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Brazilian Percussion

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BRAZILIAN PERCUSSION

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BRIEF HISTORY OF SAMBA

Samba is the most characteristic and most popular form of native Brazilian music. Origins of Samba can be traced by to the 17th century in the state of Bahia, where slaves captured in the African regions of Angola and Congo landed. Tribes from these areas brought with them their *semba* gatherings (also known as *umbigada* or *belly bumping*) and the music spread with the slave trade throughout the country (much like the beginnings of Blues, etc, in the US)

By the end of the 19th century, Rio de Janeiro – at that time the country’s capital – became Brazil’s major cultural center, where a melting pot of rhythms from diverse origins blended, such as the *polka*, the *lundu*, the *habanera*, and the *maxixe*, which all blended with the traditional African *semba* gatherings. The result – *samba*.

At the beginning of the 20th century, certain neighborhoods adjacent to downtown Rio like Estacio, Saude, and Praca Onze, became the center for this new genuinely Brazilian rhythm. These were areas where the “bairanas,” affectionately known as “aunts” by the people, had settled having migrated from the state of Bahia, with its rich traditions from Africa. They were based on the traditional figure of heavy-set women from Bahia, who wore wide, white dresses, swaying to their own rhythms.

These “aunts” from Bahia would host backyard celebrations that juxtaposed profane and religious traditions, always with great music, dancing and drumming. This style, which was performed at gatherings throughout Rio, went by several names: *caxambu*, *jongo*, *partido alto*, and later, *samba* and *batucada*. Disseminating from the area of Estacio to the rest of the city, different kinds of sambas began to emerge.

SAMBA SCHOOLS

The Brazilian Carnival originated from the *Entrudo*, a tradition brought by immigrants from Portugal in the 16th century. In the 19th century, the Masked balls and parades from Europe became an important influence. Meanwhile, the people had started to organize groups known as *Ze Pereiras* that paraded around to the sound of bass drums and other percussion instruments.

Violence in the form of brawls and riots occurred when different groups paraded in the streets and the formation of “schools” helped bring that to an end. A group of Carioca Samba composers formed an association that helped to gain respect and helped put an end to police repression against the samba groups.

In 1928, the first samba school, *Deixa Falar* (Let Them Talk) was formed in the Estacio neighborhood. Since there was a teacher’s school nearby, the founder decided to call his association a “samba school” implying that it would graduate “samba professors.” Many samba schools followed with an average of 70 to 100 members. The parade formation for early schools consisted of a sign with the schools logo, important leaders of the school, the ballroom master and the flag bearer that carry the school flag, the singers (use amplification today), female dancers and choir, the *bateria* (drum section), and the *bairanas* surrounded by men (carrying razors strapped to their legs) to protect the samba school.

In 1932, the first competition between Samba schools began. As the decades progressed, each samba school began to create their own identities including the particular rhythms of their drum sections. The rapid modernization of Rio de Janeiro which was unfortunately marked by a lack of concern for cultural preservation affected the samba schools. The new cosmopolitan approach changed the landscape to where professional artists and specialists have replaced the community artisans. Schools spend up to \$4 million each year on the event. Now, the parades resemble theatrical productions with the amazing spectacle we see today with groups as large as 4000 performers (with 300 in the drum section):

A samba school carnival entry will typically include singers (*puxadores*), musicians, the *bateria*, dancers, giant puppets, several floats and flag bearers, all ornately decorated or wearing colourful costumes. As well as the performers, there will be an army of people behind the scenes, building props and floats, making costumes, designing elements of the entry, doing the administration, etc.

BRAZILIAN PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS:

All instruments can be carried by hand or with shoulder straps for marching in parade.

- **Surdo** - With their deep sound, surdos are used to mark time and rhythm similar to bass drums. There are three kinds of surdos: first, second, and cutting (or third). The surdo is the heart of the samba school baterias, but is also used in frevo, samba reggae and axé music.



- **Caixa (means box)** - Made of wood or metal, the *caixa* has a cylindrical shape and a head on both sides with metal-spring “snares” on the top head. There are different kinds of caixas with specific names because of their different sizes and timbres. For example: Caixa clara, Caixa-de-guerra, piccolo and others. Played like the traditional marching snare drum with traditional grip.



- **Repinique** - Created by samba schools to make a high, piercing sound. It is also used as a calling (lead) and solo instrument in the samba school bateria (percussion band). In samba it is played with a stick in the right hand, with the left hand beating counterpoint directly on the drum head, or vice-versa. It is played together with the tamborins in a galloping rhythm. Samba Reggae players often use 2 sticks.



- **Tambourim** - A small hand-held drum with a high, piercing sound, played either with a wooden stick (in traditional samba, where a rhythm called *telecoteco* is often played) or with a three or four-pronged plastic beater (in the samba schools, where there is usually a large group of players). One of the more difficult instruments to master.



- **Timbao** - A drum with a nylon head inspired by the traditional timba, it was introduced into timbalada by Carlinhos Brown. Currently it is used in music from Bahia in general. With its high tuning, the Timbal produces a high, piercing sound. It often functions as lead drum in many Samba Reggae songs and combines the sound of the Latin American conga and timbale. Played with the hands like a djembe.



- **Agogo bells** - Made of iron and steel, they are used in samba and its offshoots. The sound is made by striking a stick against the instrument's two bells.



- **Cuica** - Known as “choro” (cry), the sound of a cuica is produced by rubbing a stick inside the drum with a damp cloth, and pressing the outer head with the finger. The closer one presses to the center of the cuica, the higher the sound.



- **Pandeiro** - Originally from East Africa, the pandeiro (tambourine) is considered the complete percussion instrument because it has low, medium, and high timbres. Made of wood, goatskin, and five sets of jingles, the conventional pandeiro from Rio de Janeiro was introduced into samba and chorinho as a rhythmic base. Later it spread all over Brazil in different ways, and rhythms. It is played in folkloric, pop, and erudite music, among other styles. One of the most important and most difficult to master.



- **Reco-reco** - Of African origin, the reco-reco is made of bamboo or iron. The sound is produced by rubbing a rod on its ends and grooves – like a metal guiro. Used a lot in traditional samba (“roots” samba) and reggae.



- **Ganza (shaker)** - A long shaker with little shells, beads, or seeds inside. Also known as “xique-xique” because of the sound it makes. Used in samba and bossa nova.



SAMBA STYLES

Samba in Rio:

The Samba schools of Rio have huge percussion sections – more of a percussion orchestra – with up to 300 performers who perform in a fast, high energy march-tempo. Songs performed are a poetic and melodic portrayal of the theme for the year (decided on by each particular school). Songs are decided through a contest in the summer with a winner announced in October, rehearsal then begin and continue until Carnival which occurs just before Lent in February or early March. These songs usually are composed with 2 parts each of which has a chorus section. The first section is usually in a major key – and the second in minor. The rhythm is always in 2/4 or 4/4 time. Percussionists known as *batuqueiros* or *ritmistas* are conducted by the *Mestre da Bateria* who is conductor and teacher. The instruments are grouped in sections similar to an orchestra.

Besides maintaining the rhythm throughout the parade, the drum section performs breaks to demarcate sections in the song and occasionally add what are known as *conventions* or longer drum breaks when it is percussion alone. Instruments like the *tambourim* play riffs during the song to accentuate and add rhythmic excitement to the song.

An amazing fact about the actual parade performance is that, even though rehearsals take place throughout the year, you never get to gather more than one fourth of the total of the participants which currently add up to about 4,000 people. It is a mystery how so many people manage to get together only a few hours before the parade begins and perform such a huge spectacle with such perfection.

Pagode Music:

Popular, more intimate style of samba played in clubs, etc. – usually includes 3 percussionists or so along with vocalist and guitars with guitar-like instruments like the *cavaquinho* (similar to the Yukelele) and the banjo. Percussion instruments used: surdo, pandeiro, cuica, tambourim, ganza, reco-reco and unique smaller drums called the *repique de mao*, & the *tanta* (one-headed drums played on head and sides with hands – laid on lap)

Samba Reggae (Samba from the Bahia region):

The region of Bahia with Salvador as the center, has the longest history of the entire country and has retained more of the original African influences brought over with the slave trade – including what is known as *Candomble*, a form of sacred, religious music brought over by the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the Brazilian equivalent to the *Santaria* religion of Cuba and *Voodoo* of Haiti.

Candomble has been handed down from generation to generation and has retained much of its original components from its African origins. Based largely in the state of Bahia, Candomble followers worship many different gods and goddesses of nature including five important gods known as *Orishas*. It has been estimated that over 1,000 Candomble temples exist in the city of Salvador, Bahia. The drumming associated with Candomble has retained its African character. The significant presence of this style has influenced the samba of the region as well.

In Salvador, carnival traditions developed differently and are closely linked with the black-consciousness movement of the 1970's. Taking influences from Rio samba and mixing them with music from other black artists of the period (soul, funk and reggae) – new *Afro Blocs* formed. *Afro blocs* celebrated the African heritage of their (mainly black) membership and set about educating people about African cultures while speaking out about past and present injustices and inequalities in Brazilian society – identifying strongly with Bob Marley, his politics and music. The first Afro bloc was *Ile Aiye*, formed in 1974. *Ile Aiye* took the controversial step of excluding whites and mulattos from their ranks and specializes in provocative, pro-black lyrics. The best-known Afro bloc of all is *Olodum*, who are generally considered to have invented samba-reggae.

Samba-reggae mixes Afro bloc music with reggae influences, to produce an extremely popular music form which has gained popularity world over. Amongst others, *Olodum* have recorded and performed with such luminaries as Jimmy Cliff, Paul Simon, Herbie Hancock and Michael Jackson. Some of the instruments are slightly different – *Repiques*, *timbao* as well as *djembes* and *congas* which bring in the African influence (hand drums).