

MUSIC IN BAHIA'S CAPOEIRA ANGOLA

RICARDO PAMFILIO DE SOUSA

CAPOEIRA IS MORE THAN JUST A SPORT TO WHICH MUSIC IS INDISPENSABLE. IT IS ALSO A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE, ROOTED IN FUNDAMENTALS THAT SPEAK OF FREEDOM AND KNOWING ONE-SELF. CAPOEIRISTAS (PRACTITIONERS) ARE ALSO MUSICIANS, FOR THEY SING AND PLAY THE BERIMBAU (MUSICAL BOW), WOVEN RATTLE (CAXIXI), TAMBOURINE, MUSICAL BELLS, CONGA DRUM AND SCRATCHER (RECO-RECO). THE MELODIES CAN BE RHYMING PROSE, OR SONGS WITH OR WITHOUT REFRAINS. COLORFUL NAMES LIKE SAMBA-DE-RODA¹, CORRIDO², LADAINHA, CHULA³, ORAÇÕES AND BENDIÇÕES, DESCRIBE THE INTERPLAY OF VOICES THAT GO WITH THE INTERPLAY OF MOVEMENT⁴ BY PARTICIPANTS IN A CAPOEIRA CIRCLE BOUT AND CEREMONY.



CART3E

(1) Editor's Note: The *samba-de-roda* is the samba originated in Bahia.

(2) Editor's Note: The *corrido* is a short song with overlapping call and answer, sung in *capoeira rodas*.

(3) Editor's Note: The *chula* is a song form based on the *quadra* and had its origin in Portugal.

(4) The alternation, interplay or physical dialog between participants in a bout, *negacear*, is what happens when one comes in and the other moves back, the alternation between attacking and defensive moves. "Capoeira is defense, attack, handling yourself, and a rascal's skills."

The music is played specifically for capoeira circle ceremonies. It serves to teach and guide the contestants, and follows an order of rank created by capoeiristas. Added to the various rhythms and melodies are the lyrics of the songs.

The instrumental sounds of the *bateria* (which is what the band is called) reflect the types of instruments used: the *berimbau* is a twanged cordophone, the tambourine and conga drums membranophones, and agogô bells, scratcher and *caxixi* are all idiophones. Some academies or associations even use a whistle (i.e. an aerophone or blowophone).

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The *berimbau* is usually in the “master” position. The player summons the contestants to the foot of the *berimbau*, and gives instructions on the basics of the art. A number of songs have been created or re-created recently, but the traditional songs are also always played, as they were introduced by mestres such as Pastinha, Noronha and Bimba. The most striking instrument in a capoeira band is the *berimbau*, in its three types, bass, midrange and tenor (*gunga*, *médio* and *viola*), also called *berra boi*, *contra-gunga* and *viola* and other names. The fascinating thing is how these instruments harmonize in rhythm and melody, alternating and varying their sounds, much like the techniques in a capoeira bout.

Many different *corridos* can be played during these bouts, depending on the skill of the lead singer. Some of them have a special meaning; for instance, some are intended to step up the pace – *Ai ai ai ai, São Bento is calling me.*⁵ Others encourage a wider range of techniques: *Oi, you're scared, take heart, or O a o aí gonna make my move wanna see him fall.* Some songs urge the players to slow the pace: *Slower slower, slow and easy*, or suggest floor techniques: *O Bujão, o Bujão, o Bujão Capoeira de Angola rolls on the ground* (a *bujão* is a propane bottle, easier to roll than lift). Still others urge nicer style: *Ai ai aidê, let me see some skillful play*, and so on. Lively *corridos* are the only songs played during capoeira Angola

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(5) The underlined lyrics are the replies the chorus sings out to the leader.



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bouts. No one competes during the *ladainha* or *chula*. The dance-fighting consists of moves and countermoves, each player dodging one blow then aiming another.

There is a passage called a *chamada*, where one player beckons the other close. This could be an act of recognition or a demonstration of grasp, a way of getting out of a tight spot or simply a break, to catch your breath. The *angoleiro* so summoned reports to the spot at the foot of the *berimbau*, where the bout began, then moves toward the one initiating the *chamada*. What follows resembles a striding dance, almost like a tango, sometimes close, other times at arm's-length and stepping lightly. The initiator ends the *chamada* with a gesture inviting the partner to resume the bout. Techniques for this are very individual, with limits established during the bout. Another such passage is the circle "around the world,"⁶ also a chance for a sly trick or to show grasp, or simply to catch your breath. *Angoleiros*, however, will resort to trickery, cunning and deceit to trip up a distracted partner.

The music played by the *berimbaus* during a circle ceremony increases tempo to a maximum, cuts back, then again increases to the finish. Toward the end of a bout, the lyrics foreshadow a halt, or that a player will be replaced. Even the *berimbau* player can use the song to bow out. Now and again a *mestre* or advanced student

will shout out *Yea*, at the start of a *ladainha* or several times during a *chula*, during *corridos*, or to interrupt or end a bout.

Adeus Corina dam dam
Dam daram daram
Dam dam

I am leaving
I am leaving
I am headed for Angola

Just a half-hour
Half an hour

Leaving now cutie
I'm going away now
I'm leaving now cutie

laiá let's go
One time around

The time has come

Goodbye goodbye
Bon voyage –

Even today, most capoeiristas are men and boys, though *angoleiros* place no restrictions on women – quite the contrary – women come up often in the lyrics to the songs.

(6) In Capoeira Angola, to go "around the world" is to stroll in a circle within the circle. Players may hold hands – which can be risky, for it leaves you vulnerable to attack moves, including being pulled by the hand.

Capoeira is for boys, men and women

Yeah, yeah for men and women

Nhêco, nhêco Salomé

*Everyone escorts you
for your name is Salomé
Salomé, Salomé*

*Dona Maria do Cambuotá
At the market she says what to do
Dona Maria do Cambuotá
Enters the circle, playing too*

Eh ê ê Salomé

Women do defeat the men

Adão, Adão, where's Salomé Adão

Where's Salomé Adão

She took a trip to the island

How do you do

Dona Maria how do you do

How have you been, how are you

A capoeira circle ceremony generally lasts an hour or two. Events at most of these circles may be summed up as follows:

- 1st - *Berimbaus* are strung and tuned, and all instruments brought to where the band is going to play.
- 2nd - The *roda* starts to take shape, with the first players flanking the instrument section, and the last players facing the musicians on the opposite side of the circle.
- 3rd - At this stage (especially when no demonstration is staged for the public), some capoeira fundamentals are gone over.
- 4th - Check tuning and harmony among musicians.⁷
- 5th - The music begins. Typically the *gunga* starts playing *Angola*, followed by the *médio* with *São Bento Grande* and the *viola* joins in with one or the other (those being names for traditional rhythms played for capoeira angola).
- 6th - The tambourines start to play.
- 7th - Two *angoleiros*, alive with *mandinga*,⁸ squat before the *berimbau*.
- 8th - Singing begins with the *ladainha*.
- 9th - The next song is the *chula*, with chorus replies, and other instruments, the *atabaque*, *agogô* and *reco-reco* join in.
- 10th - The entering song begins, followed by the first *corrido*, which is the signal to begin the bout. The alto *viola* begins jamming (improv), and playing lead rather than rhythm. Rhythm is played mainly on the *gunga*, while the *médio* plays counterpoint to the *gunga* or follows its

(7) This fourth item may be done third, or be skipped altogether.

(8) *Mandinga* in this case is expressed by the *angoleiro*'s gestures, such as when playing the *berimbau*, or making, for instance, the sign of the cross or star of Solomon

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rhythm. Both are free to improvise on the tunes during play.

- 11th - At the foot of the *berimbau*, the two contestants shake hands, then make their first move into the circle, usually a fall on the kidneys (*queda de rim*). Toe-to-toe combat then begins, never touching, with a great many moves such as dodging “negativas” and spinning “rabo-de-arraias”
- 12th - Throughout all of this, under the watchful eye of the *mestre*, corrections and suggestions are made by changing the song lyrics, or through a *chamada* by the *berimbau* player, calling a contestant up close for advice.
- 13th - The bout switches players whenever the *mestre* does a *chamada*, or when a contestant bows out of the match. After clasping hands before the *berimbau*, the bout is then resumed and the player who was replaced rejoins the chorus or takes up an instrument.
- 14th - During a *roda* there are always at least two *ladainhas*, and no more than six.
- 15th - To wind things up they sing: *Adeus, adeus, boa viagem*. The musicians stand, keep singing, turn right, and stroll in a circle counterclockwise back to their starting point (*volta ao mundo*).

- 16th - After about two minutes of that goodbye song, a *mestre* or one of the *berimbau* players might holler *Yea*, thus ending the capoeira Angola *roda*. During circle practice a player will “cut in” (*comprar*) the bout, thereby relieving one of the two contestants while lighting into the other.

Artist and capoeirista Carybé, who still practices it, described the capoeira music played in Bahia in 1951 as follows:

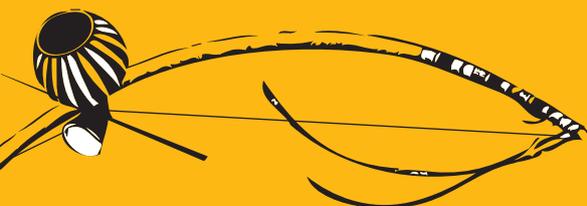
Bahia made a lot of contributions to the music, by adding the tambourine, caxixi and reco-reco to replace clapping hands, along with the steel-string belly berimbau, an instrument with better



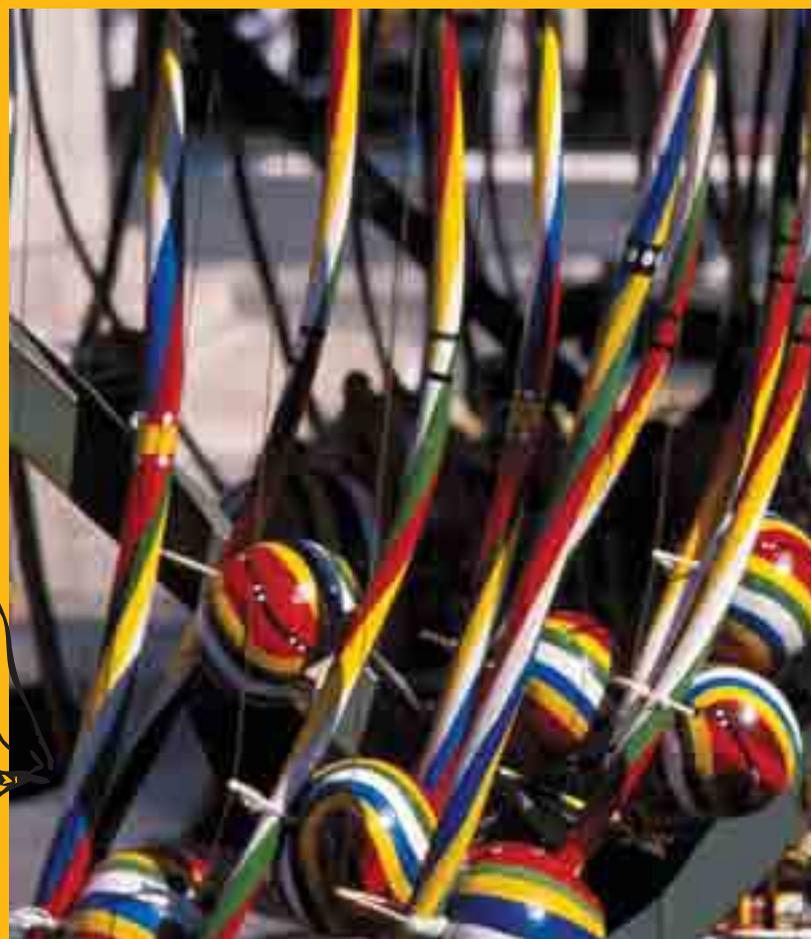
Toward the end of a bout, the lyrics foreshadow a halt, or that a player will be replaced. Even the *berimbau* player can use the song to bow out.

range and more versatile features than a Jew's harp. Bahia came up with songs and provided rules for play, beginning with the basic *chulas* written by the master himself: *Sinhazinha que vende aí?/ Vendo arroz do Maranhão./ Meu Sinhô mandô vendê./ Na terra de Salomão./* the chorus answers: *ê, ê Aruandê Camarado/ Galo cantô/ ê, ê galo cantô Camarado/ Cocôrocô/ ê, ê cocôrocô Camarado/ Goma de engomá/ ê, ê goma de engomá Camarado/ Ferro de matá/ ê, ê ferro de matá Camarado/ É faca de ponta/ ê, ê faca de ponta Camarado/ Vamos embora/ ê, ê vamos embora Camarado/ Pro mundo afóra/ ê, ê pro mundo afora Camarado/ Dá volta ao mundo/ ê, ê dá volta ao mundo Camarado.* The ones going into the fight squat there in front of the *berimbau* and listen to these homespun songs, maybe saying their "strong prayers" to turn aside bullets, ambushes or knives; they roll their bodies into the circle over elbows and hands, and start the basic *ginga* movement, which is both a defense and a dance step all rolled into one.

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CARYBE



What Carybé calls the *chula de fundamento* or basic *chula*, most people in capoeira angola call a "*ladainha*," while some other *angoleiros* and most regional capoeira players think of it as a "*quadra*." The part that comes after

a *chula* always features the chorus response, that is, the entering song. Carybé leaves out the lead singer's call, and the chorus goes straight to the response. The word "camarado," as spelled in the quote, probably has more to do with the way they pronounced "câmara." His writings make no reference to *corridos*. There are other sources that cite musical repertoires with their corresponding definitions and meanings.

Regional capoeira, created by Mestre Bimba, had – especially back then – more points in common with than differences from capoeira Angola. That much is clear in this 1940s report by Ramagem Badaró (1980: 47-50):

"What shall we play? São Bento Grande Repicado, Santa Maria, Ave Maria, Banguela, Cavalaria, Calambolô, Tira-de-lá-bota-cá, Idalina or Conceição da Praia?" Bimba thought for a minute and said: "Play Amazonas, then Banguela." The berimbaus start to play and a native son comes up to Mestre Bimba and clasps his hand. Everyone clapped hands in tune with the twanging of the berimbaus, as Bimba, rocking back and forth, sang: "No dia que eu amanheço, Dentro de Itabaianinha, Homem não monta cavalo, Nem mulher deita galinha, As freiras que estão rezando, Se esquecem da ladainha." And his companion chimed in, moving in time with the music, and sang: "A iúna é mandingueira, Quando está no bebedor, Foi sabida e é ligeira, Mas capoeira matou." His improvised lyrics met with applause. But Bimba, never one to quit easily, came back with: "Oração de braço forte, Oração de São Mateus, Pro Cemitério vão os ossos, Os seus ossos não os meus." The chorus applauded, then chanted the capoeira refrain: "Zum, zum, zum, Capoeira mata um, Zum, zum, zum, No terreiro fica um." And the native son, not to let matters stand, responded to Mestre Bimba: "E eu nasci no sábado, No domingo me criei, E na segunda-feira, A capoeira joguei." The crowd cheered and applauded the two contestants in the middle of the circle. A dusky-skinned woman commented: "Good boy! If he can fight as well as he sings, he'll be a match for Bimba. [...]" That won him the match. The crowd swarmed into the circle and applauded the king of capoeira. Bimba hugged his adversary, and the native son sang a manly verse: "Santo Antônio pequenino, Amansador de burro brabo, Amansai-me em capoeira, Com setenta mil diabos." Bimba, pleased by the complement, sang back: "Eu conheci um camarada, Que quando nós andarmos juntos, Não vai haver cemitérios, Pra caber tantos defuntos."

These "musical duels," though falling out of practice, once stood as a "label or even code of conduct for capoeira," with its "singing adversaries." They show the closeness of this art to other manifest expressions of Brazilian popular culture, such as musical duels, challenges among singers and participatory folksinger events known as *cururus*.

As a rule, capoeira angola groups claim to follow the teachings of Mestre Pastinha, in that they refer to the instrument section as the *bateria*. As we've seen, the three *berimbaus* start up, one at a time, followed by the tambourine, scratcher, agogô bells and conga drum at the close of the *ladainha*.



The *berimbau* brings together these three basic sounds, with variations on volume and tone made by alternatively leaving the hole in the sounding gourd open or muffling it against the player's belly, and by changing the force and speed with which the stick strikes the string.

Capoeira is generally practiced to the tune of the *berimbau*. The rhythms and melodies produced by this instrument are called *toques*, and basically consist of rhythmic combinations and tonal variations on the instrument's distinctive sounds: 1 – The higher tones are made by stretching the *berimbau* string with a coin pressed against it while striking this cord with a stick. 2 – Midrange tones are produced with the coin touching the wire with little or no pressure. 3 – The bass tones are made by striking the *berimbau* cord with no additional tension applied.

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All of the teachings of capoeira angola are handed down by oral tradition and learned by observation, trial and error, correction and repeated demonstration by mestres teaching their pupils. Individual development is at all times respected, but the mestre will nevertheless urge and guide his students, primarily through improvised song lyrics when singing solo, for instance: "The conga drum broke rhythm," (played too fast or too slow); "I want to hear the *reco-reco*," (or some other instrument being played too softly or sloppily); "I want you to start singing," (to everyone in the capoeira chorus).

The *mestre* usually decides who will occupy the musicians' benches and what instruments they are to play during a *roda*. Spontaneous change is still permitted, however, by invitation or if the mestre is away, and based on a player's skill. Players may pass their instruments to someone else, depending on the difficulty of the tune being played.

Beginners learn the easier instruments first, and play the scratcher, agogô bells, tambourine or conga drums, and finally the *berimbau*. Some students only play the *reco-reco* and agogô. Others have mastered the *berimbau*, but not the conga drums. A few play the congas and other *bateria* instruments, but seldom the *berimbau*. An *angoleiro*, once conversant with all of the instruments, chooses which one to play and is not pressured to play more than one. This is true for both capoeiras angola and regional, and quite a few capoeiristas only play the *berimbau*. Carybé, for example, only played the tambourine. Observation is the best study technique for becoming an *angoleiro*.

Everyone in capoeira learns the techniques, how to play the instruments and how to sing, even though they may later develop specific skills and preferences among those instruments. Singers good at improvising and delivering lyrics for *ladainhas* are recognized and appreciated.

The musical repertoire for capoeira runs the gamut from *samba-de-roda* to work songs. It also borrows from the traditional repertoire of *Candomblé de Caboclo*, or even songs from *Candomblé de Orixás*.

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Capoeira is helping to spread the Portuguese language, especially as spoken in Bahia. This bracing and invigorating cultural expression, with its wealth of physical movement, is holistic in its approach to integration, and Brazilian through-and-through. Its strength and creativity is most strongly felt through the music.

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Rita Barreto

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