

# Hello, Hello Brazil

POPULAR MUSIC IN THE MAKING OF

MODERN BRAZIL

BRYAN McCANN



HELLO, HELLO BRAZIL



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## INTRODUCTION

“Quem foi que inventou o Brasil?” Who invented Brazil? This musical question begins Lamartine Babo’s 1933 *marcha* “História do Brasil.”<sup>1</sup> The next line offers an answer that toys with history and those who believe in it: “Foi seu Cabral! Foi seu Cabral!” It was Mr. Cabral, or Pedro Alvares Cabral, the errant navigator who in 1500 initiated Portuguese exploration and settlement of the territory that soon became known as Brazil. When Babo wrote these lines, Cabral was certainly understood to be the discoverer of Brazil, but discovery is not the same as invention. The next line raises further historical doubts: “On the 21st of April, two months after Carnival.” This suggests that Brazil’s tradition of pre-Lenten revelry somehow antedated the arrival of Cabral and the Portuguese. What is the meaning of the deliberate anachronism? Was Babo making fun of textbook history by dismantling its catechism and reassembling it in nonsensical fashion? Was he suggesting that between discovery and invention lies a complex process of mythmaking and occasional misinformation? Or was he merely suggesting, in fine Brazilian fashion, that a naively forthright question deserves a dubious answer?

“História do Brasil” is, at first blush, a trifle, a carnival ditty with a simple melody and exuberantly inane lyrics, the kind of tune that Babo cranked out by the dozens throughout the 1930s. This was among his more successful efforts, and the original recording by the vocalist Almirante became a hit of the 1934 carnival season. By its nature, however, Carnival was a season of festivity, not critical inquiry, and it is likely that the revelers who followed Almirante’s open car through the streets, throwing confetti and joining him in song, happily accepted the good-humored incongruities of “História do Brasil” without prolonged reflection as to their meaning. But the tune’s initial question echoes across the decades with a deeper resonance. Who, after all, *did* invent Brazil? As interesting, why did Babo want to know? He was by no means alone in this concern. Inquiry into the nature and meaning of Bra-

zilianness was the foremost theme of the 1930s at all levels of intellectual debate. Brazilianness, or *brasilidade*, was commonly understood to mean that collection of qualities which defined the nation, which distinguished Brazilians from citizens of Argentina, Portugal, and the United States—to name three populations whom Brazilians felt it was important to define themselves *against*. Determining the cultural content of Brazilianness, and discovering the best ways to cultivate, express, and preserve it, became an overriding concern. Artists, authors, bureaucrats, popular composers, and, to a surprising degree, everyday Brazilians, shared in an investigation of Brazil's cultural roots and identity—an investigation that in itself became a process of reinvention and reconstruction.

“História do Brasil” is one of many manifestations of this tendency. It was neither the most graceful nor the most influential, but it was one of the earliest explicit inquiries into national identity in the field of popular music. It was also remarkably acute in describing a transition from one set of national myths and symbols, based on a high cultural vision of the marriage of European and indigenous elements to another, based on Afro-Brazilian roots and modern, popular cultural forms. The tune's second verse alludes to José de Alencar's 1857 novel *O guarani*, Brazil's most influential nineteenth-century nationalist work.<sup>2</sup> The novel was later adapted into an opera by composer Carlos Gomes, and both novel and opera were considered obligatory markers of Brazilian high culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>3</sup> In *O guarani*, the Portuguese maiden Cecília, or Ceci, for short, falls for Peri, the Guarani chief of the title, and from their union, allegorically, the nation of Brazil is born. In “História do Brasil,” the primordial couple surfaces in the line “Later, Peri kissed Ceci, to the sound of *O guarani*.” Again, Babo indulges in playful anachronism by suggesting that Gomes's opera was the soundtrack for the mythic couple's embrace.

*O guarani* is prototypical of nineteenth-century nationalist literature in its depiction of Peri as a noble, solitary Indian who must give way before the advancing European settlers but whose spirit is symbolically incorporated into their new civilization. It was also typical of nineteenth-century Brazilian thought in the way it pushed Brazil's enormous population of African descent to the margins: African influence cuts no ice in Alencar's national allegory. By the 1930s, such a perspective was clearly antiquated. Reconsideration of the importance of African cultural influence was the single most important element in

Brazil's collective inquiry into national character.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere was that influence more apparent than in popular music, and, partly as a result, popular music became particularly freighted with nationalist meanings. Subsequent lyrics in "História do Brasil" allude to this transition: "Later, Ceci became Iaiá, Peri became Ioiô." Iaiá and Ioiô were Afro-Brazilian terms of endearment, historically used by slaves for the slave-owner's children, but by the 1930s used, or stereotyped, as terms of courtship between older Afro-Brazilian men and women. Babo's *marcha* thus domesticates the interracial union of *O guarani* and gives it an Afro-Brazilian tinge, implying a new national ancestry.

Babo describes another transition, from "*O guarani* to *guaraná*"—that is, from the high cultural works of Alencar and Gomes to the modern commercial product of *guaraná*, a carbonated soft drink made from an Amazonian berry. *Guaraná*, as bottled by the powerful firms Antártica and Brahma, was fast becoming a staple of the Brazilian popular diet. Babo ushers out the old, refined, elitist Brazil, and welcomes the new, mass-produced, democratically consumable Brazil. In doing so, he astutely links two apparently unrelated aspects of the enormous cultural transformation currently underway—the new emphasis on Afro-Brazilian roots and the rise of a mass market. This link is indeed fundamental: the symbolic capital of Afro-Brazilian authenticity was an important factor shaping the growth of a mass market for popular musical recordings and radio programs. Emphasis on the Afro-Brazilian origins of samba, for example, became increasingly important as samba became a packaged commercial product.

From the vantage point of Carnival, 1934, a Brazil culturally defined by *O guarani* already seemed a distant past. "From there to here," Babo concluded, "everything changed. Grandma's time has gone and now Severa and the horse Mossoró are in charge." This line refers to a melodramatic singer of Portuguese laments and a prizewinning thoroughbred, both of whom were in the headlines in 1933. Babo was wrong about these last two—few Brazilians today would recognize their names. Many, in contrast, would recognize Babo's, although they would likely refer to him only by his first name, and almost all would be able to sing at least a few lines of his most famous tunes, without necessarily attaching a name or a date to them. They are part of a common store of cultural knowledge. As markers of Brazilianness, they are as pervasive as *feijoada*, the black bean stew of African origin, or *guaraná* itself. Babo was right about a transition in the relative importance of high and popular culture in defining the nation, but he could not be expected to

foresee his own importance, or that of his fellow composers and performers of popular music, in formulating the new definition.

Babo and Almirante were members of a foundational generation in the history of modern Brazilian popular music, a generation that turned a small collection of popular musical forms into both a thriving industry and a consistently vital meditation on the nature and contradictions of Brazilianness. Lamartine's nimble marchas—a genre related both to the Brazilian samba and the European march, ideal for carnival parades through the streets of Rio—helped define a generation and served as models for countless subsequent composers. Almirante—the stage name of Henrique Foréis Domingues—was a mediocre singer, but he went on to become Brazil's most inventive radio producer and host from the 1930s through the 1950s. His programs, not coincidentally, were frequently dedicated to investigations of Brazil's cultural identity. Other creative figures, such as the exuberant performer Carmen Miranda, the brilliant melodist Pixinguinha, and the incisive composer Geraldo Pereira, to name just a few, were equally important in creating this generation's body of work. While these figures occasionally collaborated, their approaches to the driving questions of the day were by no means unified. It is the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that makes their collective body of work so rich and continually relevant. Its overlapping branches set the parameters of Brazilian popular music—and to a great degree Brazilian culture more broadly—for the remainder of the century.

Brazilians of all classes were playing music well before the 1920s, of course, and even popular music produced commercially for a national audience already existed, largely through the circulation of sheet music by a few large publishers and the efforts of a fledgling recording industry.<sup>5</sup> But between the late 1920s and the mid-1950s, previously existing themes and practices of popular music, and popular culture more generally, were left behind or radically reinterpreted. By the close of this period a new set of themes and practices had been consolidated, and it is that set which continues to define popular cultural life in Brazil. These themes and practices still inform the ways Brazilians understand their nation, their racial politics, their conflicts of gender—in short, themselves, and they do so at the deepest level—that of a pop song half heard from the window of a passing car and never forgotten.

This book analyzes the creation of that new popular music and explores its deeper implications. Brazilian film, magazines, sports, and

other popular cultural forms were also transformed dramatically during this period, and innovations in these fields surface in the chapters that follow. The title, indeed, alludes both to the standard greeting proffered by early Brazilian broadcasters and to *Alô, alô Brasil* (Hello, hello Brazil), a 1935 film demonstrating the intertwining nature of these simultaneous transformations. In the film, a young man travels from the interior to Rio de Janeiro in hopes of meeting his favorite singer. He finds his way into a radio station where, starstruck, he witnesses performances by the top stars of the day, including Carmen Miranda and Almirante. The plot symbolically shows the processes of urbanization and industrialization under way, and dramatizes the unification of heartland and metropolis through the glamorous cultural production of the latter. As a commercial product targeted at an audience demanding the latest in popular music, the film demonstrates the overlapping nature of the broadcasting, recording, and cinema industries in the 1930s.

Popular music was both the common ingredient and the binding glue of these transformations. To a greater degree than cinema, popular literature, or sport, it emerged as a decisive forum for debate over national identity, and Brazilians began to view the exercise of musical preference in the cultural marketplace as an act with enormous consequences. Popular music also became a signature export product, one whose fortunes abroad were anxiously debated back home. These debates played out in radio stations and recording studios, carnival parades, musical revues, and the cafés in downtown Rio de Janeiro where composers shared and sold their inventions. Together, these venues formed a popular musical arena where the evolving body of Brazilian popular music was created and shaped, bought, and sold. Composers, performers, samba schools, fan clubs, advertisers, producers, and critics all participated in this popular musical arena. As *Alô, alô Brasil* suggested, radio stations, above all, proved to be crucial laboratories for popular cultural formation, for it was through radio that most Brazilians made their first and most enduring contact with new sounds, and it was radio that linked the production of the metropolis with the audience of the far-flung hinterlands.

This connection was fundamental, for the emerging popular culture was national in both scope and intent. To begin with, it was marketed primarily to a domestic audience—international success came only unexpectedly. All sectors of this audience were not equal. Because the recording and broadcasting industries were so heavily concentrated



in Rio de Janeiro, the preferences of Cariocas dictated larger trends. Nonetheless, national broadcasts and tours of radio stars through the interior brought metropolitan popular culture to audiences from Belém to Porto Alegre with a previously unimaginable immediacy. And as performers from the interior migrated to the capital and broke into broadcasting, Rio de Janeiro's top stations became a clearinghouse for regional styles, broadcasting the nation back to itself—with crucial transformations along the way. Finally, as even a cursory analysis of “História do Brasil” demonstrates, much of the new cultural production was explicitly dedicated to investigating and expressing the nation.

Composers and performers were particularly influential in shaping this culture and, as the following chapters demonstrate, they produced works of subtlety and complexity that repay close analysis. But it would be misleading and superficial to present this popular music as the creation of a series of individual geniuses. Instead, it was the inevitable outcome of broad economic, political, and cultural transformations. Rapid urbanization and industrialization laid the groundwork for a popular cultural market by creating an audience and the means to meet the needs of that audience. Bureaucratic centralization and a political drive to refashion the nation facilitated communication and channeled broader nationalist themes. High-cultural investigations of national identity and reappraisals of Afro-Brazilian influence inspired popular responses. Composers, performers, producers, and fans responded to these deeper trends. In some cases these responses were conscious and explicit, in others unconscious and implicit, but in all cases the influence of these deeper trends was ineluctable. Composers and performers shaped the resulting popular culture, without creating it out of nothing. The audience, too, shaped the culture—again, sometimes through active and even aggressive engagement with cultural producers, sometimes through relatively passive consumption, but constantly and with decisive effects. Understanding Brazil's new popular music, then, requires attention to the connections between cultural expression, the audience's desires, the government's demands, and the inescapable imperatives of the economy.

#### THE CULTURAL AND POLITICAL PARAMETERS OF THE NEW POPULAR MUSIC

It is no accident that this period of musical invention largely coincides with the years in which Getúlio Vargas dominated political life in

Brazil. Vargas rose to power in the Revolution of 1930, consolidated dictatorial authority under the Estado Novo, or New State, of 1937 to 1945, fell from power in a 1945 coup, returned as elected president in 1951, and shot himself in office in August of 1954. The dramatic nature of this trajectory coupled with the enormous ambition of his policies made Vargas a metonym for an era. Between the late 1920s and the mid-1950s, Brazil passed from the Old Republic, a period of oligarchic political rule masked by republican window-dressing, through the centralizing gauntlet of the Estado Novo and into the populist fracas that ensued. This was the nation's difficult passage to modernity, and it entailed dramatic change in political, economic, and cultural spheres.

These transformations were intimately related without sharing a perfect correspondence. The cultural reinvention of the nation, for example, was well under way by the time Vargas rose to power. The Modernist movement, which burst on the high-cultural scene with the Modern Art Week in São Paulo in 1922, had already created enormous disturbance and realignment in the belles lettres, visual arts, and concert music. By the close of the 1920s the modernist project of deliberate cultural overhaul had spread from a small and volatile initial cohort to several fractious branches, which varied widely in political affinities and modes of expression, but shared a strong commitment to defining and cultivating Brazilianness.

On the popular cultural level, as well—as subsequent chapters on the development of samba and *choro* will attest—the 1920s witnessed both rapid innovation and conscious pursuit of national expression. Over the course of the decade, moreover, high-cultural modernists and popular musical innovators frequently crossed paths. The erudite modernist composer Heitor Villa-Lobos incorporated the guitar techniques of amateur choro musicians into his compositions. Poet and musicologist Mário de Andrade developed a rich typology of Brazilian folkloric music and kept close tabs on the rapid evolutions of urban popular music. Poet and vanguardist Oswald de Andrade cited samba lyrics in his *Anthropophagist Manifesto* of 1928, implying that popular musicians were leading the way in incorporating foreign influence into a robust national culture. By the late 1920s, intellectuals without close association to the modernist movement, like the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre and the historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, had also begun to cultivate ties with popular musicians.<sup>6</sup> To a degree unimaginable in earlier decades, intellectuals and popular musicians began to move in the same circles. They did not necessarily see themselves as

equals, but parties from each camp knew that they had something to say to each other, across dividing lines of class and education.

Several of the key elements of the new popular music, then, were in place by the end of the 1920s. Three processes of the early 1930s helped build these elements into a sweeping process of innovation and consolidation. The first and most important was the rapid growth of the broadcasting industry, enabling diffusion of metropolitan popular culture throughout the country. The second was the steady intensification of exchanges between high and popular cultural innovators over the course of the decade. I will explore both of these processes in detail. The third was the rise of the Vargas regime itself, which consciously sought to mold and direct these cultural transformations. While the regime's cultural propaganda often failed, in some cases abjectly, its centralizing energy did serve to encourage and subsidize sanctioned expressions while marginalizing others. Even failed government initiatives brought composers, performers, and producers into direct contact with the state. One might evade that state's directives without escaping its influence.

Vargas recognized the importance of the link between policy and popular culture from his earliest days as a politician. As a junior federal congressman in 1926, he proposed a law requiring movie theaters and radio stations to pay royalties for the use of recorded music. This "Getúlio Vargas Law," eventually passed in 1928, endeared him to musicians.<sup>7</sup> By imposing an expense on the use of recorded music, it encouraged radio producers and theater owners to opt for live entertainment, helping to establish a trend toward live radio programming in radio's infancy in Brazil. Surely this would have happened in any case, as audiences made their preference for live radio clear. But the law prefigured Vargas's later approach to radio: his most effective policies were those that accepted the commercial, popular nature of broadcasting in Brazil and sought to turn those qualities to the advantage of the regime.

In 1930, a coalition of disgruntled regional elites backed Vargas as a presidential candidate. When Vargas lost an election marred by brazen irregularities, his supporters waged a brief, effective military campaign against the existing government and placed him in office. Popular musicians and composers were among the first to perceive his rise to power as an opportunity to strengthen their own hand. Shortly after his arrival in office, a representative group of performers and composers paid a call on the new president to endorse his stated intention to

renew Brazil, and to urge him to protect their livelihood by requiring theaters and radio stations to dedicate at least two-thirds of their programming to Brazilian music.<sup>8</sup> As he was to do with so many factions, Vargas magnanimously accepted these recommendations but made no firm commitments. Like the Vargas Law, the episode prefigured later events. The display of homage to the chief set a pattern for submission to Vargas and his bureaucracy that musicians and radio professionals rarely broke over the next fifteen years, at least in public. And the notion that composers, popular musicians, and government officials were all engaged in the renewal of Brazil, and that radio would be a crucial medium for that project, grew increasingly important throughout the first Vargas regime.

During the next half-decade, Vargas gradually assembled the administrative structure that, with occasional alterations, would carry his regime through 1945, constructing a strong federal bureaucracy dominated by the Ministries of Justice, Education and Health, and Labor. He distributed competing cultural projects among these key ministries, creating an intricate and occasionally contradictory network of federal cultural initiatives. Under the *Estado Novo*, in particular, the regime's intrusions into the field of popular culture through propaganda, subsidization, and censorship brought musicians and composers into an ongoing process of negotiation with federal policy makers.

The 1939 initiation of the Good Neighbor Policy by the U.S. government, with the full support of the *Estado Novo*, added a new component to this dialogue. Already, North American popular culture had become increasingly present in Brazil over the course of the 1930s, borne on the tide of hemispheric trade and promoted by U.S. advertisers and advertising agents. The Good Neighbor Policy gave new energy to this dissemination, and brought Brazilian popular musicians and composers into increasing contact with U.S. producers. It also enabled some of these performers, Carmen Miranda above all, to embark on successful careers in the United States.

The collapse of the *Estado Novo* in 1945 and the inauguration of the Eurico Dutra presidency the following year drastically diminished the federal government's attempts to manage popular culture. In the field of popular music, the withdrawal of the government altered but did not diminish the music's deep concerns with Brazilianness. Untrammelled by the propaganda initiatives of a dictatorial regime, popular musical formulations of national identity took on new volatility, reflecting a broader political and cultural turbulence. Vargas's return to

office as democratically elected president in 1951 did not mark the resumption of previous state cultural endeavors. Large-scale attempts at federal cultural management had met with myriad obstacles even under the dictatorship and, in the contentious atmosphere of Vargas's second presidency, they were completely impracticable.<sup>9</sup> Instead, popular culture articulated through the market reigned supreme, with little involvement by the government.

Perhaps in concession to this reality, Vargas attempted to increase his personal contact with radio stars, cultivating close ties to glamorous singers like Linda Batista and Angela Maria.<sup>10</sup> Friendship with popular performers, however, could not win him back a public opinion disillusioned by the corruption scandals of 1953 and 1954. During the last, bitter month of Vargas's presidency, visits by musical stars to the presidential residence at Catete Palace ceased—for the first time, associating with the president had become a liability to one's public image. Vargas's suicide, on 24 August 1954, triggered an enormous reversal of popular sentiment, prompting a public outpouring of grief and remembrance. As many of these mourners undoubtedly sensed, his death would come to symbolize the end of a period of political, economic, and cultural construction and consolidation. In the popular musical arena, Vargas's death coincided with a shift toward niche broadcasting and the splintering of the national audience. To a great degree, a window of opportunity for the establishment of deep and lasting patterns of popular musical production and consumption had closed.

This period has long been recognized as central to the establishment of modern Brazil. Over the last two decades, in particular, scholars have developed a rich historiography of the Vargas period, either narrowly defined as 1930–45 or more broadly as 1930–54, and its attendant processes of modernization.<sup>11</sup> Studies of nation building in this period have grown from an early consideration of the formal political sphere and high cultural production to analyses of more subtle and complex manifestations of national reinvention in the midst of rapid modernization.<sup>12</sup> Recent work has brought new sophistication to our understanding of the complex cultural strategies of Estado Novo bureaucrats, as well as the Estado Novo's adoption and transformation of modernist projects.<sup>13</sup>

The emergence of a new popular culture, in contrast, has received relatively little attention. Where it has been treated, it has been understood as relatively separate from political and economic spheres, an autonomous field dominated and directed by individual creators.<sup>14</sup>

Over the last decade, a few scholars have begun to push beyond this foundation, drawing the necessary connections between the popular and the political, without interpreting popular culture as merely a reflection or a consequence of political trends.<sup>15</sup> This book lifts off from these important contributions, offering a more complete picture of the popular musical arena. Participants in this arena lent their contrasting voices to a swelling chorus of musical invention. By exploring the layered meanings that resulted, I hope to reveal the workings of a coherent popular culture—one that offered Brazilians counterbalanced messages of tradition and modernity, community and individuality, nationalist fervor and cosmopolitan flair.

#### POPULAR MUSIC, BETWEEN NATIONAL COMMUNION AND COMMERCIAL DEBASEMENT

In contrast to the formal political arena during these years, and the Estado Novo in particular, the popular cultural arena was remarkably democratic. This has rarely been understood. Because the popular culture of the 1930s and 1940s shares certain nationalist themes with the political rhetoric of the Vargas regime, it has often been characterized as co-opted or controlled.<sup>16</sup> In this view, audience tastes were dictated by bureaucrats, advertisers, or both. Afro-Brazilian participants in the popular cultural industry, especially, have often been understood as exploited, seduced into selling their authentic creations cheaply to fast-talking producers or strong-armed politicians. But theories of co-optation grant too much control to government propagandists and advertisers, and fail to account for savvy and highly self-conscious popular participation in the cultural arena. Afro-Brazilian *sambistas*, for example, did not merely provide grist for the mill of commercial popular culture. They engaged the cultural market and played crucial roles in shaping new cultural expressions, gaining a cultural influence over the nation that stood in marked contrast to their continued marginalization in the economic and formal political spheres. The critical consumption of popular music, moreover, made connoisseurs of everyday Brazilians, frequently prompting them to join explicitly in the debate over national identity. More broadly, collective manifestations of popular taste offered previously marginalized Brazilians a central role in the creation of a market for cultural goods. In seizing this role and playing it with gusto, they achieved a form of popular citizenship, while full political citizenship—the right to vote,

to be free from arbitrary arrest, to speak openly against the government—remained narrowly limited, when not entirely suspended.

The popular musical arena was not as clearly defined as the formal political arena, and did not offer the same tangible access to power, but it was far more accommodating. Everyday Brazilians participated in the creation of the new popular culture by writing samba verses and selling them to professional composers, by joining fan clubs and samba schools, by attending radio shows and writing to trade magazines. They did not necessarily enjoy the benefits of full political citizenship, but nor were they marginalized from modernity as unchanging, essential folk. And the popular culture they helped fashion proved deeply relevant in the formal political and economic spheres, both during and after the Vargas period.

There were limits to this popular citizenship, and they are a crucial element of this history. Afro-Brazilians were not compensated fairly for their decisive contribution. Through much of the Vargas period, radio stations and record labels shied away from featuring black performers, allowing white professionals to become rich and famous while Afro-Brazilian composers often remained relatively poor. Rhetorical praise of African influence served to mask this ongoing racism. Thus, charges that Afro-Brazilians were often exploited by the popular music industry hold weight. Given Brazil's economic stratification, with Afro-Brazilians concentrated heavily in the lower range, this could hardly fail to be the case. Charges that they were co-opted or seduced into acting against their own interests, however, do not stand up to investigation. Instead, Afro-Brazilians seized limited opportunities within the popular musical arena, turning them to their economic advantage. Similarly, key Afro-Brazilian composers availed themselves of their popular cultural citizenship to comment critically on their political and economic marginalization. In these important cases, Afro-Brazilian popular music played a crucial role in revealing the existence of racism in Brazil.

To assert that the new popular music was democratic is not to deny that to a certain extent it reproduced inequalities and prejudices from other areas of Brazilian life. Rather, it is to affirm that this music was collectively created, ultimately bearing the stamp of participants from every economic level. It is also to argue for the relevance of this popular participation in the broad struggle to redefine the nation that characterized the period. In his excellent book on the competing projects of national cultural construction within the *Estado Novo*, Daryle Wil-

liams has suggested that the active participants in such “culture wars” were limited to a small sector of government insiders and modernist intellectuals.<sup>17</sup> The popular musical arena, however, witnessed a crucial extension of this battle for the national soul, marked by broad and vigorous participation. Composers like Luiz Gonzaga and Geraldo Pereira, for example, rose from the humblest ranks of the nonwhite rural poor to positions of enormous cultural influence. Both not only became famous composers but created works that probed the heart of Brazil’s knotty racial and ethnic contradictions, adding powerful new voices to ongoing national debates. They achieved an influence that would have been unimaginable for similar figures in formal politics or high culture. Popular participation on the consumption side of the market’s equation was also crucial, if more difficult to pin down. This influence is most obvious in cases of mass audience participation, for example, in the choro revival of the 1950s, or the contemporary growth of fan clubs. In both cases, fans made known their expectations regarding both popular music’s relationship to national identity and its importance in building community.

Brazilians of all economic levels and political backgrounds were highly conscious of the creation of a new popular music, as well as the role of radio and the recording industry in articulating that music, and greeted both with a combination of hope and fear. Virtually all observers agreed that music possessing authentically Brazilian characteristics was worthy of national dissemination via the mass media, and that music unacceptably tainted by foreign influence or merely commercial in character was to be condemned. But the qualities of authenticity and Brazilianness were not nearly as self-evident as most critics asserted, and the difficulty of pinning down these qualities turned the popular musical arena into a battleground. One’s position in that battle tended to reflect one’s faith in the market. A small but influential group of actors, most of them industry insiders, considered the market to be not only benevolent but the only suitable laboratory for the distillation of Brazilianness through popular music. A larger group, including many intellectual observers, viewed the market as a realm of perdition: as authentic folkloric creations became commodities, their Brazilianness was inevitably diluted or corrupted.

The successful Carnival films of the Rio de Janeiro studio Cinédia, including *Alô, alô Brasil*, presented the most effusive case for the market’s benevolence. Brazilian director Adhemar Gonzaga founded Cinédia in 1930. Later in the decade, working in conjunction with



Wallace Downey, an American who had come to Brazil to run the Columbia recording company's local operations, Gonzaga produced several films set in the milieu of Rio's burgeoning popular music scene. The films, released just before Carnival each year, wedded Rio's nascent film industry to a more advanced popular music industry. For Downey and his recording stars, the films offered an opportunity to cross over into a new medium, borrowing mannerisms from Hollywood along the way. The films were among the first Brazilian talkies, or, as they were suggestively called in Brazil, *cinema cantada*, sung cinema. They mixed the lavish production numbers typical of Hollywood musicals with Brazil's own rich tradition of theatrical musical revues in a hugely popular blend, outgrossing Hollywood imports.<sup>18</sup>

Like *Alô, alô Brasil*, the remaining Cinédia Carnival films depicted a glamorous world of popular musical stardom. In the 1935 production *Estudantes* (Students), Carmen Miranda played an aspiring radio singer who crosses paths with three students fascinated by the music industry. As in *Alô, alô Brasil*, talent and good humor prevail through confusion, and performers and fans unite in the common creation of Brazilian popular culture.<sup>19</sup> *Alô, alô Carnaval* (Hello, hello Carnival) of 1936, produced by Downey and directed by Gonzaga, brought a new tension to the series, dramatizing the protection of domestic cultural resources from the threatened depredations of foreign interlopers. Its plot concerns a pair of poor Brazilian performers whose plans to produce a musical spectacle featuring the best local talent are stymied by the preference of wealthy potential investors for a foreign troupe. The plot pits an emerging Brazilian popular culture against an established, foreign, erudite culture, and suggests that the deck is stacked in favor of the foreigners. By dint of talent, hard work, and luck, the locals pull off their revue, to clamorous success. The implication is that Brazil can only achieve its deserved popular culture through competition on the uneven playing field of the market. In the Cinédia films, the commercial nature of popular culture allows national communion to take place.

Marques Rebelo's acclaimed 1939 novel *A estrela sobe* (The star rises) presents the opposite interpretation of the popular musical arena.<sup>20</sup> The novel traces the life of Leniza Maier from her youth as a poor but strong-willed girl in downtown Rio to her breakthrough as a radio star. Along the way, Leniza betrays and disappoints all those who trust her, traffics in a sordid world of vice and homosexuality, and brings shame on herself and her mother through unwanted pregnancy and abortion.

Rebello chronicles these passages with a prurient fatalism, suggesting that by embarking on a career in radio, Leniza has inevitably, if not quite knowingly, plunged into a seamy underworld.<sup>21</sup> By taking her golden voice out of the closed world of her poor neighborhood and selling it to commercial exploiters, she corrupts her own talent. In the process, she loses her individuality, becoming just one in a long line of indistinguishable, ruined starlets. In Rebello's vision, commerce destroys everything of value in popular music, including its capacity to represent the nation.

Most Brazilians adopted a position somewhere between these poles. Whatever their opinion, they needed to be aware of these extreme interpretations, which remained crucial in structuring debate on popular music throughout the period. This high degree of self-consciousness regarding cultural choice is part of what makes the popular musical arena fascinating. Brazilians—including composers, performers, producers, bureaucrats, and fans—consistently justified their musical preferences on the basis of what was good for the nation. In doing so, they struggled to elevate popular music above the level of mere entertainment into the realm of public culture. They sought to turn popular music into the foundation of a unified national culture, one that would bridge long-standing chasms of class and regional distinctions in order to bring Brazilians together on an equal footing with a shared experience. Once engaged in that struggle, they oscillated between poles of optimism and pessimism regarding whether such a culture might be achieved. The more optimistic among them held up the ideal of an inclusive national culture as tangible and attainable, or even as a rightful natural inheritance needing only to be protected. The more pessimistic among them held up this ideal only to show how it had been continually debased and undermined. Their varying perspectives on this crucial subject reflected their differing conceptions of *o popular*, the popular, a vague concept standing at various moments for the popular spirit, the popular citizen body, and the authentic element that gave commercial popular music its legitimacy. The multiplicity of voices in this debate, and the crisscrossing connections between high and low cultural spheres, gave popular music its richness and depth.

This book's title, in referring to a Cinédia film, indicates my optimistic interpretation of the commercial nature of Brazilian popular music. As Eric Hobsbawm—a scholar not overly credulous of the market's tendency to serve the popular interest—has written regarding jazz, “Readers who believe that records make themselves and that horn

players are fed by ravens sent down from heaven, like the angel Elijah, are advised to pick themselves a less earthbound music to admire. Jazz musicians are professionals. The prejudice against 'commercialism' among a large section of the jazz public makes it necessary to repeat this obvious truth."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the musicians who helped fashion a new Brazilian popular culture between the 1920s and the 1950s were professionals, or aspired to be professionals. When they found themselves in a disadvantaged position in the musical market as a result of racial prejudice or a prior condition of economic marginalization, they took steps to improve their position, rather than to isolate themselves from that market. By the mid-1930s, isolation was impossible, in any case. The forms and styles that emerged in this period to enrich and shape the lives of Brazilians did so within the context of the expanding radio and recording industries, and their existence is inseparable from that context. Again, this is not to deny that these industries often underpaid musicians and, in the case of radio, sought to induce consumers to buy products they did not necessarily need. It is to assert that deeper understanding of Brazil's new popular music requires recognizing that the initial expansion of these industries created an enormously fertile climate of invention. By the end of this period, these inventions were consolidated and established as the foundation for subsequent experimentation.

In the late 1920s, Mário de Andrade, a scholar more skeptical than Hobsbawm about the effects of industrialization on popular music, lamented that samba was an urban genre. Its roots in the city, among a fluid population subject to the blandishments of radio stations, condemned it to inconstancy. Because it lacked a "necessary tradition," it could never be fixed, like rural, folkloric music. In the best of worlds, Andrade suggested, Brazilian "national character" would serve as that necessary tradition, providing a stake for the flowering tendrils of urban popular music. But he despaired that this could happen, for the national character remained "undefined, shot through with internationalism and fatal foreign influence."<sup>23</sup>

Andrade's characterization of the popular musical arena was correct. It was indeed shot through with international influence, and the genres and styles defined within it were subject to rapid evolution. He was wrong, however, about the effects of these characteristics: they did not result in watered-down or meaningless music, reduced to mere commodity ("flesh to feed radios," as he described it). Instead, they contributed to the richness of the emerging popular culture, which it-

self became precisely the necessary tradition whose absence Andrade mourned. It drew its vitality and relevance not from static or folkloric qualities, but from its complexity, its ability to contain a multiplicity of forms and styles, and to yield varying, even opposed interpretations that nevertheless took the same initial premise as their starting point.

Over the course of the period in question, several prominent themes and patterns emerged to give the new popular music shape and continuity. Each chapter in this book analyzes one of these themes or patterns, explaining its meanings to contemporary participants and its continued relevance in subsequent decades. Chapter 1 analyzes the growth of broadcasting and the Vargas regime's attempt to direct popular culture through radio during the *Estado Novo*. Chapter 2 analyzes the rise of samba as a symbol of national identity in the 1930s and early 1940s, and the transformation of that symbolism in the 1950s. Chapter 3 tracks the emergence of two parallel strains of northeastern regionalism—one of the arid hinterlands, one of the lush coast—in the popular music of the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter 4 examines evolutions in the Brazilian popular musical response to the economic and cultural influence of the United States. Chapter 5 investigates the strong reaction to perceived foreign influence in a wave of defensive popular cultural nationalism during the early 1950s. Chapter 6 analyzes the growth of fan clubs and radio auditorium programs in the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter 7 studies the influence of advertising agencies on radio programming.

The reader will note that my analysis concentrates overwhelmingly on the music produced in Rio de Janeiro, and that where I discuss audience interpretation, I privilege the metropolitan audience. This is unavoidable: throughout the period, Rio was the bureaucratic and cultural capital of the nation, home to the principal recording studios and the most powerful radio stations. Many popular musicians from other areas of Brazil achieved national prominence in this period, but without exception they did so by establishing careers in the capital. The music minted in Rio became the standard currency of national cultural exchange.



## I RADIO AND ESTADO NOVO

When Getúlio Vargas assumed the presidency following the Revolution of 1930, his authority was tenuous. He had the backing of the regional power brokers who had placed him in office and the goodwill of the majority of Brazilians who had been left disenfranchised by the clubbish political machinations of the Old Republic. But his opponents remained strong, and the economic insecurity brought on by a deepening global depression made for volatile popular sentiments. Vargas recognized the need to embark immediately on strong political and economic reforms in order to stabilize his government. In addition he and his new administrative cohort understood the imperative to reach and inspire a broad population with a message of inclusion and common struggle. Radio seemed the perfect tool for their enterprise: it combined technology and industry, and it harnessed invisible forces in pursuit of triumphant modernity. It was capable of reaching into the private homes of citizens and transforming their lives, placing them in direct contact with their leader. Most important, it offered the hope of linking far-flung territories into a single network of instantaneous communication, and of bridging the gaps of culture and class that divided Brazilians.

Vargas and his underlings frequently gave voice to such sentiments in both public pronouncements and private letters. In a 1936 interview, Lourival Fontes, director of the Department of Propaganda and Cultural Diffusion (DPDC), insisted on the need for greater government attention to the medium. Fontes argued that in other nations—he was thinking of Italy and Germany in particular—government radio stations already served to create a spirit of national unity, and he urged Vargas to establish a similar system in Brazil: “We cannot underestimate the work of propaganda and culture undertaken on the radio . . . it is enough to say that radio reaches where the school and the press do not, to the farthest points of the country, to the understanding of illiterates.”<sup>1</sup> As one bureaucrat put it in a 1942 letter to Vargas, “More

than in any other part of the world, radio is destined to exercise here a decisive influence in the formation of the culture and the popular character itself.”<sup>2</sup> Regime bureaucrats envisioned a propaganda that would go beyond narrow political concerns in order to mold a national popular culture. In his public statements, Vargas suggested that he shared this belief.<sup>3</sup> In his policy, however, he allowed government radio projects to wilt while commercial radio bloomed.

In keeping with the administrative architecture of his regime, which balanced the power of various factions in competing agencies, Vargas distributed radio projects among his three key ministries. The Ministry of Justice, through the DPDC, later to become the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP), controlled the *Hora do Brasil*, a nightly government program aired on every station. The Ministry of Education and Health (MES) broadcast programming from its own transmitter in Rio de Janeiro. And, late in the Estado Novo, the Ministry of Labor also acquired its own station, Rádio Mauá. The Ministry of Labor station served primarily as a platform for the speeches of Minister Alexandre Marcondes Filho, directed at industrial workers. Its popular musical offerings made up a significant portion of the station’s broadcasting schedule, but they were poorly funded and did not differ significantly from those of commercial stations. The programmers within the DIP and the MES, in contrast, deliberately sought to contain and counter what they perceived as the noxious trends of commercial broadcasting. For the DIP this meant censoring radio programs and records for their social and political content, and using the *Hora do Brasil* to mold the popular spirit. For the MES, this meant uplifting the popular audience through the didactic presentation of erudite material. Both enterprises failed miserably. Vargas denied each the resources necessary to achieve preeminence within the regime, much less to challenge the dominance of commercial radio. By the close of the Estado Novo, bureaucrats from both the DIP and the MES were forced to admit that their hopes to influence popular culture through broadcasting had failed.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, another station owned by the federal government grew into the powerhouse of Brazilian broadcasting. Rádio Nacional was already among the most popular stations in the nation when it was taken over by the state in 1940. New government ownership had little effect on the programming: Rádio Nacional continued to be run as a commercial station featuring popular music and soap operas throughout the Estado Novo and beyond. The great bulk of its programming

differed from that of its commercial competitors primarily in its high production values and its star quality—as Brazil’s most popular station, Rádio Nacional was able to attract the best producers and the most famous performers. This popular programming, nonetheless—particularly the prime-time musical broadcasts—was often explicitly nationalist, and presented a vision of glorious modernization nourished by Brazilian cultural roots.

As a result, Estado Novo broadcasting presents a contradiction. When the regime sought to direct popular culture through propaganda and censorship, it failed. When it limited itself to providing a structure for commercial broadcasting, it was able to wield a decisive influence. This contradiction is easily explained: it arose primarily from the relative talents and preferences of the respective broadcasters. The *Hora do Brasil* and the programming of Rádio MES were created by bureaucrats interested primarily in satisfying the regime itself, and by high-cultural sophisticates disdainful of popular tastes. Rádio Nacional, in contrast, was staffed by broadcasting professionals with an intuitive grasp of their audience and a deep commitment to Brazilian popular music.<sup>5</sup>

Daryle Williams has demonstrated the importance of “cultural managers” within the Estado Novo, using that term to describe both career bureaucrats and intellectuals recruited temporarily to carry out the regime’s cultural projects.<sup>6</sup> As Williams has shown, these cultural managers proved crucial in mediating between the government and the broader population. In spaces where the regime could exercise considerable control, such as museums and international expositions, they were able to carry out effective projects of cultural and civic persuasion. Popular culture, in contrast, and popular music in particular, proved relatively impervious to direct bureaucratic manipulation. Popular music required a different breed of cultural manager—one who might enjoy government protection but paid more attention to market tendencies than to state directives, and one who demonstrated a greater ability to respond to popular taste. The core of producers and performers responsible for creating Rádio Nacional’s programming fit this description precisely. They were able to nurture local trends, in turn magnifying them through their broadcast power, turning the local into the national. Their position at the nexus of state and market gave them unmatched influence in shaping Brazil’s new popular music.

Rádio Nacional, as a result, came far closer than either the DIP or the MES to molding national popular culture, and it did so primarily through its presentation of commercial popular music. Understanding