugal. The lookout in the crow's nest discovers the captain's three daughters and the latter offers any one of them in marriage. The lookout man declines and wants only the vessel Catarineta. In other versions, the lookout is the devil, who tempts the captain and the latter decides to challenge him, saying that his soul belongs to God and only to the sea will he give his body, wherein he throws himself, but is saved by an angel. This romance, which has become a ballet, including delightful music, appears in several works of literature, such as French and Canadian, and, already in the 17th century two Capuchins, Michael Angelo de Gattina and Denis Carli de Placenza, narrating their hot crossing of the equatorial region, fear that their ship may have the same fate as the infelice vescello detto Catarineta (The unhappy vessel Catarineta), of which the odyssey they relate.

By the name of fandango, marujada, chegança de Marujos and Barca, there remains in the North-Eastern region of Brazil a popular auto, in the form of a procession, in which a ship is hauled and several kinds of stories are told, very often with allusions to modern things and always with reference to the war with the Moors. The little wooden ship is placed on the spot where the ballet is to be performed with innumerable episodes, terminating always with the arrival of the vessel at a safe port and concluding with the farewell until the following year, that is Christmas time, when such pastimes are indulged in. The other Lusitanian ballet is the Chegança dos Mouros, a narrative of the struggle between Christians and Moors, which has a very imposing form, in a dramatic cavalcade, when the characters perform the auto on horseback in a surprising hippic festival, but without singing or any other musical feature. It is merely dramatic. The chegança, however, is sung and the plot is the fight between the Cross and the Crescent, represented by their respective kings, warlike episodes being reproduced and terminating with the imprisonment of the Infidels who, after being baptized, participate in the final dance. All this as the central theme, because the scenes which are incorporated into it are countless, very often coming from other ballets in the same manner in which this dramatic dance supplies numberless contributions for others. It can be said that there is nothing specific about its music, as in that of all these Portuguese ballets, also having little developed choreography, although possessing interesting pages and much influence of liturgical singing. Mario de Andrade has observed that very often it has a theatrical character and an expressiveness which is not of folkloric essence. However, these melodies are what we have as most definitive and lasting, it being curious that many of these pastimes have already disappeared from Portugal and survive in Brazil.

The Negro ballets, Congos, Cucumbis, Maracatús, Taiaras and others, are generally characterized by a procession with a king, who walks through the streets dancing and singing on his way to perform an auto, of which the outcome is warlike struggle. The embassies are ever-present, which show the ancient custom of African nations exchanging messengers to discuss their problems. In that fight the death and resurrection of a personage is common, which personifies the totem, a fact which is also going to be reproduced in the indigenous ballets, where the totemic element is always an animal. As a historical detail it is necessary to mention that at the time of slavery in Brazil, the election of the kings of Congos was conducted seriously, that is, with the approval of the masters and even of civilian and religious authorities, of which confirmatory records are still to be found. In the numerous episodes of these ballets that are divided into a dramatic part - the embassy - and a procession, which is the part to be danced, white and native elements are included, the influence of indigenous plumes being common in the dress of

the personages. Their music, having a martial character, blends the Negro rhythm with the Portuguese melody and the dances, gymnastic and mimic, is violent, extravagant and syncopated. The Congos still endure throughout Brazil. The maracatús, of which the one of action is Pernambuco, are simple processions, with a king, a queen and retinue, accompanied in the rear by a typical orchestra of percussion instruments. They have even come out with large drums, to beat their disorderly rhythm. They dance in the porch of the Church of Our Lady of Rosario or of St. Benedict-devotion of coloured people. The music, in quadruple meter, is characteristic, making use of common melodies. Today the maracatús are Carnival processions. It is possible to study in these autos the survival of historical facts, as well as the psychological elements of the peoples who created and who keep them alive, through their primitive and complex sounds.

It was in the popular ballets that the indigenous influence was most accentuated. The Caiapós, in São Paulo, the Caboclinhos, in Pernambuco, the Caboclos de Itaparica, in Bahia, the Tapuias, in the Central region of Brazil and the Cordões de Bicho, in the North, are suggestive examples. These ballets vary considerably, the death and resurrection of the totem are ever-present through episodes which very often utilize borrowed thematic material. Some have a complicated plot, such as the Tapuias, others amount to simple processions with occasional episodes, such as the Caiapós. All music based on percussion does not offer any special particularity, nor anything indigenous differential, at times being melodious and possessing marked emphasis. What imitates the Indians are certain war cries, skillfully put to good use.

Finally, among the Brazilian popular ballets, it is necessary to mention the one that represents a large concentration of national episodes and which, though it is not native, is that which has best been nationalized. We refer to Bumba-meu-boi, connected with a great cycle of folkloric pastimes, that is the cycle of the ox. The importance of this animal in Brazilian life was so great, as a civilizing element, that it has already been said that it discovered Brazil. In the penetration into the interior, the role of the ox has been marked, representing a stage, which has been called the "civilization of leather". From all this there have resulted episodes and exploits of oxen, that have remained concentrated in the famous auto, which appears with many variations and throughout the country. In the Amazon region it has the name of Boi-bumba. The Bumba-meu-boi is an auto, in which the ox is dignified, within the following plot. Two cowboys lead an ox, in the midst of an animated assemblage of people of every class and amidst dances and contortions. At a given place, the ballet is developed, which consists of diverse scenes alluding to the animal that is suddenly struck by a wellaimed blow of one of the cowboys and drops dead. The death of the animal is deplored with much singing and the totemic banquet is prepared, by the division of the parts of the ox. After many incidents, during which a doctor is called, the ox comes back to life and the feast ends in merriment and in general rejoicing. The episodes are connected with the cycle of the ox, but in this ballet an agglutination of traditional songs and dances is accomplished, being, without doubt, the greatest folkloric expression of the dramatic kind that we possess. It is yet necessary to make reference to the semi-erudite autos, those of the Christmas festivities, which are the pastoral ballets performed before stables and mangers, the pastorals of the North-Eastern region of Brazil, and the little shepherd plays, all intended to glorify the birth of Jesus, and the ternos and ranchos of Twelfth-day, which are processions to celebrate Epiphany, singing songs of praise through the streets. These songs are of the kind of the French noels and the English carols. Such pastimes are now falling into disuse. They were based on religious motifs and are connected with the traditional Christmas festivities.

In the dramatic dances there are to be found some of the most interesting Brazilian folkloric manifestations and there is still much to be learnt in them, as one of the most suggestive chapters of national demopsychology. From the musical point of view, if there do not exist originalities, almost all the melo-rhythmic cells of Brazilian poetic and musical folklore are found in them, and through the references to customs, superstitions, legends and myths, the dramatic dances are prodigious concentrations of the intire popular soul of the nationality, with a variation and depth such as are not to be found in any other manifestation.

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