

THE “CAVAQUINHO” IN BRAZIL

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THE “CAVAQUINHO” – STUDY ON THE DISSEMINATION OF A POPULAR INSTRUMENT. 1965

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Travelling through the greater part of the Brazilian states has helped us to compile plenty of elements regarding the *cavaquinho*. Nowhere else in the world has this instrument been disseminated or popularized as in Brazil. We have had the opportunity of encountering countless times with *cavaquinho* players. We came across the lone player who on a train or fête plays for himself; the group player accompanying the guitar and strumming in the Portuguese fashion; and finally, the city concert player, *virtuoso*, celebrated, who attracts crowds and earns what he likes. Among the latter, Waldyr Azevedo stands out as the musician who has probably earned most from the sale of records lately¹. But in this case, and although the instrument is the same, the use of a pick gave him new possibilities and the artist has more resources to get new effects and variations than the popular musician. Thus, from a rhythmic and harmonic instrument, the *cavaquinho* has been transformed into a melodic instrument.

Herewith we have assembled a review of all the elements regarding the *cavaquinho* which we have managed to compile from the Brazilian bibliography in order to reach some provisional conclusions regarding this curious dissemination case.

1) PORTUGUESE HERITAGE

Oneyda Alvarenga says: «Since it was through the Portuguese colonization that Brazil came to be as a nation and was governed for over three centuries by Portugal; since the other two races which mostly contributed to the making of the Brazilian man suffered predominance and influence of the ‘white man’, it is natural that the Portuguese had the main part in the making of our music. In fact, not only did we inherit forms and structural peculiarities of Portuguese music, traditional song of Portugal, poetic texts (mainly the majority of quatrains, predominant form of Brazilian poetry), dances, full dramatic-dances or the nucleus of several of them, as it was also through Portugal that we received from Europe the basis of our own music: the harmonic-tone system, the square melody. And also all the sound producing instruments, and not only rhythmic sounds such as those of the American-Indian and the Negro, among which stand out, due to their very constant presence in our instrumental, accompanying or pure music, the *violão* (six single strings guitar), the *viola* (five double strings guitar), the *cavaquinho*, the violin, the cello, the *sanfona* (type of accordion), the flute, the clarinet, the ophicleide (type of tuba), the piano»².

Mário de Andrade is of the opinion that «The Portuguese influence was the vastest of all. The Portuguese fixed our harmonic tone; gave us strophic squareness; probably the syncopation we developed in contact with the African rhythmic “pererequice”; the European instruments, the guitar (*violão*), the Portuguese guitar (six double strings guitar), the *cavaquinho*, the flute, the ophicleide, the piano, the bows group; a flood of texts; poetic-lyrical forms such as the Children’s Circle; Iberian dances such as the *fandango*: dramatic dances such as *Reisados*, *Pastoris*, *Marujada*, *Chegança* which at times are true plays. Also from Portugal came the primitive origin of the more national dramatic dance, the *Bumba-meu-boi*.

And in various traditional or modern popular songs from Brazil, even now appear Portuguese

¹ Information provided by Ms. Henriqueta Rosa Fernandes Braga, Teacher at the Conservatório Nacional de Música do Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro National Music Conservatory). Already in the 19th century there had been in Rio a celebrated *cavaquinho* player named Joaquim Manuel [Enciclopédia Universal (Universal Encyclopaedia), Espasa, Vol. 12, «cavaquinho»].

² Oneyda Alvarenga. *Música Popular Brasileira* (Brazilian Popular Music). Ed. Globo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, S. Paulo, 1950, p. 25.

melodic arabesques, sometimes in their pure form, sometimes deformed»³.

Renato Almeida claims: "The *cavaquinho* is Portuguese, nationalized by our *seareiros* (men from the fields). Instrument of the *modinha* (mode) and *samba*, it has never gone beyond its limits, valued in the conventionally rogue *carioca* (from Rio de Janeiro) groups of music"⁴

2) DESCRIPTION AND TUNING

According to Oneyda Alvarenga : «The *cavaquinho* is a string instrument, smaller than the Portuguese guitar. European origin (Portugal). It has four metal strings with the following tuning: D-G-B-D»⁵.

Renato Almeida says: «The *cavaquinho*, a small four-string guitar: D-G-B-D, it is also very popular and is a compulsory part of choirs. Type of *cavaquinho* is the *machete* or *machim*»⁶. According to Luís da Câmara Cascudo, the *cavaquinho*, also bearing this name in Portugal, originated in Madeira where it is named *braguinha*. «The *braguinha* has 17 frets⁷, is 51 cm long, with four gut strings, sometimes the first string is of naked steel, tuning on the second inversion chord of G major. This tuning history is not dogma. Ours is diverse and changes from state to state.»⁸

3) PARTICIPATION

Here are the opinions of the following authors:

a) In regional groups:

Renato Almeida: «There are many typical groups of which the most important is the *choro*. They depend strongly on the merrymaking, but in general the *violão*, the flute, the *cavaquinho* and the *sanfona* are present... «In Rio's *samba* schools, besides percussion instruments there is the *violão*, *cavaquinho* and mandolin»⁹.

Mariza Lira: «The North, that fiery North of cotton, sugar cane, cocoa, *babassu* palm and so many other riches, provided us with the *embolada* (generally a pair of singers who improvise metric, quick verses where they tarnish the each other's images and resort to swearing and insulting).

Mischievous, restless music of a bouncy melodic line; unexpected, a plummet of sentences in progression; of a lovely cleverness. It invokes without any similarities, the Italian toccatas and sonatas of the 18th century.

The variations are countless and display a succession of many and varied arabesques of always downward melodic sentences. The poetry is generally in *décimas* (ten-line stanzas). Their charm is enhanced by our regional groups, the flute, the clarinet, the *cavaquinho*, the harmonica, the ophicleide, the *pandeiro* (type of tambourine), a *cuica*, o *reco-reco*, a *rabeca* (violin), and the *harmónica* from Sertão which is also called *sanfona* and in the south it is called *cordeona*.

Catulo Cearense, in *Bras-Macacão*, describes a group from Sertão with its precious simplicity which is its great charm:

«Rabeca, Flauta, pândero,
Crarineta, violão
Um bandão de cavaquinho
Um ofiscreide, um gaitero
Que era um cabra mesmo bão»¹⁰.

Fausto Teixeira: «We all recognise the great Brazilian romanticism, especially that of our

³ Mário de Andrade. *Pequena História da Música* (Short History of Music). Livraria Martins, S. Paulo, 1942, p. 148.

⁴ Renato Almeida. *História da Música Brasileira* (History of Brazilian Music). Ed. F. Briguete Comp. Rio de Janeiro, 1942, p. 310, (footnote)

⁵ Oneyda Alvarenga. Op. cit., p. 307

⁶ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 114.

⁷ The Portuguese *cavaquinhos* of this size we have measured only have 12 frets,

⁸ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 310 (footnote).

⁹ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁰ Mariza Lira. *Brasil Sonoro*. Editora, S. A. A Noite, Rio de Janeiro, n.d., p. 111.

caipira who pours out his sentimentality in his guitar «modas».

As they are unknowledgeable on metric rules, or even of the simple syntax rules, their verses faithfully represent the language of their thoughts, pure and clear, without any vernacular modifying influence.

The motifs representing the verses are almost always the authors' personal reasons, as with most poets. They interpret their own thoughts and sometimes regional feelings.

They sing about their unhappy love stories, their native lands, facts related to life itself, humorous criticisms, romantic stories of their regions.

Their favourite music is the *toada* (a repetitive tune) – a monotonous guitar beat, slow, rhythmic, almost always sad.

When the guitar player does not sing alone, his companions with a *cavaquinho* and *reco-reco* (a dented bamboo stick over which another small stick slides over in a rhythmic movement), perform the entire accompaniment.

Only those who have had the opportunity of witnessing an evening of singing know how interesting it is to appreciate the whole peculiar way the singers spin the list of guitar songs they know»¹¹

b) *In choro*

Renato Almeida : «*Choro* is a name applied generally. It may name a set of instruments, generally flute, ophicleide, mandolin, *violão*, *cavaquinho*, *pistão* (trumpet) and trombone, each of them doing solos. By extension, *choro* is also the name given to the music played by these groups of instruments which ended up by taking their own, characteristic feature. Lastly, *choro* is also the name given to some popular dances, also known as *assustado* (literally "scared") or *arrasta-pé* (literally "foot dragging")¹².

Oneyda Alvarenga : «*choro* is, in its general meaning, an instrumental group made up almost always of a soloist and a set of accompanying instruments. Due to the Portuguese-Brazilian custom of using and abusing diminutives, it is also named *chorinho*. In these groups, whether they have a soloist or not, wind instruments predominate (flute, clarinet, ophicleide, saxophone), *violão* and *cavaquinho*»¹³.

Luciano Gallet : «*Choro* is the name given to small popular groups with instruments of European and African origin and which, in diverse circumstances, play for dancing (European origin dances) or just for listening. In these cases intervenes the virtuosity of one of the performers.

Synonymously, *choro* also designates «execution».

A *seresta* (serenade) is a *choro*, with the same instrumental formation or a different one which accompanies the solo popular singer.

In the «Brazilian *choro*» there are blatant approaches to American jazz.

1st – The same instrumental formation:

Jazz: clarinet, saxophone, trombone, banjo, percussion and song.

Choro: clarinet, ophicleide, flute, trombone, *cavaquinho*, percussion and song.

2nd – The same composing process:

Free improvisation (counterpoint) around a theme, featuring our *decantado* «contracanto» (type of back vocals) of such Brazilian flavour.

3rd – The rhythmic forms of the Brazilian and American Negroes are also similar.

4th – However, the Brazilian Negro, or mulatto holds melodic supremacy due to his expressive Latin influence.

It should be recalled that the *choro* and the *seresta* were common in Brazil when the influence of jazz had not yet been known»¹⁴.

Mariza Lira: «*Choro* was launched among us by the negroes and mulattos from the days of slavery.

At first *choro* was the set of *violões*, *cavaquinhos*, flutes, *pandeiros*, etc., which jollied the

¹¹ Fausto Teixeira. Estudos de Folklore (Folklore Studies), Movimento Editorial Panorama, Belo Horizonte, Minas, 1949, p. 75.

¹² Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 112.

¹³ Oneyda Alvarenga. Op. cit., p. 299

¹⁴ Luciano Gallet. Estudos de Folklore (Folklore Studies). Carlos Wehrs & C ". Editores, Rio de Janeiro, 1934, p. 62

gatherings of simple people»¹⁵.

c) *In samba*

Renato Almeida: «*Batuque* (drumming) is impressive due to its monotonous rhythm marked by percussion instruments, the clapping of hands and stamping of feet...» «The *batuque* also has the general meaning of Afro-Brazilian circle dances, as a synonym of *samba*...» «As instruments, drums, *puíta* (*Cuica*), rattles, tambourines (*pandeiros*) and other percussion instruments. At times, the guitar and *cavaquinho* also»¹⁶.

Luciano Gallet: «Instruments used in *samba*:

1 singer, 1 guitar, 1 *cavaquinho*, 1 tambourine (*pandeiro*). The singer and players do not dance. They are separate»¹⁷.

Mariza Lira: «Formerly, *samba* was ingenuous, pure, alive, it cried to the sound of the *violão*, the *cavaquinho*, the flute and at times *pandeiros* which set the beat and the woings.

Today, *samba* vibrates, dizzies, raves with the *violões*, flutes, *cavaquinhos*, *reco-reco*, *ganzás*, *pandeiros*, *cuicas* or *omelês* and rattles»¹⁸.

Guilherme Teodoro Pereira de Melo: «The *samba*, which in Rio de Janeiro was named *chiba*, in the State of Minas *caterete* and in the southern States *fandango*, is a *roça* (plantation) dance in the open air in which the *violão*, the wire guitar, and the *cavaquinho* are the instruments, the sound of which the singing and tapping to the clapping of hands, cymbals and *pandeiros* follow»¹⁹.

Renato Almeida; «In Baía, where the Negro influence is stronger, *samba* has many variations. Several of them are: *samba batido*, *corrido e chulado*, *batê-baú*, *bole-bole*, *samba de chave*, *vamos peneirar*, *corta-jaca*, *separa-o-visgo*, *apanha-o-bago* and the *samba do partido alto*. These are some of the many variations of the *samba de roda*, characterised by the fact that there is no dancing whilst the verses are being sung...» «The instruments are *violões*, *cavaquinhos*, flutes, tambourines, serving plates, knives and hand clapping»²⁰. «In the instrumental *samba* the *violão*, mandolin and *cavaquinho* also take part»²¹.

d) *In bailes pastoris* (pastoral dances)

Renato Almeida : «Pastoral dances and pastorals are generally fêtes stemming from the Portuguese *janeiras* (January fêtes) which take place between Christmas Day and Epiphany. They are small dramatic plays with singing and dancing performed only by girls in front of Nativity cribs...» «... In those which I attended the singing was accompanied by *violão*, mandolin, *cavaquinho*, clarinet and tambourines»²².

«Pastorals in Brazil arrived with the Jesuits and since the 16th century we have known about them...» «They were never popular in the strict sense of the word, nor did the people take them over as their own. They were always part of society, 'except in Pernambuco, where there used to be or there still are popular pastorals, balls held in stately mansions». «...The accompaniment was with *violão*, mandolin, flute, clarinet and *cavaquinho*. The shepherdesses play tambourines or castanets. The singing is always very strident and nasal which makes it difficult to understand the lyrics»²³.

Oneyda Alvarenga: «Pastoral dances were in truth profane plays, short comedies on various subjects to which Christmas was only a pretext...» «Not only the names of the musicians have been lost, the music also has been lost». «Of the instrumental accompaniment, I have only found reference in Melo Morais Filho, who mentions, besides tambourines and castanets, possibly played by the actors: the flute and string quartet; *violões*, guitars, flutes;

¹⁵ Mariza Lira. Op. cit., p. 305.

¹⁶ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., pp. 158/9.

¹⁷ Luciano Gallet. Op. cit., p. 78.

¹⁸ Mariza Lira. Op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁹ Guilherme Theodoro Pereira de Mello. *A Música no Brasil* (Music in Brazil). Tipografia de S. Joaquim, Bahia, 1908, p.31.

²⁰ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 163.

²¹ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 192.

²² Renato Almeida. Op. cit., pp. 225/6

²³ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., pp. 228 e 231.

violins, flutes; violins, *violões*, flutes, guitars, *cavaquinhos*, ophicleide»²⁴.

e) *In ranchos (folk dance groups)*

Renato Almeida: «The folk dance group is distinguished by the variety of their colourful clothing, with tinsel and sequins, its music stems from the *violão*, guitar, *cavaquinho*, *canzá*, cymbals and at times the flute; the shepherds and shepherdesses sing *chulas* appropriate to the occasion along the street: the characters vary and wear different colours according to the animal, plant or even inanimate object that the shepherds carry to the Lapinha (literally a grotto similar to the one where Jesus was born)»²⁵.

Guilherme Teodoro Pereira de Melo : «The common people who only have fun dancing the *samba* and who in colonial times were more in contact with Africans than with Europeans, decided that the shepherds were not the only ones who should pay tribute to the Messiah but also animals, thus forming folk groups of the Ox, the Horse, the Goat, the Alligator, the Lizard, etc. and on they went in these forms to the Lapinha to worship the child God to the sound of the flute, the tambourine, the *cavaquinho*, the guitar and the *ganzá*»²⁶.

f) *In chula*

Oneyda Aivarenga : «The *chula* is a dance and a type of song of Portuguese origin. As a song it was already referred to in 16th century Portugal; in Brazil its existence as a dance is documented at least from the beginning of the 19th century...».

«As a dance it seems that the *chula* has totally fallen into disuse and as a song it is already a rarity. In this form it still remains in Amazonia and the Nordeste (north east region of Brazil) and in Amazonia the word seems to have the general meaning of the song...» «The *chula* song is accompanied by *violões*. In the dance, according to various references, the *violão*, *cavaquinho*, guitar, tambourine, castanets or imitation of their sound with the fingers are used. Only one author includes the *ganzá* and one other the *caxambu*»²⁷.

Manuel Quirino: «To the singing of *chulas*, the dark girls danced the *miudinho*, the *corta-jaca* and generally melodious and bold *sambas*, accompanied by the *violão*, flute, *cavaquinho*, guitar, *ganzá* and hand clapping»²⁸.

g) *In chegada de marujos*

Oneyda Alvarenga : «Melo Morais Filho refers for *chegança de marujos*, the use of guitars, *violões*, *cavaquinhos*, *pistão*, *rabeca*, flute or clarinet, or also *música-de-barbeiro* (literally barber music); for both types of *cheganças*, he mentions *flautins botija* (bottle piccolo flute), guitars, rattles, drums, bagpipes, besides some others which unexpectedly join them and the whole set is reinforced in the Moorish *chegança* by metals and boxes of war»²⁹.

h) *In cateretê*

Luciano Gallet: «Instruments used in *Cateretê*: - Indispensable - either 3 guitars, 2 or 3 tambourines (rustic *pandeiro*, probably without any cymbals). *Ad libitum*, if available, 1 *cavaquinho* and 1 *rabeca* (violin)»³⁰.

i) *In bumba-meu-boi*

Oneyda Alvarenga : «In *bumba-meu-boi* only the human figures sing. The instrumental accompaniment is performed by small groups which feature the *violão*, guitar, *cavaquinho*, drum, *pandeiro*, *ganzá*, *maracá*, *sanfona*, harmonica, piccolo flute, clarinet and violin. These

²⁴ Oneyda Alvarenga. Op. cit., pp. 80/81.

²⁵ Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 238.

²⁶ Guilherme Theodoro Pereira de Mello. Op. cit., pp. 36/37.

²⁷ Oneyda Alvarenga. Op. cit., pp. 158/9, 161.

²⁸ Manuel Quirino. A Bahia de outrora (The former Bahia), pp. 127/ 8.

²⁹ Oneyda Alvarenga. Op. Cit. p. 75.

³⁰ Luciano Gallet. Op. cit., p. 68.

instruments join in various combinations from a large group, such as that with the guitar, *violão*, clarinet, *sanfona*, *zabumba* and *pandeiro* to the simple rhythmic reinforcement of the *ganzá* and *zabumba* »³¹.

4) INFLUENCE OF THE *CAVAQUINHO* IN THE MUSIC FOR PIANO BY ERNESTO NAZARETH

Renato Almeida: «In Brazilian music, Ernesto Nazareth has a relevant role due to his vast contribution, leaving us work which is not only full of beautiful and delightful things but also because it is a true field of musical experimenting. Nobody better than him gave us, in music, that *decantado carioca* spirit, scathing, saucy, carefree and mocking, avoiding the constant sadness of Brazil. If the latter appears in his tangos, in rare sentimental notes, it gives immediate place to malice. The whole essence of *lunduns*, *tangos*, polkas, *choros*, waltzes and *maxixes*, with their melodious processes, their particular and variable rhythms, and their great instrumental resources is present in Nazareth's work, vitalized and developed by the fantasy of this admirable musician...».

«He took advantage with rare mastery of the sounds of various popular instruments such as the *violão*, the flute and the *cavaquinho* and transposed them to the piano with surprising effect...»³².

³¹ Oneyda Alvarenga. Op. cit., p. 44.

³² Renato Almeida. Op. cit., p. 445.