

“Brazilian guitar music”: music and identity in service of a stereotyped product

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SIMPÓSIO PANORAMA DA PESQUISA SOBRE VIOLÃO NO BRASIL

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Abstract: The goal of this article is to deconstruct the commercial expression “Brazilian Guitar Music” in order to reveal it as a signifier of a stereotype based on the narrative of the unified Brazilian identity. Drawing information from a selection of audio recording and concepts from the sociological literature by BHABHA (2014), HALL (2015), BAUMAN (2005) and DUARTE (2007) we want to demonstrate how this stereotyped product helped to outshine the diversity of styles present in Brazilian contemporary repertoire for solo guitar.

Keywords: Brazilian contemporary guitar. Brazilian guitar music. Music and cultural industry. Stereotype. National identity.

Brazilian guitar music: música e identidade a serviço de um produto estereotipado

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é desconstruir a expressão comercial “Brazilian Guitar Music” para revelar seu significado estereotipado baseado na narrativa da identidade nacional brasileira unificada. A partir da informação coletada de uma seleção de fonogramas e da utilização de conceitos oriundos da literatura sociológica, de autores como BHABHA (2014), HALL (2015), BAUMAN (2005) e DUARTE (2007), queremos demonstrar como esse produto estereotipado ajudou a ofuscar a diversidade estilística do repertório contemporâneo brasileiro para violão solo.

Palavras-chave: Violão brasileiro contemporâneo. *Brazilian guitar music*. Música e indústria cultural. Estereótipo. Identidade nacional.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the present paper is to introduce the concept of “Brazilian Guitar Music” and the implications it may have in the perception of the Brazilian repertoire for classical guitar. We did not create the expression itself, rather we began scrutinizing it after perceiving the repetition of a certain type of repertoire in recordings that explicitly wanted to evoke either a sense of “Brazilianness” or, at least, an idea of Latin-American ethnicity, such observations were then corroborated by the data collected from a selection of recordings by both Brazilian and International classical-guitar players.

After exposing the concepts that provided theoretical support to establish a meaning for the expression “Brazilian Guitar Music”¹ we will explain the methodology used for collecting the recordings and some of their results, the data was then interpreted through the light of three concepts borrowed from sociological sources. The writings of Homi

BHABHA (2014) would be used to explain Stereotype; Zygmunt BAUMAN (2005) and Stuart HALL (2015) were authors used to explain Identity and National Identity; finally Paulo PUTERMAN (1994) and, specially, Rodrigo DUARTE (2003) were used to clarify Adorno's and Horkheimer's concept of Cultural Industry.

2. Main concepts

We will use the concept of stereotype as understood by Homi Bhabha (2014). Bhabha explains stereotype as a “form of knowledge and identification that varies between what is always ‘in place’ or already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.”². For him, as a scholar of post-colonial relations, stereotypes must be analyzed through the perspective of the Freudian fetish since both are “the refuse of difference”³ as mechanism of power. We won't go further into Bhabha's view about the relations of power between the colonial characters; this is beyond the reach of this work. But the concept exposed will be applied to the relation between identity and the field of music industry; considering that the later has the power to appropriate from cultures, identities and its narratives in order to create products that will reach acceptance and penetrability in the market.

Bhabha's concept becomes pertinent because, as he explains, stereotypes are simplifications of reality that are not necessarily wrong in what they represent. They go further by denying the possibility of self-determination for a particular identity.⁴ Rather, it is a representation that only allows the outsider, creator of the stereotype, to apply an ever-determined role to its subject.

Stuart Hall explains that the Nation itself is a creator of meaning, a “system of cultural representation and the individuals are not only legal citizens of a Nation; they participate in the *idea* of Nation as represented in their national culture”⁵. Additionally, the narrative of a *national* identity automatically imposes the creation of otherness, the delimitation between one, which is national, and another that isn't. In the words of Bauman

national identity, allow me to add, never was like the other identities. Unlike the others that don't demand unequivocal bond and exclusive loyalty, national identity does not recognize competition, much less opposition [...] the national identity claims the monopolist right to delimitate the border between “us” and “them.” (BAUMAN, 2005, p. 28).

A difference worth noticing between national identity and stereotype is the direction of the relationships between the parts involved. While identity seeks its meaning through self-determination, the stereotype, as stated before under the concept by Bhabha, is

the affirmation of what the “other is” (or is imagined to be according to one’s convenience) and once this is established it is a type of perpetual (fixed) identity.

Stereotype creations of national cultures depend on the premise that all national cultures are completely unified and immutable. Nevertheless, as Bauman explains, *national identity* was forged through a narrative that served the political and social rise of the modern Nation-States and is not related to an innate feature of the individuals within a Nation. According to Bauman, the current notion of identity does not relate to the old unified and immutable idea. Actually, he believes that Identity is something that has to be deliberately created or chosen from a set of different given alternatives. Moreover, one ought to protect it since it is a product of one’s own circumstances and relentless efforts.⁶

About the inner workings of the *cultural industry*, Rodrigo Duarte writes

Unlike the other two models - the high “autonomous” art and the “low” popular art, both possessing, in different amounts and with diverse degrees of elaboration the spontaneity of the expression and feelings from the societies in which they emerge -, the *cultural industry* is, above all, a business that has its success conditioned to the borrowing and fusions from culture, art and entertaining, bounded totally to the already mentioned means of profit and the obtained conformity to the *status quo* (DUARTE, 2003, p. 59).

Still according to Duarte, the *Cultural Industry* products must reflect the preferences and expectation of their target audience. This can be one way that the relation between *Identity* and *Cultural Industry* may lead to the creation of *Stereotypes*. During the development of a product that relates to the expectations and preferences of the public, the industry incurs in the fetish of repetition that defines the stereotype. “In order to prove the divinity of reality, the *cultural industry* limits itself to cynically repeat it. A photological prove such as this might not be rigorous but is devastating”⁷.

In that way a simplification of reality is created in order to achieve acceptance in the market. Such simplification confirms the beliefs and expectations of the public. As Puterman explains

The cultural products always become a communication medium in the sense that they are shared and interpreted by a community (in the same way that words are also interpreted in order to function); they are no exception to the rule and also have the role of approximating or distancing (PUTERMAN, 1994, p. 40).

3. The recordings of music *from Brazil*

Analysis of recordings can be enlightening since that was a media that had penetrability to both musicians and non-musicians and, during the entire XX century,

recordings were an important medium to legitimize both artists and repertoire within the Classical Music scene. Also, Classical Music recordings are particularly interesting subjects since they can be separated, at least conceptually, in two different products: 1) the actual media (the CD, or LP) and; 2) the product within the media, that is, the “works” of music in a particular rendition. This separation is possible because the idea of “musical work” is a particular trait of Classical Music, the idea that music is self-evidently independent from any kind of source or surrounding⁸.

Bringing that idea to the subject of this paper, when a phonogram announces that it contains the “Brazilian Guitar Music” or “Latin-American music” one can assume that the music that one expects to listen is timeless and the carrier of the true features of those identities it claims to represent.

The recordings collected were released after 1950 and no discretion was made between Brazilian performers and international performers. Again, it is worth stressing that only the specific niche of the “Classical Guitar” is being considered. In order to the recordings to be included on the list four different criteria were established. Those recordings that complied with at least three of the following criteria would be included: 1) Referencing a Brazilian or Latin American identity in the title (but containing at least one piece by a Brazilian composer); 2) Historical importance and/or reach of the recording; 3) Professional importance and recognition of the performer (academic and/or artistic); and 4) easy and trustful access to information about the recording. It is important to acknowledge that the lists are supposed to be comprehensive but not exhaustive representations.

A total of 33 recordings were collected and distributed in two lists, one with Brazilian repertoire only and another with Latin-American repertoire containing at least one Brazilian piece.

| Composer (dates) | Performers (number of recordings) | Total albums | Most recorded pieces (albums) | Bra. Perf. | For. Perf. |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Heitor Villa-Lobos (1889-1950) | 1. Turibio Santos (5); | 18 | 1. Suíte Popular Brasileira (8); | 4 | 4 |
| | 2. Gerald Garcia [F]; | | 2. Chôros Nº 1 (8); | 3 | 5 |
| | 3. Graham Anthony Devine [F]; | | 3. Prelúdios; (6); | 3 | 3 |
| | 4. João Kouyoumdjian; | | 4. Estudos; (3); | 1 | 2 |
| | 5. Xuefei Yang [F]; | | 5. Melodia Sentimental (2); | 0 | 2 |
| | 6. Oscar Cáceres [F]; | | 6. Bachianas Brasileiras Nº 5 (2) | 0 | 2 |
| | 7. Pepe Romero [F]; | | | | |
| | 8. Sharon Isbin [F]; | | | | |
| | 9. Eduardo Fernandez [F]; | | | | |
| | 10. Manuel Barrueco [F]; | | | | |
| | 11. David Russell; [F] | | | | |
| | 12. Pablo Sainz Villegas [F]; | | | | |
| | 13. Milos Karadaglic (2) [F] | | | | |

| Composer (dates) | Performers (number of recordings) | Total albums | Most recorded pieces (albums) | Bra. Perf. | For. Perf. |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------|---|------------|------------|
| João Pernambuco (1883-1947) | 1. Turíbio Santos (3); 2. Gerald Garcia [F]; 3. Marco Pereira; 4. Graham Anthony Devine [F]; 5. João Kouyoumdjian; 6. Flávio Apro; 7. Xuefei Yang [F]; 8. Pepe Romero [F]; 9. David Russell [F]; 10. Pablo Sainz Villegas [F] | 12 | 1. Sons de Carrilhões (11); | 6 | 5 |
| | | | 2. Interrogando (4); | 3 | 1 |
| | | | 3. Graúna (4); | 2 | 2 |
| | | | 4. Pó de Mico (3) | 1 | 2 |
| Garôto (1915-1945) | 1. Turíbio Santos (2); 2. Marco Pereira (2); 3. Mário da Silva; 4. João Kouyoumdjian; 5. Flávio Apro; 6. Xuefei Yang [F] | 8 | 1. Jorge do Fusa (4); | 4 | 0 |
| | | | 2. Desvairada (4); | 3 | 1 |
| | | | 3. Lamentos do Morro (3); | 2 | 1 |
| | | | 4. Chôro Triste Nº 2: Tristezas de um Violão (2); | 2 | 0 |
| | | | 5. Gente Humilde (2) | 1 | 1 |
| Tom Jobim (1927-1994) | 1. Gerald Garcia [F]; 2. Paulo Bellinati; 3. Graham Anthony Devine [F]; 4. Marco Pereira; 5. João Kouyoumdjian; 6. Xuefei Yang [F]; 7. Sharon Isbin [F]; 8. Milos Karadaglic [F] | 8 | 1. Luíza (4); | 3 | 1 |
| | | | 2. Garota de Ipanema (3) | 0 | 3 |
| Dilermundo Reis (1916-1977) | 1. Turíbio Santos (2); 2. Paulo Bellinati; 3. Marco Pereira; 4. Xuefei Yang [F]; 5. Ricardo Cobo [F]; 6. David Russell [F] | 7 | 1. Se Ela Perguntar (4); | 2 | 2 |
| | | | 2. Xodó da Baiana (3) | 1 | 2 |

Table 1: List of most recorded composers and pieces with the indication of the performers who recorded them.

The table above⁹ displays the five most recorded Brazilian composers, their most recorded pieces and how many times they appeared. Additionally, there is a list of the performers and information regarding if they are Brazilian or foreigners (assigned with a letter [F]). Uniting the data from the table in the previous session and the concepts of the first session it's possible to come to many conclusions. The focus of attention will be the reception of composers and pieces. Also, we will comment on how these particular selections of composers and pieces can serve as a stereotype, created to brand an idea of Brazilian identity into a product suitable for the market.

Let's take the example of Villa-Lobos. Mostly non-Brazilian performers have recorded his pieces in this specific context. However, his seminal work for guitar, the *12 Estudos*, was not remembered as often as his *Chôros Nº 1* and his *Suíte Popular Brasileira*. As matter of fact, they appeared over twice as often as the *Estudos*. A way to analyze this is

that the national elements in that particular cycle are not as obvious as in the other two pieces, thus they could not be commoditized (or branded) as a “legitimate” Brazilian product so easily. Yet another interpretation is to say that the *Estudos* became so widely accepted and influential that they may have achieved a kind of “universal status” hence losing their “exotic” appeal. Even more importantly is to question who is making these choices and what purpose they serve.

It would be easy to fall in the assumption that since Brazilian performers are also recording similar repertoire, therefore non-Brazilian performers are only reproducing the identity also recognized by native players. A more attentive look into the interesting example of *Sons de Carrilhões* by João Pernambuco, the most recorded piece on the list and the second most recorded composer, can help us understand how native performers’ selections of repertoire can also lead to stereotypes.

According to FARIA (2012), Turíbio Santos published at least thirteen scores of music by Pernambuco in the late 1970’s¹⁰. Notwithstanding, *Sons de Carrilhões* appears eleven times, virtually in every recording containing music by Pernambuco and fairly divided among Brazilian and non-Brazilian performers. It would not be overstepping to say that this can pertinently be observed as a stereotype, since the constant repetition of a well-known piece¹¹ may have obscured other compositions by Pernambuco - and, why not, from other composers as well. It is easier to explain the reasons for Brazilian performers to always return to this particular piece. The recording of *Sons de Carrilhões* by Dilermando Reis was very popular in Brazil for many years and the piece has received other editions by important performers and teachers such as Henrique Pinto. As for the non-Brazilians, I can only speculate. For example, the edition of Sophocles Papas on Columbia Publishing Company might have been the only available score by Pernambuco outside Brazil.

The case of Tom Jobim is easier to explain. The commercial and artistic success of Bossa-Nova outside Brazil has strongly shaped the way foreigners interpret *brazilianness*. So, it’s not surprising that arrangements of Jobim’s music would appear, particularly considering the long tradition of guitar-players arranging music, a fact that can be traced at least to the XVI and XVII centuries. The curious fact here is that the most recorded piece is *Luíza* and not *Garota de Ipanema*, a song that have received a famous rendition by Frank Sinatra along with Jobim in the guitar. It is not to be missed though that all of those who recorded *Garota de Ipanema* were not Brazilians and that these recordings were released by important recording companies such as Deutsche Grammophone, Naxos, and Decca.

Finally, we want to make some brief comments about Garôto. Although he is one of the most recorded, his situation is opposite to that of Villa-Lobos since mostly Brazilian performers recorded his music. Garôto's music was published to a wider public in 1990's, with the editorial work by Paulo Bellinati whose editions were released through Guitar Solo Publications in San Francisco along with a recording. The authoritative status reached by those editions and recordings might have established Garôto's music as something that could only be fully apprehended by a native Brazilian, thus making performers to be more careful – at least in a first moment.

With this in mind we designated the expression “Brazilian Guitar Music” not as an expression that represents the production of Brazil's guitar music in a broader sense. But as a label through which performer and audience signify a shared, idealized, and fixed notion of what is Brazilian music. In this case it means the music composed during the first half of the 20th century and the music that dialogues with it in a direct way, Jobim's music being an example of this.

Musically speaking, is the music that contains specific traces like syncopation, more diatonic triadic harmonies (in genres such as Chôro and Samba) or a combination of these with a more elaborated jazz-like harmony (like in Bossa-Nova), thus excluding music from composers or in styles that don't comply with such expectations.

We also chose to keep the expression in English even when writing in Portuguese. The reason for that is to make clear the idea of fixed, rigid immutability imposed by an articulation of external actors that insist in not portraying the vast range of styles present in the contemporary Brazilian guitar production. That diversity is a reflection of how the country changed and developed during the last 50 years - despite, or exactly due to, all political, social and economic changes. The denial of such transformations is, in our opinion, a conservative and safe approach to creating a product that will resonate with the audience's expectations and preconceptions.

4. Conclusion

After this research we believe it is possible to claim that, even if unaware, when a musician performs a piece of music or when they record them in discs, they engage in the construction of meaning and social narratives. Thus, they are capable of reinforcing narratives as the Brazilian national identity, already framed through the pressure of the stereotype, in particular when this product comes with titles linking it to a certain national or ethnic tradition.

Understanding *identity* as something in constant transformation and the role of the individual as part of the generation of meaning leads us to conclude that the idea of Brazilianness is also in perpetual change. Furthermore, if we are to follow the premises of Mário de Andrade in 1928, who pointed that “the contemporary criteria for Brazilian Music must be not philosophical, but social; it must be a criteria of combat” and that “the criteria for Brazilian Music in the present must be that it exists in relation to the present”¹², one might conclude: presently the Brazilian music for guitar is way more diverse than the recordings might show. By acknowledging this, the performer can change not only how he/she builds a program of music by contemporary Brazilian composers, but also how to include the established tradition within the present context. Finally, it can also help creating new approaches to interpret the repertoire as well as new ways to deliver and create engagement with the audience.

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Notas

¹ The expression was kept in English even in my writings in Portuguese (the translation would be *Música Brasileira para Violão*), the reasons I will explain later in this paper.

² BHABHA, 2014, p. 117.

³ BHABHA, 2014, p. 129.

⁴ BHABHA, 2014, p. 130.

⁵ HALL, 2015, p. 30.

⁶ BAUMAN, 2005, p. 22.

⁷ ADORNO e HORKHEIMER *apud* DUARTE, 2003, p. 63.

⁸ GOEHR *apud* COOK 2001.

⁹ CASTELLON, 2017, p. 115.

¹⁰ FARIA, 2012, p. 15-17.

¹¹ A piece so well accepted within the traditional Classical Guitar repertoire that it is included in one of Suzuki Method instructional books.

¹² ANDRADE, 2006, p. 15.