BY CHRIS MCGOWAN

MÚSICA BRASILEIRA

SPIRIT AND SOUL

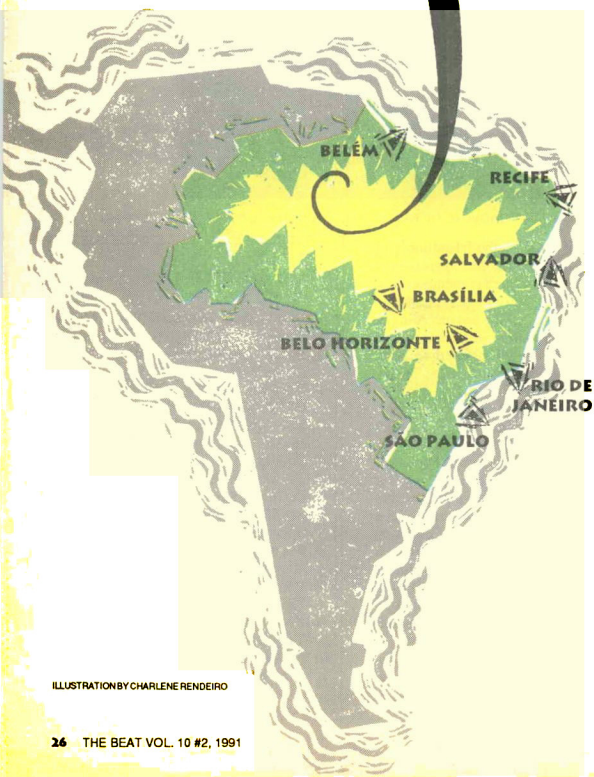

ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLENE RENDEIRO

During Brazil's colonial era, Lord Beckford was the English ambassador to the court of Portuguese ruler Maria I. After visiting Brazil, he wrote that the melodies he had heard there were "the most fascinating since the time of the Sybarites."

Lord Beckford was not the first nor the last visitor to be charmed by the remarkable music to be found in South America's largest country. The sensual *maxixe* dance was popular in Europe around 1920 and was the lambada of its time. In the 1940s, beautiful *samba-canção* tunes by Ary Barroso were used in several Walt Disney films, and singer Carmen Miranda performed sambas and *marchas* in a string of Hollywood movies, such as *That Night in Rio* and *The Gang's All Here*.

The cool modern samba called bossa nova was popular all over the world in the 1960s, and in that decade and the next Brazilian rhythms and melodies had a huge influence on American jazz and fusion. Most recently, lambada (a fusion of *merengue* with the Afro-Brazilian *carimbó* style and other influences) was the hit of the European summer in 1989 and then a much-hyped flop in North America the following year.

Maria do Carmo Miranda da Cunha (AKA Carmen Miranda), a popular samba singer in Brazil in the 1930s and an ambassadress of Brazilian song in the '40s.

But all of the above reflects only a little of what has been going on musically in Brazil this century. In recent years, a small-but-loyal audience has been growing in the States and other places for the wider spectrum of Brazilian song. New and old idioms like *choro*, *afoxé*, samba-reggae, *baião*, *xote*, *frevo* and *maracatu* are beginning to be heard for the first time, as are many talented Brazilian artists now gaining global exposure.

Part of this is due to the big push that Brazilian music has received in the U.S. from labels like PolyGram, Mango and Tropical Storm/WEA, from Qwest Music Group (which subpublishes the songs of many Brazilian songwriters), and from musicians like David Byrne, Paul Simon, the Crusaders, Dave Grusin, Lee Ritenour and the Manhattan Transfer, who have introduced many Brazilian songs or artists to the American public through their albums. Byrne has even released four compilations of his favorite Brazilian tunes (the "Brazil Classics" series on Sire).

Of course, the value of Brazilian music has nothing to do with its commercial acceptance in the exterior. Whether or not people in other countries are listening, the beat goes on in Salvador, Rio, Recife, Belém, Fortaleza and São Paulo. And the vitality of the music being made in these places is impressive indeed. As in Africa and the Caribbean, music is an extremely important thread in the fabric of Brazilian life, an essential part of day-to-day existence.

The vast cornucopia of Brazilian music began to take form after Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral first set foot in April 1500 on the lush tropical coast of what is now southern Bahia. Of course, he was not the first to discover Brazil. The Indians had done that some 40,000 years earlier, migrating down from North America.

In colonial Brazil, a new society began to take shape, composed of the descendents of the Portuguese, the native Indians and the Africans brought over as slaves. Brazilian culture (vocabulary, customs, cuisine, lifestyle) was formed from this miscegenation. However, it was primarily the meeting of European and African harmonies, rhythms and instruments that created Brazil's national music, as was also the case in the United States.

But the European and African musical elements that created Brazilian folk and popular music were different in Brazil than in the United States. Firstly, the music of Portugal was unlike that of the English, Irish, German and other European peoples who initially settled America; Portuguese music also used the European tonal scale (and medieval modes) but had quite a different flavor. It was very lyrical, often extremely romantic or melancholy, and usually suffused with *saudade*, a word that means longing or yearning for someone or something. In addition, Portugal had been occupied by the Moors for several hundred years (until 1249 AD) and had incorporated their scales and syncopation into some of its music.

Brazil's African influence was also different because of the particular mixture of nations represented among the slaves, and because six to seven times as many Africans were taken to Brazil as to North America. Historian E.B. Burns estimates that about 3.5 million Africans surivived the crossing of the Atlantic to Brazil in slave ships. Another historian, Philip Curtin, has a higher calculation: about 4.2 million; he thinks 4 million slaves were taken to the Caribbean islands and 651,000 to North America.

In Brazil, the Yorubas, Fon, Ewe, Bantu and other African peoples tenaciously clung to their culture. In addition, the Portuguese intermarried extensively because of a shortage of their own women in the new land and created a population that was much more racially mixed than to the north. The survival of African ways may have also been aided by the slightly greater tolerance of them by the Portuguese (whose country was more culturally open and diverse than England), by the ease with which West African religions hid behind the saints and rituals of Catholicism, and by the many *quilombos* (colonies of runaway slaves) that were established in the rugged interior of Brazil.

With the Virgin Mary standing in for Iemanjá, Saint George for Ogun and Saint Jerome for Xangô, the *orixás* (West African gods) survived for centuries underground in the hostile new world and are revered openly today by perhaps half of Brazil's population. These Afro-Brazilian religions are cousins of *santerid* in Cuba and *voudon* in Haiti; their forms include *candomblé* (most practiced in Bahia and the closest to the old West African ceremonies of the Yoruba), *umbanda* (an eclectic 20th-century variant with considerable spiritist influence), *xangô*, *catimbó*, *caboclo*, *batuque* and *pajelança*. *Macumba* is a common generic name for all these sects.

In the Afro-Brazilian religions were preserved African songs, rhythms, dances and instruments. African religious and celebratory music provided most of the rhythmic basis for such modern song forms as samba, *coco*, maracatu and baião. Brazil abolished slavery in 1888, and African-Brazilians slowly achieved their full emancipation over the fol-

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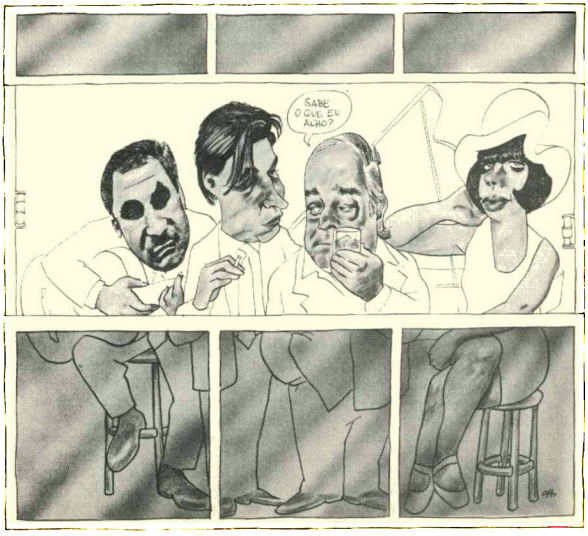
Four of bossa nova's key figures are caricatured on this retrospective album cover: (from left) singer-guitarist João Gilberto, composer Tom Jobim, poet Vinícus de Moraes and singer Nara Leão.

BOSSA NOVA 25 ANOS



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lowing decades. Early in this century, candomblé and even black Carnaval groups were still repressed, but over time Brazil came to accept, value and celebrate its rich African heritage.

A great rush of musical creativity came 70-100 years ago, when many of Brazil's most important styles were forged from the ongoing fusion of African and Portugese roots, and the admixture in some cases of elements of various foreign genres (*habanera*, tango, polka and so on) popular at the time. Around 1880 came the dance-hall form of maxixe and the leaping instrumental style called choro. Then in 1899, Chiquinha Gonzaga used a boisterous Afro-Brazilian rhythm she had heard during Carnaval to write the first registered marcha, "Ó Abre Alas." Marcha (or *marchinha*) evolved into a happy, festive style with lots of horns and drums rolls on the snares, a strong accent on the downbeat and short, humorous lyrics. Marcha became an extremely popular style during Brazil's nationwide pre-Lenten Carnaval celebration, as would an idiom also evolving then—samba.

Samba crystallized into its familiar urban form in Rio de Janeiro early in this century. The first recorded samba was "Pelo Telefone," covered by the Banda Odeon in 1917 and written by Donga, Mauro de Almeida and others (though Donga registered it as his alone). Samba grew into Brazil's most famous idiom, a vibrant music with spirited responsorial singing, many interlocking syncopated lines and extensive percussive interplay.

Samba became a voice for the black and mulatto working class, especially in Rio: It was celebration, philosophy, solace. It also became the musical base for the *escolas de samba* (samba schools), the community organizations that parade during Carnaval. Nowadays, the samba school parades in Rio are incredible spectacles, televised live across the entire country: Each escola has dozens of enormous floats, some 5,000 extravagantly dressed singers and dancers, and around 300 drummers and percussionists.

Bahian women at a festival at the Church of Nosso Senhor do Bomfim in Salvador.

In northeast Brazil, one of the most popular Carnaval styles is frevo, which originated in 1909 in Recife when the director of a military band transformed the polka-marcha into a vigorous new form by heightening the syncopation and juicing up the tempo. Then years later, in 1950, Dodô and Osmar electrified the genre in Bahia: They appeared in Salvador atop an old Ford pickup playing frevo with electric guitar and electric *cavaquinho* (a ukelele-like instrument). When a third instrumentalist was added, they gained the name *trio elétrico* (electric trio).

Since then, a common sight in cities like Salvador and Recife during Carnaval has been trio elétrico trucks that carry banks of speakers and musicians in various numbers who play hyperkinetic frevo as well as overheated renditions of rock, reggae and lambada. As they drive along, thousands of partiers trail behind, dancing and leaping deliriously.

Brazil's northeast has also provided the baião, xote and *xaxado* styles, most of which were popularized nationally in the 1940s by Luiz Gonzaga (1912-89), born in Pernambuco state. These forms, played with the accordion, bass drum and triangle, are full of boisterous rhythms and raw poignancy. *Forró* is a generic name for the more danceable variations of these styles as well as a party or place to play northeastern dance music. To some, forró also signifies a fast, lively type of baião introduced by Gonzaga in tunes like "O Forró de Mané Vito."

In the late 1950s came more innovation, as Antonio Carlos "Tom" Jobim, João Gilberto, Carlos Lyra and Vinícius de Moraes developed bossa nova, a low-key, harmonically rich reshaping of the samba-canção. Bossa then led into what many refer to as MPB (*música popular brasileira*), the music made by the eclectic, post-bossa generation of artists that established their careers in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The music of such MPB stars as Milton Nascimento, Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Djavan, Ivan Lins, Alceu Valença, Chico Buarque, João Bosco, Gal Costa, Simone and Maria Bethânia incorporated bossa harmonies, samba, rock, toada, frevo, forró and much more. It resulted in some of the most sophisticated, diverse and appealing popular music ever written in any country. Many of their songs were also written under difficult conditions: the fierce censorship and repression imposed on the Brazilian people by the military dictatorship that ruled from 1964-1985.

In the 1970s came another important musical movement: the re-Africanization of Salvador, the capital of the state of Bahia. Early in that decade, Carnaval in Salvador was celebrated mainly in clubs with live bands and in the streets with trios elétricos. There had been Afro-Brazilian Carnaval groups in Salvador's past but they had almost died out. That legacy was mainly represented by the Filhos de Gandhi, an afoxé founded in 1949. The music they played was also called afoxé, and it was essentially a large-scale secular style of candomblé music.

Two young Bahians, nicknamed Vovô and Apolônio, were inspired by the black power movement in the U.S., by rising African nationalism and by reggae stars like Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff. They decided in 1974 to create a new type of bloco afro, or Afro-Brazilian Carnaval group, in Salvador. Only blacks could be members, the music would be very Afro-Brazilian, and different aspects of African culture would be celebrated. Thus was born Ilê-Aiyê (which in Yoruba roughly translates as "House of Life"), which made its Carnaval debut in 1975.

It was a big success and developed into an organization of more than 2,000 members. Meanwhile, the Filhos de Gandhi had been revitalized and by the end of the 1980s was 3,000 strong. From 1979 to 1986, many more blocos afro and afoxés were formed, such as Olodum (in 1979), Olori, Oju-Oba, Malê-Debalê, Afreketê and Muzenza. The afoxés played afoxé, and the blocos afro performed afoxé and a new style called samba-reggae, a thunderous and earthy blending of those two styles with additional Afro-Brazilian elements.

By the 1980s, Bahia was thoroughly re-Africanized. Even the trios elétricos were often performing "afroelétrico" music, as writer Antonio Risério called it, and furiously mixing it with lambada, frevo, reggae, merengue, salsa and everything else. The music of the blocos afro, trios elétricos and various new groups from Salvador (Banda Mel, Chiclete com Banana, Banda Reflexu's) was immensely popular in Bahia, although not so much in cities like Rio and São Paulo, where the airwaves were mainly buzzing with Brazilian rock (Titãs, Lobão, Legião Urbana), romantic ballads and imported pop.

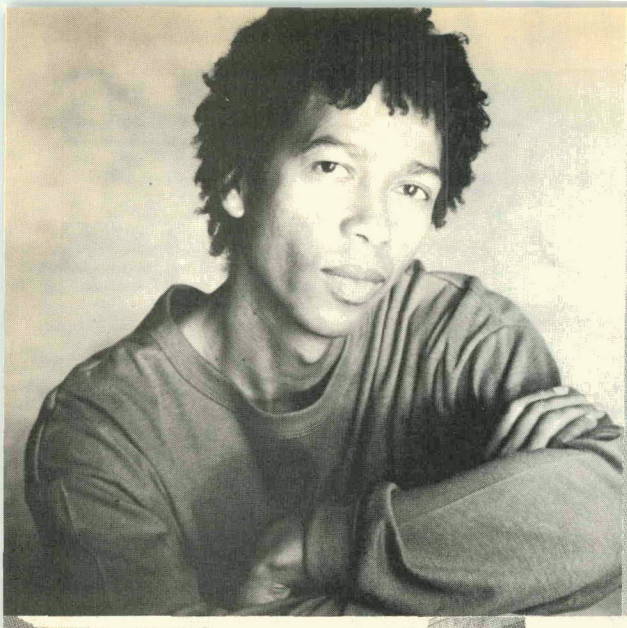
Besides the Bahian Afro-explosion of the '80s, there was also a proliferation of great instrumental music that decade, as artists like Dori Caymmi, Antonio Adolfo, Eliane Elias, Marcos Ariel, Alemão, Zil, Hermeto Pascoal, Egberto Gismonti, Azymuth, Aquarela Carioca, Pau Brasil, Cama de Gato and others vividly mixed together jazz, choro, samba, funk, forró and more.

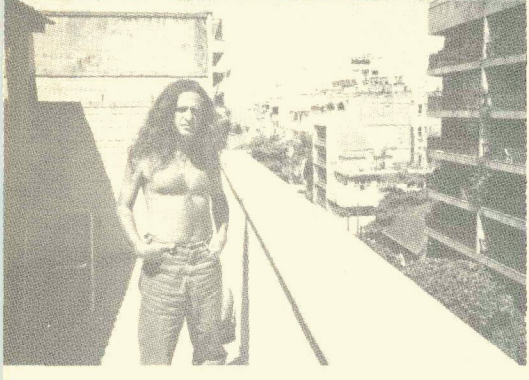
In the 1990s, look for more experiments in the combining of Brazilian, Caribbean and African sounds into new world music fusions. Margareth Menezes singing with David Rudder and recording a Boukman Exsperyans song; Maria Bethânia backed by Ladysmith Black Mambazo; Gilberto Gil jamming with the Wailers; Djavan recording Enoch Sontonga's hymn of the African National Congress—all these combinations have already happened and they are just the beginning.

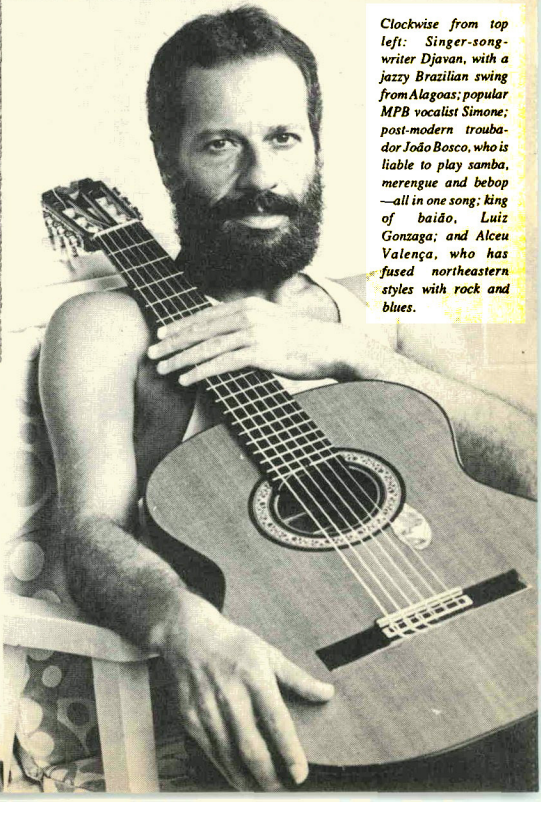
What would Lord Beckford have made of it?

Chris McGowan has written about Brazilian music for Billboard, The Beat, Musician *and other publications. He has lived in both Rio de Janeiro and Fortaleza, Brazil, and is co-author, along with Ricardo Pessanha, of a book on Brazilian music.*

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RANDEE ST. NICHOLAS, CBS-BRAZIL, CBS-BRAZIL, IVAN KLINGEN, CHRIS MCGOWAN







Clockwise from top left: Singer-songwriter Djavan, with a jazzy Brazilian swing from Alagoas; popular MPB vocalist Simone; post-modern troubadour João Bosco, who is liable to play samba, merengue and bebop —all in one song; king of baião, Luiz Gonzaga; and Alceu Valença, who has fused northeastern styles with rock and blues.