

# **The Development of the Brazilian Country Music and its Relationship with *Folia de Reis*<sup>1</sup> in Defining Rural Identity**

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This paper discusses the social and historical facts related to the development of *caipira* and *sertaneja* musical genres and its association to the *folia de reis* tradition in Brazil. The development of country music throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century influenced by various musical forms, gave particular distinction to *folia de reis* music, carrying out needs and desires of rural populations. These musical genres expanded and transformed into other types of music, which includes music to express regional identity, to voice social aspirations, and to fulfill religious obligations.

Just as the Three Kings are in the center of all *folia de reis* activities, song is in the center of their associations with these Kings. The participants' usage of guitars, percussion, and other melodic instruments to express religiosity on a country music base form articulates one fundamental belief in *folia de reis* tradition: music is a God-given talent and should be used to intermediate the relationship between humans and the Divine. It is through regional influences that country music has taken different stylistic paths and has become meaningful to people in rural Brazil. In this research paper, my analysis reveals that country music not only has been developed into a musical genre common to rural Brazil, but transformed into a vehicle to communicate faith among people in rural Brazil.

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<sup>1</sup> The *folia de reis* is a popular Brazilian tradition of folk Catholicism that involves a group of participants who, between Christmas and Epiphany, go on a journey asking for alms for social-religious purposes. The tradition refers to musical ensembles comprising predominantly low-income rural workers from various regions of Brazil. Instrumentalists, singers, and other participants travel from house to house and farm to farm, singing and praising the birth of Christ. The *folia de reis* celebrates and reenacts the Biblical journey of the Three Kings to Bethlehem and back to their homeland guided by the Star of Bethlehem.

### ***Folia de Reis: a Rural Identity***

In Brazil's heartlands a person's social status often depends on where she or he lives (rural or urban areas), family name, and education. In order to determine "who you are" one must choose or associate himself or herself with a geographical region of the country, consequently an association with a music that represents one's heritage and values. The associations people from the rural areas make with country music are also based the result of this representation and for almost a century, developed its own country "trade mark". Country music empowers its rural participants by voicing their opinions throughout the development of its history.

*Mestre* José Francisco Ferreira from *Companhia de Santo Reis Estrela da Guia* (Olimpia, SP), because of his African heritage, incorporates aspects of the *congada* (Afro-Brazilian music and dance), such as the way the *pandeiro* plays the syncopated rhythms, in the way he performs and expresses the music for his *folia de reis*. (Tremura 2004: 78) *Mestre* Ferreira's faith in the tradition and African heritage, through the *congadas*, is a syncretic example of how folk religion is intertwined among participants in *folia de reis*. Like *mestre* Ferreira, other Afro-Brazilians have adopted *folia de reis* and *congadas* to be the center of their faith. Given the centrality of *mestre* Ferreira's leadership in the lives of the participants in the tradition, different styles of *folia de reis* music coexist side by side and rely on each individual family for their subsistence. Through the formal and informal instruction and communal obligations, the *folia de reis* groups express their music and choose a particular style. This is one reason why starting a *folia de reis* group requires not only religious experiences, but also musical experiences within the neighborhood where participants have been raised. The continuous use of musical instruments by the participants to accompany their vocal petitions strengthens the communal experience of *folia*

*de reis* participants and establishes their musical identity.

### **The Development of Country Music**

In Brazil country music translates as *música caipira* or *música sertaneja*, which throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century developed into various forms of folk-rural music traditions. From the time of the first Portuguese settlers in the early 1500s, the arrival of coffee cultivation in the 1800s with the opening of roads to the central plateau, to the internal migrations of the 1960's and 1970's, Brazilian country music as it develops as a genre has encountered many obstacles such as associating it with less educated people, to attract and to develop into a broader and accepted musical genre.

The earliest examples of country music dates to the recordings of the writer, composer, and *viola* player Cornélio Pires in the 1920's. While in São Paulo, Cornélio Pires pioneered a musical project to produce several records in 78 rpm depicting the music of Brazil's interior. At the end of the 1920's, country music was then been transformed, and for the first time was being recorded in a professional studio, slowly transforming into a selected musical style to be played on the local radio stations (Cruzeiro do Sul, Record and Educadora, a few years later called *Gazeta*).

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century migration and other social movements such as the *Revolta do Forte de Copacabana* in 1922, the *Rebelião Gaúcha* in 1923, and the *Rebelião Paulista* in 1924 contributed to the relocation of entire families from Brazil's interior. These movements renovated a national consciousness for political and social awareness, steering their frustration towards the state and federal governments at a time of high unemployment and forcing many families from Brazil's interior to relocate to the southern state's capital cities. The expectations of living in urban centers, the novelty of being in a new region, and the search for new jobs are

some of the obstacles encountered by the migrants.

An open road to other types of country music and musicians, the recording industry, motivated by the increasing number of migrants, created an ideal environment for the diffusion of folk-rural musical traditions. The increasing access to radio waves and to vinyl record gave country music a boost, reaching other regions of the country as well. The songs, often describing bucolic themes and discussing rural versus urban life style, emphasizes life transformations in the city, which positively impact the new consumers. “In 1933 there were 23 radio stations in Brazil, two years later 72.” (Nepomuceno: 1999).

In fact, the 1920's and 1930's were good decades for other genres of Brazilian music as well. *Samba* and the samba schools in Rio de Janeiro through the music of Noel Rosa and his neighborhood Vila Isabel (1929 - 1936), and through the compositions of Brazil's acclaimed classical composer Villa Lobos who employed folk themes, such as in *Trenzinho Caipira* (1931) is an example of country theme been used in a specific composition. This piece, which is a classical piano work picturing a train traveling throughout Brazil's interior, were among the compositions written during that period of time. Other composers, interpreters, and compositions employed folk-rural themes as well: Carmen Miranda's “Triste Jandaia”, Ari Barroso and Lamartine Babo's “No Rancho Fundo”, Silvio Caldas' “O Caboclinho Querido” and “Por Causa desta Cabocla”, Joubert de Carvalho's Maringá, Hekel Tavares and Joracy Camargo's Guacyra, and Angelino de Oliveira's Tristezas do Jeca (Nepomuceno:1999). The Revolution Song (*Moda Da Revolução*) in reference to the São Paulo government rebellion of 1924, was inspired by the poetry of Cornélio Pires and later recorded by Rolando Boldrin as an early illustration of country music. It depicts musical instruments, such as the accordion and the *viola caipira* (10 string double coursed guitar) that are well-know to most people of Brazil's interior.

**Moda da Revolução** (Cornélio Pires & Arlindo Santana)

A revolta aqui em São Paulo para mim já não foi bão Pela notícia que corre revoltoso tem razão	The revolution in São Paulo Was not good to me From the recent news The revolted are correct
Aí estou me referindo, a essa nossa situação Se os revoltoso ganhar aí eu pulo e rolo no chão	I'm making reference To this situation If the revolted are to win I jump and roll over the ground
Quando cheguei em São Paulo o que cortou meu coração Eu vi a bandeira de guerra lá na torre da estação	When I arrived in São Paulo What cut my heart I saw a war flag Displayed at the station
Encontrava gente morto por meio dos quarteirão Dava pena e dava dó, ai era só judiação	There were people dead In the middle of the street It was merciful, it was said Ah! It was chaos
Na hora que nós seguimos, persequindo o batalhão Saimo por baixo de bala, sem ter aliviação	At the time we followed An entire regiment We run under bullets been shot With no mercy
E a gente ali deitado sem deixar levantar do chão De bomba lá de São Paulo, ai roncava que nem trovão	We laid on the floor With no permission to stand There were bombs in São Paulo Snoring like thunders
Zidoro se arretirou lá pro centro do sertão Potiguara acompanhou ai prá fazer a traição	Zidoro left the scene To the center of the region Potiguara followed him With the intention to betray
Zidoro mandou um presente que foi feito por sua mão Acabaram com Potiguara e acabou-se o valentão	Zidoro sent a gift That was hand-made They finished Potiguara It was the end of a brave man
Nós tinha um 42 que atirava noite e dia Cada tiro que ele dava era mineiro que caía	We only had a 42 caliber hand gun That fired bullets night and day Each fired bullet was aimed at a <i>mineiro</i> * lying on the floor
E tinha um metralhador que encangaiava com pontaria Os mineiro com os baiano ai c'os paulista não podia	A machine gun with a good shooting range The <i>mineiros</i> and the <i>baianos</i> * Could not cope with the <i>paulistas</i> *

\* people from Minas Gerais, Bahia, and São Paulo States respectively.

The bucolic attitude towards life and the objectivity in dealing with real situations, such

as of adjusting to an unfamiliar place during a turbulent time in Brazil, set the migrants to a new city experience. The lyrics written in a quatrain verse are combined with the country way of expressing the Portuguese language to create a punch line.

### **Country Music: from Caipira to Sertaneja**

Martha Ulhôa de Carvalho (1993) stated that country music had been marginalized from the mainstream media since the 1930 and it was not until the booming of the *música sertaneja*, (a modernized version of country music in the 1980's) that this genre started to be accepted by other segments of society. The marginalization was in part due to the negative feeling associated with people from Brazil's interior. The lack of government assistance to provide infra-structure to families relocating to the capital cities exposed many to difficult lives, which contributed even further to their negative experiences. In the following years the migratory and social movements paralleled the development of the Brazilian textile and automotive industries, which kept migrants arriving in the São Paulo metropolitan areas by the thousands.

By the early 1970's a new wave of country singers and musicians such as Léo Canhoto and Robertinho and Sérgio Reis innovated country music by amplifying their musical instruments, specially the acoustic guitar and by transposing certain solo and melodic ornamentations from the traditional *viola* to the electric 12 string guitar. These stylistic changes gave country music a lift and boosted the record sales throughout the country.

“As the country urbanized and the need for cheap labor from the interior increased, a great number of artists from the Northeast and the Interior arrived in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro looking for better opportunities and studios to record their music. In this fashion, *emboladas, cocos, maxixes, guarânias, rasqueados, chamamés, boleros, baladas, rancheiras*, and everything else that was played in 1950s contributed to the creation and formation of the traditional *caipira* music, which later was called *música sertaneja*. More styles from the 1960s, such as rock, MPB, and American country music in the 1980s also entered this large cooking pot. The modernizations and adaptations responsible for the new wave of *música sertaneja* gave *música caipira* a “new image.” [Rosa Nepomuceno in 1999 describing the social scenario and the arrival of *música*

*sertaneja*] (My translation).

It was not until the later developments of the 1980s, influenced by these various musical styles, that the new country music or *música sertaneja* acquired a distinguished status and increasingly became accessible to a wider audience. This dynamic process gave the already existent country music a broader meaning in regard to rhythm, harmony, melody, and text, which further expanded its thematic content to a more diverse compositional style. Other folk traditions of Brazil's interior such as the *congadas*, *cururus*, *cateretês*, were added to this developmental phase. The Paraguayan *guarânia* (Paraguayan rhythm with harp) and the Mexican bolero and *corridos* incorporated a new rhythmic complexity to the variation of styles. The new external influences gave country music a more diverse musical identity, expanding even further its popularity among urban and rural populations.

The *música sertaneja* no longer expressed solely bucolic issues, but other ordinary themes such as broken relationships, romance, and topics related to migrants' life in urban areas. Italian-American gangster movie pictures of the 1970s also influenced a variety of musicians, bringing instruments such as the electric guitar and uncommon rhythms to Brazil. The separation between *música caipira* and *música sertaneja* was conclusive in the 1980s; in fact, composers and musicians from *música sertaneja* gained national attention from television and radio stations after their music started being played in the Brazilian soap operas.

“The modern country music [in reference to *música sertaneja*] not only represented the country segment of society, but it grew into a more dynamic style where others genres were created. Among the new style included is the *folia de reis*” (Bernadeli 1991:44).

### **Country and *Folia de Reis* Music**

The development of country music also parallels the development of the *folia de reis*. As briefly discussed the *folia de reis* through its music, text, appeal, and history is widely spread

among the rural populations of Brazil. In fact, musicians and composers from country music are sometimes the composers and/or musicians for *folia de reis*. Through music and prayer entire communities in rural Brazil identify *folia de reis* as their vehicle to express their Christian belief, which is a Roman Catholic devoutness with strong relations to the stories of the birth of Christ as narrated in Matthew's nativity story (the Gospel according to Saint Matthew) and their relationship to the Three Kings. The participants' commitment to the Three Kings enables various rural communities to recognize each other by a common faith, consequently welcoming people from various social and ethnic backgrounds. In fact, the modernization of Brazil's interior in the 1980s has not altered the religious practices. Today, *folia de Reis* from many different regions of the country continues to practice their yearly ritual (December 24<sup>th</sup> to January 6), and its participation in various religious festivities around the country. Moreover, through social cultural appearances such as the *folia de reis* meetings (*encontro de folia de reis*) and other community engagements, *folia de reis* musicians have been performing on many levels with country music musicians, which with the exception of the lyrics, maintain similar melodic and rhythmic structures to *folia de reis* music.

Country musicians often refer to "moda" (mode or manner) in reference to their songs. *Moda* not only refers to folk tunes, but is also short for *moda de viola*<sup>2</sup>. In *folia de reis* songs are referred to as *toadas* or melodies. In both circumstances due to their similar musical structures, either *toada* or *moda* have become synonymous with *música caipira*. However, they are distinguished by their contrasting texts. *Toada* carry sacred texts, while *moda* discusses secular issues (narrative). There are many similarities found amongst country and *folia de reis* music. They both utilize leading male singers playing a *violão* and *viola* and sing in parallel thirds (or

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<sup>2</sup> A song genre associated with strumming the *viola* in a percussive manner and common to the rural areas of central and southeastern Brazil.

sixths); the songs are strophic (verse and refrain). The following musical characteristics associates' musical elements commonly found in *folia de reis* music and its relationship with country music. (1) usage of major keys, also common in other Brazilian folkloric styles; (2) preference for open tuning with the *viola* (E or D major open tuning), *cavaquinho* (G major open tuning) and the *violão* (Spanish or classical guitar); (3) melodic scooping where singers slide their voices through the octave; (4) preference for binary tempo; (5) freedom to adapt the *moda* rhythm according to text; and (6) rhythmic attenuation (slow and processional like).

Country music is commonly written in binary tempo often including an introduction and a main section with an interlude. Their melodies vary according to the length of the text, often characterized by a short and repetitive phrase. The harmony follows typical chord progression found in most country musical styles are: Tonic / Dominant Seventh / Subdominant / Tonic (I – V7 – IV – I). Moreover, other musical elements related to country music texture and timbre are also found associated with *folia de reis* music: (1) Mixed style of nasalizing and loud style of singing (especially the *tala* (high voice); (2) the *requinta* (fifth voice), and *tala*; and (3) the song texts commonly organized in four strophe verses (quatrain).

Furthermore, country music, through its many influences and similar style, was very effective in providing a new forms and venues for *folia de reis* musicians to express its musicianship and identity. It empowered the musicians by allowing them to actively participate outside their own community; an open conduit to participate in the country music scenario. An example of this development is the country duo: *Tião Carreiro e Pardinho*, one of Brazil most favored country musicians of all times, developed a special technique referred as *Pagode-de-Viola* (a technique of playing the *viola* with a special strumming pattern) which has been incorporated by *folia de reis* musicians as well. Another example is the music of *Vieira e*

*Vieirinha* (well know country and *folia de reis* musicians in São Paulo State). They increased the usage of other stylistic changes, such as allowing the second vocal line to sing with less intensity, not only changed the way the music had been expressed, but also added a new dimension to the sound by allowing a more thoughtful manner to singing. *Folia de reis* groups, due to an increased attention from the media and to other country musicians, are nowadays more concerned with their performance aesthetics, which translates into more rehearsals and attention to details.

While we can not know exactly know how country music sounded prior to early recordings of the 1920s, the musical characteristic found in the *folia de reis*, especially those associated with the Paulista or São Paulo style of *folia the reis* music, seems to be very similar to those of country music . Moreover, recent artists from the MPB (Brazilian Popular Music) movement, such as Milton Nascimento adapted a *folia de reis* melody from the *mineiro* style (from Minas Gerais State) into his composition *Cálice Bento*. Other examples of music using the *folia de reis* themes are Martinho da Vila in *Folia de Reis*, Sérgio Reis in *Folia*, and the Trio Parada Dura in *Viagem dos Magos*.

Despite the modernization and socio economic changes in Brazil throughout the 1980s and 1990s, family and community leaders still maintain a close relationship to its roots and with those of the *folia de reis*. It is not uncommon today to find *folia de reis* relying on professional musicians to conduct their journey leading their ensemble. An example is the *folia de reis* Tradição de Família from São José do Rio Preto (city of São Paulo's state interior) which depends on the leadership of Vieira e Vieirinha to lead their annual journey. Since there have been changes of leadership throughout the years, the group's *festeiro* or celebration organizer recently assumed the role of *mestre* or leader and invited a second group of country singers,

Cristal and Cristalino, for their traditional journey. The collaboration not only fulfills the expectations of all participants, but also gives an opportunity to become more visible among other communities.

In search for a common sound as to validate country and *folia de reis* music, one must listen to musical instruments, thematic content, song format, and styles. The following table proposes a brief analysis of *folia de reis* characteristics and its association with country music (*música caipira* and *musica sertaneja*).

Name definitions	<i>folia de reis</i> tradition	<i>música caipira</i> or early country music	<i>música sertaneja</i> or modern country music
Musical instruments	acoustic guitar and viola, pandeiro (tambourine), snare, and drum	Acoustic guitar and <i>viola</i>	electric guitar, electric bass, drum set, mariachi ensemble, Paraguayan harp
Themes	sacred (Christian bible and apocryphal writings)	rural inspiration (epic character)	urban / rural inspiration (romantic)
Language	folk Portuguese	country and standard Portuguese	standard Portuguese
Musical styles	<i>viola</i> open tuning; melodic scooping; rhythmic attenuation (slow and processional like); nasalizing and loud style of singing; <i>requinta</i> or fifth voice, and <i>tala</i> (high voice; commonly organized in four strophe verses (quatrain))	duos singing in major keys; throat vibrato; duets in thirds; nasal; mixed song text with country and standard Portuguese words; small melodic range and intervals; melodic line in the low or high range;	occasional solo singing; heavily arranged; addition of other intervals; melody in high range; ornamented vocal style; more complex melodies and rhythms

Forms	<i>toadas</i> , <i>mineiro</i> style, <i>paulista</i> style, and <i>baiano</i> style	<i>moda de viola</i> , <i>cateretê</i> ; <i>catira</i> ; <i>cururu</i> ; <i>embolada</i>	<i>guânia</i> ; <i>corrido</i> ; <i>bolero</i> ; <i>balada</i> ; <i>samba</i> ; diverse Latin rhythms
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The musical instruments of *folia de reis* groups are essential for distinguishing regional performance styles and identity among *folia de reis* musicians. The instruments are used to provide harmony and rhythmic accompaniment for the singers and to give motion to the group while they walk during the journey, especially for the *palhaços* (clowns) who use the rhythms of the percussive instruments to make their dance-like movements. Moreover, they are distinguished by the type of *toadas* performed during the *folia de reis* journey. The continuous use of musical instruments by the participants to accompany their vocal petitions strengthens the communal experience of *folia de reis* participants and establishes their musical identity. Furthermore, the learning of a musical instruments or singing within the family, typically under patriarchal guidance, are still strong factors in reinforcing their close ties and relationships. Musical apprenticeship and other social relations connected with peasant life have maintained many aspects of their traditional belief system.

## **Conclusion**

Just as the Three Kings are in the center of all *folia de reis* activities, song is in the center of their associations with these Kings. The participants' impersonation thorough the *folia de reis* journeys are their contribution to create a better world to those who follow their voices (the Three Kings and the participants). Because *folia de reis* participants view music as a state of human grace and God-given talent, they use their musical instruments and voices to express their search for happiness and better life. Because of their autonomous character, *folia de reis* groups have operated and expressed their faith completely independently from the institutionalized

church, consequently creating regional musical styles based on the personal musical experiences of their participants.

Furthermore, the social and political transformations throughout these developments helped to change the negative views mainstream society have held regarding country music. Mirrored in the modernization of country music, *folia de reis* had its innovations followed the lead of kin-based practitioners such as parents or close relatives. While country music has moved to the direction of sophistication and full-scale production, *folia de reis* music still maintains its association with the early forms of folk music. Even with the increasing number of country musical styles and other professional opportunities, country musicians continue to practice their faith in the tradition, and *folia de reis* continues to affirm their rural identity by maintaining traditional elements associated with a value system that focuses on the principles of good will, commitment, obligations, and reciprocity.

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