

# **“Sing and Dance... *Jacaré* has Arrived: Participatory Experience and the Growing Significance of Brazilian Music in Higher Education.**

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**Abstract:** Departing from Charles Seeger and Mantle Hood’s original idea about participatory experience, understanding the music of the other, and the usage of world music ensembles, the Brazilian ensemble “Jacaré Brazil” at the University of Florida has been growing to address the significance of Brazilian music in the context of an academic environment. The ensemble has mediated collegiality among students, faculty and local musicians through a series of successful experiences obtained through participatory academic and professional activities combined with dedicated instruction and a positive context. The research discusses how teaching and performing Brazilian music has achieved success and become an interacting and integrating discipline in a traditional research institution.

## **Background**

Assuming that musical knowledge is often exchanged at different levels of understanding and assimilation, the function and importance of non-traditional ensembles, or so called world music ensembles are often justified by formed rules and views of specific individuals within a music program. Customarily, these are ethnomusicologists spending long periods of time learning how to perform the music outside their own. To further improve the participatory process, world-music ensembles ought to embrace a collaborative method for learning, allowing the exchange of information to be placed in more than one front, that is providing opportunities not only for students and faculty to perform, but also entrusting artistic values and validating performance practices with standards similar to those afforded and offered by Western music and all the ensembles of its kind. At the 2006 ABET (Brazilian Association for Ethnomusicology) meeting in São Paulo, Brazil the discussion table entitled: “The Study of Brazilian Music in a Global Context” was proposed to explain how Brazilian music and culture have been studied, performed, taught, and discussed in different parts of the world. The participants attending the first round table, Suzel Ana Reily, Jesse Wheeler, Frederick Moehn, and myself had the opportunity to define rules and applied methodologies to explain the

importance and usage of research and applied Brazilian musical language to explain Brazilian music culture. In this meeting for the first time that I showed a video of our University ensemble “Jacaré Brazil” performing different Brazilian repertoires. Everyone seemed to be intrigued and somehow fascinated to know that Brazilian music was being taught in the US on an academic environment, and the impact of these performances were having in the school and community in general. From this meeting I realized the importance of continuing to explore new musical possibilities and repertoires, as well as to provide and expand these experiences to new audiences.

### **World Music Challenges**

As expressed by ethnomusicologists’ forefathers, world music ensembles are a common denomination for musical groups that performs non-traditional or non-western musical repertoires. Its concept and creation parallel’s the definition of the word ethnomusicology itself. Another historical and supporting factor is that earlier programs in ethnomusicology had a number of ensembles devoted to court musics (Javanese gamelan, Imperial Japanese Gagaku, Hindustani and Karnatic chamber music, Ewe and Ashanti drumming), which despite of its importance to the development of the field were certainly a novelty to many at the time. Customarily these ensembles served as training ground for students in ethnomusicology to gain a better understanding of music cultures outside the European traditional models, such as describing the work of musicians of the Imperial Japanese Court, who were trained in both *gagaku* and pan-European classical traditions. Mantle Hood explained that ethnomusicology as being the "study of music wherever and whenever." While his teacher Jaap Kunst wrote the two volumes of *Music in Java* without actually playing any of the music. He required of his students to learn to play the music they were studying.

Formed by graduate and undergraduate students in North American Universities, these ensembles were innovative forms that the influential ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood at UCLA in the late 50’s coined the term bi-musicality. While Hood was not the first ethnomusicologist to attempt learning to perform the music being studied, he adopted this concept in a 1960 article in his program in ethnomusicology. As it happens, well before the publication of Hood's article, musicians trained in jazz were already well

known as early practitioners of the bi-musical concept. Hood applied the term to music in the same way a linguist would when describing someone who spoke two languages. He also strongly proposed that ethnomusicology students should know the spoken language of the musical culture being studied or performed. Learning another musical language was to become bi-musical. This led to the breakdown of the steadfast rule of having to have competence in French and German at many ethnomusicology programs. Nowadays Javanese, Spanish, Portuguese, and other foreign languages could potentially fulfill the language requirement. Thank you to these initial challenges, the researcher to some extent, can today experience music "from the inside", and thereby acquire additional knowledge from its technical, conceptual and aesthetic experiments. Therefore, world music ensembles are a result of this ideological presumption that students can benefit from experiencing non-Western cultures through immersing themselves into their music. In fact, taking courses in non-Western music and being involved with performance practices of foreign places can offer a real chance to experience other sensorial readings and discover new musical possibilities, such as not relying on musical scores and learning music by imitation and rotation.

These practices can also be found in real historical and cultural contexts. In the Caribbean the "creolization" (hybrid development in the New World) of African descendants and the retention of musical practices has clearly demonstrated that peoples of Latin America of Spanish, or other European descendant, have coexisted in a geographical area exchanging and overlapping African and European practices, and even mixing indigenous music and musical instruments to this mixture, which in fact has given some of these societies characteristics of various musical practices "multi-musical". These processes as explained by Davis (1994) have in fact recreated new musical forms without disturbing its function or original purpose. Examples of these musical practices can be found in the Dominican Republic where male and female combine collective musical practices to create their own domains and roles of musical styles within a single genre.

While students in North America do realize that there is more to learn about a culture than playing their music, new questions of how to listen to music, contextualize performances, and give significance to social events are also important factors to

consider. Putting aside the merit of authenticity or legitimization, I argue that like Western classical music, world music ensemble need to recycle repertoires and musical genres in order to advance, challenge, and protect its purposes. Performing creative repertoires expand the possibilities for success and endurance. Often, performances by these ensembles have been portrayed as some type of exotic concert, inhibiting some to be recognized simply as “good music”. As elucidated in the book *“Performing Ethnomusicology - Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles”* by Ted Solis (2004) throughout the past forty to fifty years, world music ensembles continue to be vital to programs in ethnomusicology. These programs study are often synchronized with the social sciences, standard music training, and participation in some type of world music ensemble. Even though this triangulation is fundamental to provide a diverse academic experience, today a number of students pursuing combined degrees are abstaining their participation from world music ensembles. Differently from traditional programs where students perform in western ensembles such as choir, band, or orchestra, are trained by an effective music faculty to become an educator, performer, conductor, composer, theorist, and historian.

World music ensembles are always linked as part of an ethnomusicological concept and do not follow the same track for opportunities as we have seen for Western music, and are not always taught by a culture specialist. More often these ensembles are lead by an ethnomusicologist, a temporary visiting artist, or a student from a particular region of interest, which do not always provide the ideal training ground for the program. These practices, commonly adopted, often do not consolidate lasting experiences, mainly because programs fails to be consistent, funds are scarcely, and when the culture specialist finishes his or her degree the ensemble goes with them. This not only hinders continuance, but also limits the existence and function of world music ensembles as an essential and lasting academic activity. Another drawback, these are often offered as an elective course and not a required activity.

To better understand the function or strength of world music ensembles, I have raised the following questions: How effective is a program in relation to the usage of resources to train students? How measurable is the quality of the work produced by the program? Are musical ensembles been used as a training ground for research? What type

of fieldwork training is been taught prior to research activities? Are music ensembles created solely to fulfill a degree program? Moreover, programs in Western classical art forms are artistically measured by how well their performing body (symphonic bands, orchestras, or choral programs) performs. How can we make an analogy for world music performances? Furthermore, how can we tell the difference between a poor or a good performance? Where evaluation takes place? These questions express real concerns with the function and usage of additional training to students and faculty. Whether or not one is born in a musical tradition, one's musical and cultural experience is a result of an intertwined process that involves practice and acceptance. This is why becoming bi-musical increases the chance of better understanding of one's own culture.

### ***Jacaré* Brazil Background**

In the formation and development of the world music ensemble *Jacaré Brazil* or *Gator Brazil*, at the University of Florida, the ensemble aims to teach and perform contrasting musical repertoires of Brazil's rich and diverse musical heritage, to provide a participatory experience, where music, language by region, musical instruments are discussed and taught, and to offer a training ground for students planning to conduct fieldwork in Brazil. Ethnomusicologist Larry Crook purposely gave its title name in 1991 honoring the University of Florida's mascot figure, the North American alligator. From the start *Jacaré* was a clever idea, attracting sympathizers in an academic environment dedicated exclusively to Western classical music and North American football. In the same years, while doing my graduate work at FSU (Florida State University) in Tallahassee, I found the world music ensemble *Samba Oba*, a Brazilian ensemble with the primarily mission to teach "samba" music and to diversify the performing opportunities for music students. In more than one occasion we combined the ensembles from the two Universities FSU and UF for concerts in Gainesville and Tallahassee. Indeed, "Gators" and "Seminoles", at least theoretically and in music, are sharing a common vision for the music of Brazil! It reinforced my belief that world music ensembles should not function exclusively as a training ground for musicians in preparation to fieldwork, but a genuine venue to learn, collaborate, and most importantly to identify the value of learning the music of the "other".

In the year 2000 I joined the University of Florida as an assistant professor and the co-director of *Jacaré* Brazil. My assignment was to increase the number of performances, to expand the ensemble vocal and instrumental repertoires, to connect and to facilitate collaborations with renowned artists in Brazil, and provide new directions and opportunities to study Brazilian music and culture. I also created a series of interdisciplinary projects, by using Brazilian music to a global, real-time Internet event based in several geographic locations simultaneously. “Dancing Beyond Boundaries,” where musicians and artists performed live over the internet. This was a collaborative project of music, dance, and technology to a new research design by virtual technology, a collaborative project among the University of Florida’s Digital World Institute, University of Campinas (UNICAMP), the University of Minneapolis, and University of Denver in Colorado. At the time, the Center for Latin American Studies and Center for World Arts were fundamental to support these developments. In 2001, I found the Brazilian Music Institute (BMI), an academic and artistic program planned to provide additional opportunities for students, community, and faculty to perform additional repertoires, to recruit talented students, and to engage the College of the Arts in the process of using Brazilian music to bring visibility to the program. The Institute expanded the role of Brazilian music and hosted several high caliber musicians to teach their artistry in a more personal setting during a weeklong workshop and lectures. The Institute also brought renowned scholars for lectures, including Gerard Béhague, Larry Crook, Christopher Dunn, and Charles Perrone. Among the Brazilian artists: guitarists Marco Pereira, Nonato Luiz, Aliéksey Vianna, Paulo Martelli, Diego Figueiredo, Celso Machado, Duo Siqueira Lima, Ulisses Rocha, Richard Miller, and José Rastelli. We also had Carlos Malta (flute), Beatriz Malnic (voice) Julio Figueiredo (piano), Jorge Continentino (flute/saxophone), percussionists Mestre Boca and Carlinhos Pandeiro de Ouro, and drummers Márcio Bahia and Adriano Santos. For the first time since its creation we are bringing the 2015 Institute to South Florida in a collaborative project with Broward College in Fort Lauderdale.

We certainly can be very opinionated and judgmental when making comments about an orchestra performing Mozart, or a choir singing sacred music. We quite often

learn to appreciate another culture's music by accepting the sonic experience as the only truths. That is why performing world music continues to be an exotic activity. Our current model uses, encourages, and requires students to perform non-traditional music, not only to gain and understand of the music or style of a region, but also to gain from an artistic and challenging musical experience.

Jacaré Brazil artistic activities and diverse repertoires are essential to create an adequate environment for collaboration among all participants and visiting artists, promoting a unique and rich experience to all. Outreach activities continue to bring and popularize Brazilian music and culture throughout the community, helping to intensify and expand the appreciation for Brazilian music. Furthermore, the ensemble articulates an educational model based on positive and motivating activities for musical training, based on performance, repertoires, instrumentation, arrangements, ultimately allowing the members to share their experiences with one another and with the rest of the group. Furthermore, other academic programs disregarded at some level, the artistry content of non-traditional groups, often by lack of understanding or not been able to convince a traditional administration of the value these "music's" could bring to their program.

Using a collaborative method for learning and producing concerts and training experience to students, the University of Florida Brazilian music ensemble has sustained collegiality among students, faculty and local musicians through a series of interrelated topics: 1 – The University support system through its Center for Latin American Studies; 2 – An updated concept of "world music ensemble" and its purpose within the University of Florida's mission; 3 – One Brazilian and one North American director working collaboratively for a common cause and preservation of a successful program in Brazilian music; 4 – Performances and other public events and its organization; 5 – *Jacaré Brazil*, a world music ensemble as a required course; 6 – The relationship between the group's participants and the general public (audience); 7 – The collaboration with renown visiting artists.

The University's geographical location and relatively proximity to the largest Brazilian communities in the USA, including the Orlando and Miami-Dade areas, acts as a natural magnet for students. Furthermore, the University receives a very large number

of undergraduate and graduate students with some type of connection to Latin America. The Center for Latin American Studies and the Spanish and Portuguese Studies has a vital importance by providing academic support and student body. A more recent initiative to expand the University's visibility and educational partnership with Brazil such as "Ciências Sem Fronteiras" (Science Without Borders) with other peer institutions, gave the program a natural boost and has created other recruiting opportunities, which has helped to advertise and promote the program elsewhere. Furthermore, the Center for World Arts and its long term vision for diversity institutional infrastructure; the Brazilian Music Institute (BMI) offering focused studies and practices on Brazilian music; the Partnership in Global Learning (PGL) consortium providing the educational connections for international collaborations with schools in Latin America; and the Digital World Institute (DWI), offering the connection over the internet for long distance projects, are some of the important liaisons and collaborative groups that we have tagged to promote our music experiences.

### **Jacaré Brazil's Repertoires**

Performing Brazilian music at the University of Florida has a singular meaning; it brings significance to Brazilian music and culture through the exploration of diverse musical repertoires and academic activities. We have divided the ensemble into five independent musical groups; where each group develops its own repertoire and rehearsal time, that includes percussion ensemble (*bateria ou batucada*), guitar ensemble (guitar quartet), solo instruments or *choro* ensemble (various *choro* repertoires), and vocal techniques. The concerts are defined and approached by from the moment we identify a possible visiting artist or the level of musicianship among our students. The purpose is to present and expose the students to many levels of Brazilian music and artistry as possible. We prepare two major distinct concerts throughout the school year (Fall and Spring concerts). However, it is not unusual to have three to five performances depending on the University activities. These repertoires offers a combination of Brazilian folk musical styles such as samba, bossa nova, frevo, baião, samba-reggae, maracatu, coco, and a variety of compositions or transcriptions of the classical repertoire of Villa Lobos,



Patápio Silva, Egberto Gismonti, Ernesto Nazareth, Laurindo Almeida, and Radamés Gnattali to name a few.

The diversity is attributed to a philosophical consideration that individual pieces, whether a song, a specific rhythmic section, or dance, are major sites for generating, recalling, validating, and celebrating personal, community, and national identity. The varied repertoires are perhaps the most attractive ingredient of each concert. Performances are built on specific themes related to specific regions. The dynamic collaboration with visiting artists allows students and faculty from diverse areas to collaborate, developing new arrangements during practices, incorporating solo instruments, and using improvisation. For example: a bassoon playing traditional *choro*, music with guitars and percussion, percussion instruments accompanying a classical guitar ensemble, classical trained voice faculty singing popular musical styles. A recent concert included a classical guitar ensemble playing other genres of music such as the *maxixe* (a syncopated rhythmic figure), the *tango brasileiro* (Brazilian tango), and *choro*, these are virtuosi genres incorporated to our repertoires.

The guitar and *choro* ensembles performs a variety of repertoires including works of Dilermando Reis, Zequinha de Abreu, Pixinguinha, Luis Bonfá, Severino Araújo, Lina Pesce, and Baden Powell. A recent graduate research project proposed by Michelle Chang (former graduate student), I replied to her interview stating that Brazilian music has a special way of integrating music and culture in the USA, through its artistic forms promotes collaborations and good relations among its participants.

"In the United States the general public does not accept foreign influences so easily. We (Jacaré Brazil) promote artistic values, good music, and cordial relationships. Good music is good music anywhere."

The sense of community bonding, which is fundamental to performing Brazilian music stimulates closeness and enthusiasm among the students. It helps them to eliminate focusing on the individual by providing a safe environment not chastised by mistakes. Through shared musical experiences the ensemble is engaged into a common goal for satisfaction. This maturing concept has a pluralistic purpose. It immediately opens opportunities for classical trained

musicians to be involved and challenged, and through its repertoire engages students to work as team players. Larry Crook comments on the repertoire:

“We play a lot of different kind of things (music). In the past, we have some performances primarily percussion and singing. So we do a lot of contemporary Brazilian carnival music as well as a certain kind of folk styles that are Afro-Brazilian in focus. Since Tremura has come, we’ve been able to tapping to a lot of guitar music and string music. We do a type of music as known as “choro,” which is almost like, kind of Brazilian string band jazz, music of Bossa Nova, and carnival samba, so all kinds of.”

*Jacaré Brazil* and its dynamic repertoire and diverse programs and collaborations have acquired a special position and visibility on campus. It is providing training for students interested in pursuing degrees in ethnomusicology, allowing a diverse and dynamic environment for students, and every year attracting large audiences to its concerts. The interaction and integration of Brazilian music in our current music program can be seen from four different angles. First, the musical interaction among its members (local and international students) through shared experience. Secondly, the interaction of the two music directors (one North American and the other Brazilian but trained in the USA); third, the complete interaction between *Jacaré Brazil*, directors, participants, and the audience; fourth, the collaboration between the visiting artists and the ensemble.

From the point of view of personal relations, the ensemble has been working towards a common goal of creating an artistic alliance through positive participation. This is not only interactive but a developing process that promotes and celebrates the experience itself, it makes the music a medium to promotes the music makers (students) allowing everyone to feel positive about their contribution and experience, expressing their creativity and musicality, and ultimately performing a good show.

Statements by the students and participants at the University of Florida’s world music ensemble *Jacaré Brazil*: “I never thought I could sing this music,” “I never danced like this before,” “I never played a musical instrument before,” and “I never thought I could feel so good in front of the public” are important statements and validates the importance of the idiosyncratic world the ensemble creates. The new generation of students are not only endorsing this discussion, but having a tangible opportunity to artistically become part of a much larger concept of world music. Perhaps not all

ensembles have this aptitude; is there something special about Brazilian music that creates this involvement and fulfillment?

*Jacaré Brazil* is synonymous to overcrossing musical styles. The diverse opportunities through an array of artists and concerts are beneficial to both the University attracting and recruiting new students, and to the participants who are exposed to a diverse musical experience. For example, the Haitian choreographer and singer Erol Josué provided a complete voodoo Haitian ceremony in 2003, involving singing, drumming, and dancing, or the recognized Guatemalan marimba player Pedro Thomás teaching the diverse techniques and styles of the Guatemalan marimba in 2005.

What is “it” that we are learning to perform from these artists? First of all, It is placing the “oneself” in the context of music with an embodied experience, “it” is teaching how to improvise and become aware of an aural experience, “it” is building confidence to improvise or to become more creative in a process of music making, “it” is acquiring a better sense of communal work and music through sharing, “it” is recontextualizing Brazilian music in the USA and validating the experience of bringing “foreign” elements to a performance, and ultimately “it” is reinterpreting repertoires into new social contexts.

## **Conclusion**

Ethnomusicology, world music ensembles, and the usage of bi-musicality for training are only distinct when seen from the eye of a novelty. Deeper we dive into a particular culture, larger the gap between research and the performance practices narrows. How can we define “world music” today? These “world” sounds are everywhere and no longer are part of a particular group of scholars or a Wikipedia definition. Certainly, there are sounds that represent continuation and development of musical practices and repertoires dating back centuries over the millennia (India and Japan for example). Other sounds are results of recent music creation and often privileges private interests and moneymaking companies looking for new musical alternatives (Afro-beat in the African Diasporas and film music in India are examples).

The study of world music is now part of an ethnomusicological challenge of defining new music in a new context much closer to home, combining new philosophical

endeavors to comprehend twentieth-first century music. Today, world music ensembles and programs in ethnomusicology could be interpreted and articulated a bit less “exotic” and perhaps modeled and articulated as we proposed in this study.

In performance context *Jacaré Brazil* and Brazilian music has been able to address many levels of boundary breaking. We solidify and embrace communal experiences and work on an uplifting environment, embracing performance and scholarship into one element promoting artistic values within the culture in study through solid artistic collaborations. Institutions are by their very essence conservative, created in part to uphold status quo whether in terms of local, regional, national, or worldwide power structures.

It is because Brazilian music offers so many possibilities and sounds that we are experiencing a multilayered scenario of departmental stores such as Macy and Dillard’s, or food chain restaurants like Chipotles, and radio stations and media throughout North America playing this music. Whatever form it might manifest, Brazilian music above all is about heart, a profound ability to move human soul. In its percussive sounds, complex harmonic structures and poetic lyrics, it reflects the Brazilian people: uninhibited joy or despair, a remarkable capacity to celebrate and lament at once.

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