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The Berimbau

Eric A. Galm

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The Brazilian berimbau, a musical bow, is most commonly associated with the energetic martial art/dance/game of capoeira. This study explores its stature from the 1950s to the present in diverse musical genres including bossa nova, samba-reggae, MPB (Popular Brazilian Music), electronic dance music, Brazilian art music, and more. Berimbau music spans oral and recorded historical traditions, connects Latin America to Africa, juxtaposes the sacred and profane, and unites nationally constructed notions of Brazilian identity across seemingly impenetrable barriers. This book considers the berimbau beyond the context of capoeira, and explores the bow's emergence as a national symbol. Throughout, it engages and analyzes intersections of musical traditions in the Black Atlantic, North American popular music, and the rise of global jazz. The book is an introduction to Brazilian music for musicians, Latin American scholars, capoeira practitioners, and other people who are interested in Brazil's music and culture.

Introduction

Eric A. Galm

in *The Berimbau: Soul of Brazilian Music*

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This introductory chapter sets out the book's purpose, which is to view Brazilian music and culture through the lens of the berimbau. The book demonstrates how this critical icon traverses a broad range of social, class, and racial boundaries in both national and global contexts. This chapter describes the berimbau, followed by discussions of Brazil's development of a centralized cultural-intellectual infrastructure, and

popular and art music in Brazil. An overview of the subsequent chapters is also presented.

Historical Connections and the Emergence of a National Symbol

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in *The Berimbau: Soul of Brazilian Music*

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This chapter presents a historical introduction to the berimbau and capoeira. Topics discussed include the history of capoeira in Brazil; the berimbau's survival and formal association with capoeira; the strong connection between African-derived religious beliefs, capoeira, and the berimbau; and capoeira and gender.

Theme and Variations

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This chapter focuses on the early 1960s, when bossa nova composer Baden Powell adapted the berimbau's melodic rhythms to the guitar, resulting in the internationally successful composition, "Berimbau." It analyzes Powell's composition within the context of capoeira-related musical performance practices, and views how the musical trope that emerged from this composition continues to be used in Brazilian popular music today. The chapter demonstrates how this motif has changed from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Afrocentric Themes of Resistance

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This chapter continues the chronological study of the berimbau's transformation in Brazilian popular music. It focuses on the fusion of musical genres, and how the berimbau as a metaphor has transformed from a symbol of capoeira to one of blackness, resistance, and change.

The "One Note Samba" Starts to Jam¹

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This chapter describes three individuals within Brazilian popular music who have moved the berimbau into genres beyond capoeira: Naná Vasconcelos, Dinho Nascimento, and Ramiro Musotto. Vasconcelos brought the berimbau from Brazil into a global jazz marketplace and, through his recordings, inspired the Bahian Nascimento and the Argentinean Musotto to follow his ideas for developing new concepts. Nascimento developed alternative techniques for playing the berimbau, most notably the "blues berimbau," which is a combination of berimbau tradition and his interpretation of North American blues music. Musotto is known for creating multiple layered berimbau arrangements, and for experimenting with electronic sampling and sequencing in a broad range of Brazilian popular music contexts.

Creation Myths

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This chapter begins with an overview of Brazilian art music. It then discusses how African-derived thematic material has been used in the genre since the late 1800s; Ganguzama, the first symphonic work that incorporated the berimbau; percussionist and composer Luiz D'Anunciação's development of berimbau notation and the emergence of percussion-based art music in Brazil; and a contemporary vanguarda composition for berimbau and prerecorded tape by Luiz Augusto (Tim) Rescala.

Conclusions

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This chapter connects several strands of history, cultural studies, music, and the multiple diasporic presences within the black Atlantic, analyzing the threads of a rich tapestry of Brazilian music and culture to demonstrate how the berimbau has become a symbol of Brazilian identity and an icon of brasilidade throughout the world. It presents a comprehensive portrait of the use and meaning of the berimbau in Brazilian music and culture by investigating how its position has been constructed, modified, and adapted by culture producers, both Eurocentric and Afro-Brazilian, marginalized and elite, to construct opposing notions of Brazilianness.