

“Rosário: Tambor e Fé (Rosary: Drum and Faith)” Bosco de Oliveira

“ROSÁRIO: TAMBOR E FÉ”
ROSARY: DRUM AND FAITH
Bosco de Oliveira

Track 1 – Reza para sair (Moçambique de Justinópolis)

0 – 1.21 >>>

In this program we will look into one of the most fascinating Afro-Brazilian musical traditions: the Congado. Very popular in the State of Minas Gerais, in the SE of Brazil, the Congado is more than just a musical tradition; it is a way of life. Also known as Reinado (meaning reign or realm) it celebrates catholic saints and at the same time it honours ancestors and the King and Queen of Congo...

<<< 1.55 - 2.30 >>>

...With the title of “Reza prá Sair” or “Prayer to go Out”, this song represents a prayer to strengthen the spiritual force of the group before it goes out into the streets. The singer says “vou firmá nossa ingoma” meaning “I am going to strengthen our drum”.

<<< 2.45 - 3.45

That was the Moçambique of the Brotherhood of Rosário from Justinópolis, Minas Gerais, recorded on the 26-10-96 during the festival of Our Lady of the Rosary and out on the CD “Congado Mineiro” as part of the Cachuera Archive of Brazilian Sound Documents, 1998.

Our Lady of the Rosary, Rosário in Portuguese, is one of the main patron saints of the Congados, along side St Benedict, St Ephigenia, which are known as the “Black Saints”, Our Lady of Mercy and Our Lady Aparecida, who is also the patroness of Brazil. However, it was the Rosary that became the symbol of all the groups that form this tradition.

The story of the Congado is shrouded in mystery and magic and varies from region to region. I called upon Glaura Lucas, an ethnomusicologist from Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, who worked with some Congado communities, namely those of Jatobá and Arturos. She wrote a book on those communities called “Os Sons do Rosário” - (The Sounds of the Rosary), which was published in Belo Horizonte by the Federal University of Minas Gerais in 2002. I asked her about the myth surrounding the Congado:

Bosco De Oliveira: Glaura Lucas, welcome to the program and congratulations on your book. Glaura, what is the legend of the Congado? What is the story behind it?

Glaura Lucas: In the Metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, which is the capital of the State, the version of the legend tells us about an image of Our Lady of the Rosary that was found in the sea and it is the rescue of this image by the black slaves. So, long ago at the time of slavery, an image of our Lady of the Rosary was said to have appeared in the sea. The white people tried unsuccessfully to rescue the image with their prayers, litanies and music. Later the blacks were allowed to honour her with the dance and music that formed their prayers. Congo was the first group to arrive. Its lively rhythms and dances caused the image to make a slight move. Next came the Moçambique, formed by old wise black people who slowly

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attracted the image to the shore by playing the three sacred drums called Candombes. The saint came to sit on top of the largest drum known as Santana.

BD: Is this why, in the cortege, the part of the Congado called Congo comes in front of the Moçambique?

GL: Yes, that is it. Because the legend structures the ritual and the brotherhoods that belong to this area in Minas Gerais, they often have a group of Congo and a group of Moçambique and they also perform the Candombe ritual, which is an inner ritual, it doesn't go outside. So, when they go to the streets the Congo, which was the first one to arrive in the sea according to the legend, goes in the front to clean up the space, the area, so that the Moçambique can come behind conducting the Kings and Queens, which are the most important people in the hierarchy of the whole ritual. The Kings and Queens represent Our Lady of the Rosary, other saints that they are devoted to and as well as the African Kingdoms. And Moçambique is the group that conducts them because according to the legend, it was the Moçambique that attracted the image to the shores, by playing the slow rhythms. That is the way they go in the street according to the functions that are established through the legend.

Before stepping onto the dangerous world of unknown forces, which is the streets, the Candombe is performed by calling upon ancestors, saints and royalty to provide protection to the group. We shall hear now a Candombe saluting the King of the Congado. Note that before he starts to sing, the singer hails Our Lady of Rosário, the sacred songs, the King, the Captain who is an important leader of the Congado and everybody who is present at that moment.

Track 2 – Saudação aos Reis (Salute to the Kings)

0 – 2.37

That was Candombe from Mocambeiro, district of the town of Pedro Leopoldo, Minas Gerais, with a Salute to the Kings, recorded on the 25 – 08 –1996 and part of the Cd “Congado Mineiro” already mentioned.

Today, many communities formed by descendants from freed and runaway slaves still practise this tradition. The ritual is highly hierarchical and involves going into the streets and visiting certain spaces such as the houses of the crowned Kings and Queens, churches etc. When they are in the streets, the groups move in the form of a cortège. The Moçambique carries the throne of the King and Queen and the Congo opens the cortege.

Here is the Congo from the community of Arturos with a song called “Tá Caindo Fulô” – “Flowers are Falling”

Track 3 - Tá Caindo Fulô

0 – 2.40

Tá Caindo Fulô- by the Congo of Arturos, sung by Maria do Rosário. Out on the CD number 4 of the collection “Música do Brasil” on Abril Entretenimento circa 2001.

The hierarchy of the cortege is similar in most groups. In some cases the Congo opens the cortege followed by the Moçambique. In other cases, such as in the town of Oliveira in the

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south of Minas Gerais the Guard or group opening the cortege is not the Congo but the Catupé (Brandão 1998). But it is still followed by the Moçambique. I asked Glaura Lucas about this processional hierarchy:

BD: We have established that the Moçambique follows the Congo. But you mentioned that the Moçambique moves slower. Does the hierarchy also dictate the pace of each group?

GL: Ok. As I told before, this has to do with the legend because the Moçambique attracted the saint by playing slow rhythms. When the Congo comes with their lively rhythms this dynamic is important for the cleansing of the space. So the Congo, because of this dynamic by which they move according to faster rhythms, they are called the “Broom” of the ritual, because they wipe out all the negative energies that maybe around. When the Moçambique comes, it has to come slowly, because this was the way that the wiser men, that belong to this group, played in order to attract the saint to the shore. So, this is also the way they walk and they dance and they play their rhythm to carry the Queens and Kings to take them along their way. They cannot move fast. So Whenever for any reason they speed up a little bit during their performance, they come with this song to remind them that they cannot move quickly.

And slowly the members of the Moçambique of the Arturos walk to the rhythm of “Se Deus me Tirasse Agora”. (If God Took me Away Now)

Note the sound of the Gungas after the first chorus. Gungas are small tin shakers tied up to the dancers ankles.

Track 4 “Se Deus me Tirasse Agora” (If God Took me Away Now)

0 – 2.13

That was The Moçambique of Arturos with the song “Se Deus me Tirasse Agora” (If God Took me Away Now), sung by José Batista da Silva, out on the CD number 3 of the collection Música do Brasil, Abril Entretenimento.

The festivities in honour of Our Lady of Rosário run from around the middle of August until the 7th of October, the day in which Our Lady of Rosário is commemorated in most communities. In the town of Ouro Preto, the old capital of Minas Gerais, during those festivities and especially on the 7th of October, Congados converge to the Church of Rosário with their drums and according to the caretaker of that church, Mr. Expedito Alves, they enter the Church playing their drums.¹ To understand the dynamics of these groups as religious entities I talked again to Glaura Lucas.

BD: In your book “Os Sons do Rosario”, the idea of an Afro-Brazilian playing drums in honour of catholic saints is seen as a “reinterpretation of Catholicism”. Could you tell us a bit about that idea?

GL: Yeah. The transformation or the introduction of Catholicism to the African began actually in Africa. Many Africans had already come to Brazil baptised as Catholics. We can talk about reinterpretation so that the Africans could see many things, many elements and symbols, and cosmologies that belonged to the Christian religion through their own worldview, through the way they involved with the world of the spirits and etc. So they incorporated some symbols and things, in the beginning at least, as though they were their own.

And here in Brazil, this was done in a context of slavery, of repression towards some original forms of devotion they had, that was repressed here, and they were gathering in brotherhoods

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of the Rosary and of course if they belonged to these brotherhoods they had to be first of all Catholics, although they were Catholics in their own way. But, also they had these processes of resistance also, because if anything, they wouldn't give up, they didn't want to give up. And the representatives of the powers they made their feasts and their festivals in honour of Our Lady of the Rosary, in which the slaves could take part and their participation would frequently involve many of the elements of their traditional ways of devotion and also they could include some institutions that were developed by them like the crowning of a King, the crowning of a Congo King. So, as they could take these own forms, like their music, their dance and crowning of a King to the official celebration in these feasts of Our Lady of the Rosary, they could keep many of their original ways of thinking and ways of feeling towards the other world within the official Catholic context. So, you know, they could continue their own ways of devotion within the official context.

Track 5 Marcha de Nossa Senhora do Rosário – March of Our Lady of the Rosary

0 – 1.30 >>>

Marcha de Nossa Senhora do Rosário (March of Our Lady of the Rosary) by the Congo Guard of Arturos, sung by Cássia Aparecida da Luz and out on CD 3 of the Música do Brasil collection, Abril Entretenimento.

The Congado has in its cosmology many common elements with other Afro-Brazilian traditions. One of these common elements is the act of the Coronation of an African King and because the brotherhoods were named after the African nation to which their members belonged to, one of the most popular was the coronation of the King of Congo due to the large numbers of Congolese Bantus present in Brazil.

Glaura Lucas had some thoughts on that issue.

GL: Yes. Many of these traditions were formed during the colonial periods in Brazil. According to new ways of creating and recreating the identities of the black people in a context of slavery and of any violence. Many groups of slaves created institutions according to the institutions they brought from Africa, which was the crowning of Congo Kings, of electing Kings, even though they did not have real power, political power, they had a kind of power within their community. So, this institution was spread out throughout many places where there had been slavery, not only in Brazil, but also in other countries of America and even in Portugal. And according to this institution many cultural manifestations and traditions survived. Congado is one of them. But there are others like for example Maracatu and Ticumbis that also involve the crowning of Congo Kings, Black Kings. Of course there are also some musical elements and forms of rhythms that are similar in these manifestations, but if you just listen to them, you can find similarities between them.

Here is the song Coroa Imperial (Imperial Crown) by the Maracatu Nação Pernambuco from the city of Recife in the NE of Brazil.

Track 6 – “Coroa Imperial” (Imperial Crown) by the Maracatu Nação Pernambuco

0 – 1.40 >>>

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“Coroa Imperial” (Imperial Crown) by the Maracatu Nação Pernambuco, sung by Abissal, recorded in 1992 and out on the CD Nação Pernambuco on the Brazilian label Velas.

The connection between the Congados and other Brazilian traditions with the Bantu people of the Congo is undeniable (Alvarenga 1945:91), (Fryer2000: 55). And it was by chance that I came across a song from the Congo, which had in its rhythm and feel, an uncanny similarity to the Congado, especially the Moçambique and to the Maracatu. I discovered that it was Court music, so I decided to ask the well-respected Congolese percussionist Koko Mukala, who is a member of the ensemble Master Drummers of Africa, about it. But first, here is the song:

Track 7 – Sanza and mirliton drum

0 – 2.25 >>>

Sanza and mirliton drum from the Court of the Mwaat Yav. Out on the Cd Musique du Zaire as part of the collection Musique du Monde on Buda records.

I caught up with Koko Mukala in the East end of London, on a very windy day:

BD: I am here with Koko Mukala...

We heard a track with music from the Court of Mwaat Yav

Koko Mukala: The people from Lunda. Music for the King. Or if a king, they transporting the King, going to see the event, that's if you hear that music it means the King, is coming.

BD: So they play this music when they are walking. They walk on that rhythm?

KM: They walk on that rhythm. So, you know, when you carrying the King you have to walk slowly, with dignity. You can't rush up because you are carrying him. There is no car, but you have to carry him from your shoulder. A lot of people there they are carrying the King with slow moving music and they are walking towards the event.

BD: So, whenever you hear that rhythm, it means they are carrying the King?

KM: Whenever you hear that music, if you are in the Lunda area that means they are carrying the King. The King is coming. So, everyone in that area have to be prepared to be aside of the road to greet the King.

BD: That drum that we heard does it have a name?

KM: Yes, the drum we call it Ditumba, Ditumba. Drum is the shape like a Djembe with a small hole at the side, which we put a little bit of plastic inside. At the top, also at the top of that drum they put a black of glue, and the black glue if you hit the drum, with that plastic at the side, it makes the sound of distortion. Bass and distortion at the same time.

BD: It makes it low? Low sound?

KM: Low sound. And if you want to tune it, you need to put a little bit of water inside the drum, shake it, take it out and then the drum will go high.

BD: We heard also some music from the Brazilian tradition of Congado. What do you think about that?

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KM: Yes, Congado their rhythms also are related with rhythms from the Congo rhythm. Is the same rhythm because the rhythm from Congo has travelled, this story about slavery over, and then that is why you hear that rhythm is related to the Congolese rhythm to. You see, all the rhythms from Africa you can find it in Brazil, you can find it in Cuba, you can find it in Colombia. Everywhere.

BD: `Cause we heard a thing called Candombe...

KM: Yes. Candombe... Ndombe, that means black person. Is coming from the Bacongo. So we have Bacongo in the region of Bandundu and Bacongo in the Bas- Zaire.

BD: The lower Zaire.

KM: The lower Zaire near by the sea. Ndombe means black person.

BD: One of the music there, they sing before they go out into the streets, for protection. The person that actually sings that, it is going to make their drum strong, “vou firmá a minha ingoma”. He calls the drum Ingoma ...

KM: Yes. All our drums in the Congo we call it Ngoma. So Ngoma is the name of all drums. But each specific drum has is got own name. Like here we got Ditumba... we also got Cangoma. Cangoma is the smallest one. It is like the Quinto.

BD: Ok, the Quinto in Cuba?

KM: In Cuba. They called Cangoma. Is got high pitch.

BD: So Ngoma is the general name for all drums

KM: For all drums

BD: Well, thank you very much, Koko.

KM: You are welcome.

We will now hear a song called Engoma, by the Moçambique de Nossa Senhora do Rosário

Track 8 Engoma (Fade in on the beginning is part of original recording)

0 – 0.55 >>>

Engoma, by the Moçambique de Nossa Senhora do Rosário from the town of Oliveira, Minas Gerais, recorded in September 1986 & 1987 during the festival of the Rosário. Sang by Captain Tião Ataíde, out on the Cd “Os Negros do Rosário” (The Blacks of the Rosary), Lapa records 1999.

Many popular artists, especially those with a Minas Gerais connection, are using the Congado as a source of material, either by directly adapting songs or rhythms from the ritual or simply as inspiration. Here is a song by the duo Rosana & Zélia, two musicians who come from Minas Gerais but are established in Germany. In this song not only they use the feel of

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Congado, but also introduce, as incidental music, half way through the song, a street recording of a Moçambique.

Track 9 – Coisário de Imagens (Trunk of Images)

<<< 1.00 – 2.30 >>>

That was “Coisário de Imagens” by Rosana & Zélia, sang by Rosana Tavares, incidental music by the Moçambique de Nossa Senhora das Mercês from Oliveira, Minas Gerais. Out in the CD “Coisário”, Peregrina Music, 1999.

I asked Glaura Lucas what impact this interest from popular artists towards Congado, was having in the communities and this is what she said:

GL: There was really an increasing interest towards the elements of this tradition in many areas, not only these popular musicians but from many parts of society. And this, of course, interferes in their rituals... on one hand they feel that they have been given the proper value, which is a thing that they never had along their history, it is always a history of discrimination and racism, etc. This was a positive interest, a positive impact in the community. On the other hand, other artists take the complete songs or rhythms and just make arrangements and present it in shows and make CDs and etc. and this is not always felt as being positive, by the communities. Of course, this also is variable from one community to other. But generally, the “Congadeiros” or this groups that play the Congado don’t like when their music is being used in other purposes than the ritual ones. So, they tried to keep their songs, which they see as being sacred, away from these movements. They tried to resist the commercialisation of their sacred repertoire.

In spite of their wishes to preserve sacred songs and rhythms, the Congado communities suffer influences from other sections of the larger Brazilian society to which they belong, as any dynamic cultural manifestation does. These changes happen more often in groups other than the Moçambique. Congos and Catupés are seen as more adaptable. In some communities they might use guitars or accordions. Glaura Lucas said this about these changes:

GL: The Moçambique is much more homogeneous group. Wherever you find a Moçambique, you will find much the same elements. Like the instruments they use, the kind of clothes they wear, the kind of rhythms they play... but when you find Congos you have different kinds of Congos, because they are more flexible and variable. So, there some rhythms that you find in many Congos throughout the State, but others are specific. And when you leave this area and meet other groups in the State, you will find increasing differences between them. Even with the feelings towards the instruments, for example. In this two brotherhoods I’ve worked with, Arturos and Jatobá, the instruments and the music are considered sacred, they cannot be played in other circumstances, and this doesn’t happen in other groups for example, where they have industrialized instruments and don’t keep the same feelings towards the instruments as these more traditional brotherhoods do. So, we find really sometimes they are more superficial differences but sometimes there are little deeper differences among them.

Here we have a Catupé that uses an accordion in the song “ A Volta do Mundo é Grande” (The World has a Big Turn)

Track 10 A Volta do Mundo é Grande

< 2 – 1.35 >>>

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“A Volta do Mundo é Grande” by the Catupé de Nossa Senhora do Rosário, recorded in September 1986\87 in Oliveira and out on the CD “Negros do Rosário”.

Another important change that is occurring is that of the role of women inside the rituals. I asked Glaura Lucas about it.

BD: Glaura, I have come across some female “Guards”, which are the groups that honour the saints. Is this a recent phenomenon? How do you see the role of women inside the Congado?

GL: Especially the groups, which I worked with, they, are traditional ones. They tend not to accept the women. The acceptance of women in the ritual space is slow. But since the most important Captains in these two brotherhoods died, the women could involve more in the ritual itself, which means they could take part in the guards. So, it is in the Congo that these changes are happening also. In Arturos women and men take part in the Congo group and in Jatobá they created a Female Guard because they didn’t allow the women to take part in the Male Congo. But it is interesting because the older Captains they don’t consider this Female Guard so much powerful as the other one. So, now they say that the women bring beauty to the feast, but they don’t consider it really something deeply spiritual, in the spiritual sense of the groups. But not so much in Arturos, because they work together in the same Congo. Now in Arturos, women have been also baptised recently as Captains. The first Captains, women Captains were baptised there last year. In this area, in other cities of Minas Gerais, there many Guards where women take part including Moçambique. So, it depends really on each place and what things, the history, the memory they have, the history each community has to define these changes that have been going on towards the participation of women within the guards.

Track 11 Guarda de Congo Feminina Nossa Senhora do Rosário

0 – 1.16 >>>

That was the Guarda de Congo Feminina Nossa Senhora do Rosário, on the CD “Tambor Grande” (The Great Drum), recorded in Belo Horizonte in 2001, financed by the State Government and the Foundation Belgo-Mineira.

The ethnomusicologist Suzel Reily once said that, “The media of music and dance performance constitute efficient mnemonic devices for the preservation of hidden social memory”(Reily, 2001:6). This incredibly powerful tradition, with its slow moving King and its low and powerful drumming, which was born out of the necessity of African slaves in Brazil to find new identities, to be accepted by the ruling society and at the same time to keep values and institutions from their original culture, lives on in the vitality of the young generation of those communities.

Track 12 Congo de Maria Amada

O – 5 >> - 12 >> -

I leave you the voice of the future in the form of the Congo Infantil da Irmandade do Rosário in Justinópolis (The Children’s Congo from the Brotherhood of Rosário in Justinópolis) singing and playing “Congo de Maria Amada”, recorded in April 2000 and out on the CD Canções do Brasil (Songs from Brazil) from Palavra Cantada.

23 <<< - 2.07

THE END

ⁱ Personal communication 2004