

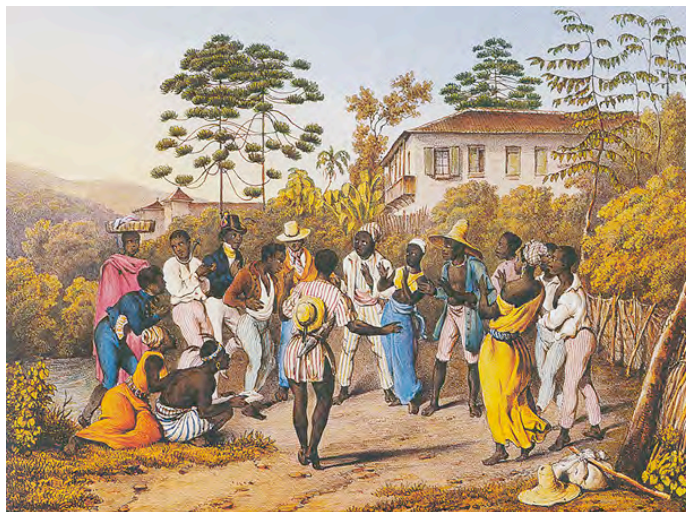
African Influence in Brazilian Music: Samba

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Introduction

Although we are strongly influenced by Afro-Brazilian heritage, we know very little about their extensive contribution to Brazilian culture. Without question, *samba* is the most popular musical style and genre ever produced for *carnaval* in Brazil. The word *samba* is derived from the Bantu word *semba*, or belly button. In Africa, entire villages gathered in circles to sing and dance with the opportunity to show their abilities and knowledge of their musical and dance heritage. After each participant completed his or her turn, another member of the group was invited with the dance pattern *semba* or “belly button touch,” to take his or her place.

Like the word *batuque* (drumming), *samba* was first associated with any type of popular celebration¹. There are those who feel that the *lundu*, a dance of African origin in Brazil since the shipment of slaves from Angola, is the true musical parent of the *samba*². Others theorize that slaves and ex-slaves brought an early form of *samba* to Rio from Bahia in the nineteenth century “because of the decline in the fortunes of tobacco and cocoa plantations in Bahia state, and because of two important new laws: the Law of the Free Womb in 1871 (which declared all children born to slaves as free), and Brazil’s abolition of slavery in 1888”³. Thus, internal migration took place and the Afro-Brazilian population had the opportunity to move south with their musical traditions.



Drumming (1835), by Johann Moritz Rugendas.

¹ *Enciclopédia da Música Brasileira: Erudita, Folclórica e Popular* 1977: 684

² McGowan & Pessanha 1991: 28

³ *Ibid*

Another theory of the roots of *samba* is also associated with the *ranchos*, which is the Portuguese word to describe a group of people. In the beginning of the last century, the first *ranchos* organization was introduced, and the idea of organization was substituted with the word school, which was the first definition of a neighborhood association. In an effort to reach a larger Brazilian audience, members of the *ranchos* (which consisted primarily of Afro-Brazilians) changed their names, and by the early 1920s, the *ranchos* evolved to *escolas de samba* or *samba* schools, which rapidly made inroads into the larger Brazilian community. The *ranchos* were originally created by black organizations for the recreation of Afro-Brazilians from the state of Bahia: “Their origin is generally ascribed to Bahians who settled in Rio with their semi-religious processions”⁴. Chiquinha Gonzaga’s (1847-1935) composition *O abre alas* (Make Way) in 1899 was the first melody written for the *ranchos* and was performed by the *Rosa de Ouro* association. This new type of music, afterward called *marcha-rancho*, was usually played without wind instruments, although using lots of percussion. Later, the music was taken up by brass bands. It is also important to remember that other styles of African-derived and samba related rhythms have been developed in different areas of Brazil, which run parallel to samba. These musical styles were many times relegated to small areas and the music was isolated from the larger centers of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador.

Samba

Undoubtedly samba is the best known of Brazil’s musical expressive forms. As a synonym for Brazilian music, it has become a term that encompasses a full range of popular styles: *Samba carnavalesco*, *samba de breque*, *samba de exaltação*, *samba de gafieira*, *samba de partido-alto*, *samba de quadra*, *samba de terreiro*, *samba-batido*, *samba-canção*, *samba-choro*, *samba-chulado*, *samba-corrido*, *samba-de-chave*, *samba-lenço*, *samba-enredo*, *samba exaltação*, *sambalada*, *sambalanço*, *samba-rural*⁵. These forms are variations from slow to fast and incorporating distinct lyric structure. The development of these musical styles depended, for the most part, on each individual community. Musical instruments, rhythmic patterns, and compositional style varied from city to city and region to region. *Samba* was invented and developed primarily by African descendants and became the standard word to describe music and dance for a large number of communities throughout Brazil. A frequent internal migration of the black population from the northern states to the southern states, especially to Rio de Janeiro, created a favorable ground for new developments of musical styles. In the State of São Paulo, *samba* was danced

⁴ Schreiner 1993: 104

⁵ Enciclopédia da Música Brasileira: Erudita, Folclórica e Popular 1977: 685

not only by Afro descendants, but also by *mulatos* (African descendants mixed with Caucasians), *caboclos* (Caucasians mixed with Native Americans), and Caucasians⁶.

In the early 20th century composers from the city of Rio de Janeiro such as *Pixinguinha*, *Donga*, *Sinhô*, and *João da Baiana* gathered at *Tia Ciata*'s place (literally Aunt Ciata's house) to write *samba* and other musical genres. The reasons for choosing that location are unclear; many believe that *Ciata*'s fame as an excellent cook and maker of sweets contributed immensely. "Her house soon became a meeting ground for *sambistas* from the hills and professional musicians, as well as for those who had made the transition from one to the other"⁷. In 1923, with the arrival of the country's first radio station, *samba* became the fashionable musical style and was the most popular music of the time. And so, the seeds for the coming revolution were planted in a *favela* (shack) on *São Carlos* hill.



Tia Ciata (1854-1924)

Ismael Silva, one of Brazil's leading *samba* composers in the early 1930s explained how the term *samba* school had come to him. The *sambistas* used to rehearse in an empty lot near a teacher's college. According to Silva, the members of the community used to say, "This is where the professors come from."⁸ The *São Carlos sambistas* decided that while teacher's colleges and universities might be out of their reach, nobody knew more about *samba*. That is how the idea of a *samba* school came about. In this

⁶ Giffoni 1973: 111

⁷ Guillermoprieto 1990: 26

⁸ *Ibid*

sense, *escola* refers to the method of learning music through community integration and participation, where all members of a given neighborhood share their social musical experiences with each other.

Organizing a *samba* school, (actually the name ‘school’ stands for an ensemble), is a job that involves tens of thousands of people (musicians, dancers, artisans, costume-makers, and other contributors). In Rio de Janeiro every year, the *samba* schools choose new themes. They also have a *samba* coordinator or *diretor carnavalesco* and a *samba*-theme or *samba-enredo*, which is the *samba* music based on the theme for the year. The themes are usually political, historical, or a tribute to a particular person. In 1997, for the first time in the history of *carnaval* in Rio, a theme referring to cultures outside Brazil was introduced. The *Rocinha* *samba* school, one of the major groups from Rio de Janeiro, presented the theme “*The Enchanted Voyage of Zé Carioca to Disney*.” The new theme broadened the horizons in *samba*’s history and initiated the concept of how other non-traditional themes could be used to explore *samba* music in Brazil.



The Enchanted Voyage of Zé Carioca to Disney, Rocinha Samba School, 1997.

New Developments

Quem não gosta de samba bom sujeito não é
É ruim da cabeça ou doente do pé

He who doesn't like samba isn't a good guy
He's rotten in the head or sick in the feet

Dorival Caymmi,
"Samba da Minha Terra"

Samba is a social phenomenon known to practically every Brazilian. A vibrant musical form distinguished by increased responsorial singing, emphasis on percussive interplay and syncopated rhythm. Written in a 2/4 meter, within a stanza-and-a-refrain structure with many interlocking syncopated lines, and with its heaviest accent on the second beat -- these characteristics make *samba* an authentic Brazilian musical genre. *Samba* and *carneval* are very closely related words and practically evolved together. From its early stages, *samba* has almost always been treated as a verb. A verb mostly conjugated in the present tense, it is one's self-celebration through communal participation. In an article in the newspaper "*O Estado de São Paulo*," Theo de Barros, a Brazilian music writer claims that throughout the past decade *samba* changed its swing or *gingado*. Theo affirms that *samba* is to be danced and not marched. Perhaps the increased speed of the basic drum beat has corrupted the primary usage of the rhythm, which was primarily intended to be danced within the syncopation and swing. Most Brazilians will agree, however, that one of the objectives of *samba* and *carneval* is to make sure that people forget their watches and appointment books at home and step out to sing and dance.

Afro Samba

The term *quilombo* is derived from the Bantu-Angola language and refers to any place of habitation. In 1740 the king of Portugal, speaking to the *Ultramariano Council* [On 14 July 1652, the King of Portugal proclaimed an order to establish the Overseas Council (*Conselho Ultramarino*) to help administering the overseas colonies. This council became the early shape of the Ministry of the Overseas (*Ministério do Ultramar*) and the Ministry of the Colonies. However, the obvious effects to the overseas colonies as a result of centralism did not occur until Marquês Pompal came to power in the mid-18th century] defined *quilombo* as ". . . any habitation of more than five black fugitives, in desolated areas, with or without shacks or pestles." As the nuclei of resistance, *quilombos* operated as states because they maintained their own governments and laws and were not dependent on the rest of Brazil for their

existence. Most of the *quilombo* populations consisted of African descendants, in addition to various other persecuted ethnic groups who did not conform to the restrictions and laws imposed by Portugal during Brazil's colonial time. From about the second quarter of the 17th century until the beginning of the 18th century, the *quilombos* resisted the government's attempts to disband them.

The main ethnic/cultural groups of the *quilombos* were the Yoruban, Fon, Ewe, and Ashanti peoples (the Sudanese groups). The *quilombos* were essential in the preservation of their music and for the survival of their culture. In fact, music was an important factor in unifying the diverse groups of African-descendants who could only express their heritages and culture in these isolated areas of refuge. Early in the 18th century, the government finally broke up the *quilombos*. Their "citizens" were returned to their former habitations or thrown into jail. However, the Brazilian government brought about a gradual emancipation process which culminated with Princess Isabel's emancipation proclamation on May 13, 1888--the year before Brazil issued its Proclamation of the Republic, which claimed political independence from Portugal.

The development of the *samba* tradition produced many musical offshoots. The Brazilian *carnaval* and other celebrations adopted many African rhythms and cultural influences from African descendants. For example, in the Brazilian state of Bahia, many groups emerged, including *Império da Africa*, *Filhos de Odé*, *Filhos de Obá*, *Pandecos da Africa* and *Embaixada Africana*. While these groups shared African rhythms, they are distinguished by the different African regions from which they originated and by the way that their cultures were integrated into Brazilian life. The diverse influence of African culture in Brazil was demonstrated in 1897 in Bahia, where the Bahians produced a *carnaval* celebration similar to the African celebration in Lagos, Nigeria. Since the 1970s, when many young Afro-Brazilians became fascinated by the music of James Brown, the Jackson Five, and other African-American musicians, these movements have constituted the basis of African-Bahian musical and cultural development. They have become a source of pride for the rest of Brazil.



Olodum, carnival parade in Salvador.

The recent musical contribution of African traditions in Brazil, which runs parallel to samba schools in the south is seen in the *afoxés* and *blocos afros*, inspired by a renewed pride in African roots and by the wave of independence movements in Africa. *Afoxé* refers both to the musical instrument, a gourd with strung beads around it, and to an authentic manifestation of *Gegê-Nagô* (Ewe-Yoruban) dances, rhythms, and liturgy outside the *candomblé* (Afro-Brazilian religion) temples. The *bloco-afros* indicates the Afro-Brazilian consciousness of African heritage through music; it is a term which indicates the celebration of music. Thus the *afoxés* and *bloco-afros* are very closely related. *Afoxés* differ with regard to instrumentation and the emphasis they give to different countries and cultural events. In the Bahian repertoire, these ensembles introduced several rhythms. The rhythms are made up of forms and techniques of playing percussion and other musical instruments. The *baianos* (Bahian citizens) can recognize the music of any local ensemble, as rhythmic patterns differ from region to region, as does the construction of instruments. For example, one percussionist might make and play a drum which is narrow, made of metal, and which has a cowhide head. Another from a different region might make and play one which is wide, has a wooden frame, and uses a goatskin head. The idea behind differentiation is the search for identity, a means of expressing individuality.

In the last twenty years, the music of Bahia has been influenced by *candomblé* and

Afro-Caribbean rhythms. Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Peter Tosh are among the singers who have become popular in Brazil. Adding to this spectrum are other Afro-Caribbean rhythms such as salsa, reggae and *merengue*. For example, the reggae rhythm of Jamaica is similar to that in Bahia. Brazilians call these new movements *samba-reggae*. Music and dance inherited by these mixed styles are present in various segments of society today, especially in the sounds of the new ensembles such as *Timbalada*, *Filhos de Ghandi*, *Olodum*, *Ilê Aiyê*, *Banda Mel*, and *Ara Ketú*. These ensembles have contributed not only to the new musical fashion of the 1990s, but have influenced a variety of other musical styles. Sting's song *Fragile*, Paul Simon's record, *Rhythm of the Saints*, and Michael Jackson's recent work with *Olodum*, a native Brazilian band, all exhibit this spreading influence of Afro-rhythms. Much of Brazil's way of living and behavior is dictated by this new generation of music and musicians. We, perhaps, can say that in Brazil, social classes do share one thing in common: the same taste and appreciation for the music of Brazil, which is neither Afro-Brazilian nor European, but *Brasileira*.

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