



THE ARRIVAL OF THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT RECO-RECO (GUIRO) IN BRAZIL

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Invited by Professor Dr. Adriana Olinto Ballesté (1) to trace the history of the arrival of the reco-reco in Brazil, a sentence by Luiz D'Anunciação immediately occurred to me.

He synthetizes and illustrates the matter quite well: reco-reco's typicality does not derive from the musical instrument's object, but from the participation exercised in the form of the rhythmic accent of the Brazilian beat (D'Anunciação 2008, p.32). The instruments introduced in Brazil by the European colonizer were added to the African beat here and assimilated by a singular racial combination. This is how the casaca of Congo bands from Espírito Santo, the spring reco-reco of the samba schools from Rio de Janeiro and the bajo of Cavalo Marinho from Pernambuco rose, amongst other examples.

It's worth remembering that, despite being a mixed race country, research on the impact of Indigenous music over the Brazilian music composition still remains incipient. The Amerindian contribution is practically extinct, in spite of its influence being immensely acknowledged. Mário de Andrade and Luciano Gallet, when mentioning the famous Brazilian racial triangle in their works, have concluded that Indigenous music occupies a small place – if not practically none – in Brazilian music, limited to Blacks and Whites (Andrade, 1962 and Gallet, 1934). Nevertheless, there are very rare evidences, as we will see as follows, such as some types of reco-reco in some Indigenous tribes in our country.

The reco-reco is a musical instrument classified as an idiophone with undetermined pitch sound. This is the generic name which in Brazil is given to percussion musical instruments which have as a main characteristic being constituted of a material containing on its surface – or on part of it – a series of transversal and parallel grooves, close to one another, in order to be rubbed or scrubbed with a specific type of stick. The reco-reco can be made of one or more bamboo shoots (taboca or taquara), wood, metal or oxen horns. In Brazil, the most common reco-reco is made of bamboo and at present, of metal as well. The Delgado de Carvalho Museum possesses two specimens in its collection: one made of bamboo and another made of wood.

Historically, the existence of this type of instrument in central Europe goes back to the Stone Age, as a Paleolithic bone scraper was found on the Pekarna cave, in Moravia, with a specimen that can be seen at the Moravia Museum in Brno, at the Tzcheck Republic, being without doubt one of the most ancient specimens in the world (Blades, 1992, p. 40-41).



The reco-reco incorporates in Brazil our rhythm, with strong action in our folklore, in music ensembles of various popular feasts, such as: São Gonçalo dance (Laranjeiras, Sergipe), Congo bands from the Capixaba region (Espírito Santo), Rural Maracatu and Cavalo Marinho in Pernambuco, Cururu from Mato Grosso, the Catopés de Milho Verde in Minas Gerais, Santa Cruz dance in Carapicuíba (São Paulo), Moçambique and Marinheiro groups in Goiás, among others. Brazilian regionalism named those as casaca, caraxá, cracaxá, canzá, ganzá, ganzal, querequexé, pulê, macumbo, reque, bajo and others.

About the evidence of the entrance of the reco-reco in Brazil, Brazilian researcher José Ramos Tinhorão informs us that scrapper idiophones have always been connected to the type of music of the Black people, not only in Africa, but in all peoples from the Iberian Peninsula and of the Americas, to where the interest of the slave traffic have taken them, along with their strength for work, the sound of their atabaques, calabashes and reco-recos (Tinhorão, 2006, p. 31). This forced migratory movement has brought populations of diverse ethnicities to Brazil. They were groups that did not form a citizenry in particular; there were distinct languages, costumes and beliefs.

For the purpose of this article, however, we are interested to deal with a specific ethnicity: the great ethno linguistic group banto, which, according to researchers Kazadi wa Mukuna and José Redinha, was certainly that which supplied us the grounds of samba and the big variety of manifestations alike, as well as the introduction in Brazil and in some countries of South America and the Caribbean, of various musical instruments, amongst which the reco-reco is included (wa Mukuna, 2006 e Redinha, 1988). Brazilian author Nei Lopes defends this statement and adds that the origin of the terms “umbanda”, “macumba” and “mandinga” is banto’s, terms belonging to the cult universe in our country. In his New Banto Dictionary of Brazil, he elucidates that the word macumba also means a type of reco-reco, of quimbundo mukumbo origin (Lopes, 2003, p. 132).

Julio Cesar Farias says that the introduction of the reco-reco to samba schools in Rio de Janeiro is credited to samba musician Caburé (Farias, 2010, p. 87). There are records of the instrument’s use by percussionists from Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Portela in 1953 (ibidem, p. 88). Since the mid 1970’s, aiming to obtain more sound power, the drums section of the samba schools have started to use only the metal version of the reco-reco, called spring reco-reco. This type of reco-reco, in fact, consists of a stretched steel spring on a brass pipe, to be rubbed against with a metal stick. Such procedure was probably influenced by spiral spring reco-recos that have been used at the city of Perdões, in the State of Minas Gerais, made of tin and car hubcaps.

Searching for evidences of the instrument’s provenance via the European colonizer, James Blades informs us about a type of scraper found in Portugal - two pieces of pine are rubbed against one another in order to mark the rhythm for the dance (Blades, 1992,



p. 41). Tinhorão, afore mentioned, gets even more specific in his book *O Rasga*. A Black Portuguese dance, in which he presents the research about a type of singing and dancing of Blacks and Mulatos from Lisbon in the beginning of the 19th Century. It's a dance of which sound was characterized by a sort of *canzá*, *ganzá* or *reco-reco* that arrived in Rio, having passed through theatre presentations in Lisbon before. The author states that it was that peculiar sound of the rubbing of a fine cane stick over a toothed cylindrical surface which resulted in a "scratched" sound.

Thereof the name *rasga* (of a torn rhythm, in the sense of opening cuts or tears, scratches). (Tinhorão, 2006, p. 39-41).

Musicologist Luiz Heitor Correa de Azevedo says that it was Brazilian Alberto Nepomuceno who first introduced the *reco-reco* in a symphonic music score, when in 1891, he orchestrated his *Dança de Negros*, calling it *Batuque* (drumbeat). The instrument is also found in scores by Heitor Villa-Lobos, Camargo Guarnieri, Cláudio Santoro, César Guerra-Peixe, Nelson de Macêdo and Radamés Gnattali, amongst other names of the symphonic and chamber Brazilian repertoires (D'Anunciação, 2004, p. 7). Villa-Lobos was the composer who had the merit of introducing the percussive staccato in his works *Uirapuru* and *Momoprecoce*, as well as the *portato*, in the *Uirapuru* (Sá, 2009, p.32-34).

Regarding Indigenous music, according to what has been already mentioned here, evidence of the use of the *reco-reco* are practically inexistent. Câmara Cascudo informs us about the *caracalho*, used by *Tambés* Indians, also known as Amazonian *catacá*. With two wooden board pieces – more commonly *taboca* (a type of bamboo) pieces – one board is toothed and the other board is not – the player extracts the sound rubbing a sort of stick over the toothed part (Cascudo, 2002, p. 112 e 122).

In conclusion, what also moved the elaboration of this work was the aspiration to contribute academically to the knowledge about the *reco-reco*. It has been a long time that innumerable publications by renowned percussionists are observed – many of which are considered as a reference in the academic work – containing inaccurate data about the instrument. One of the most common examples is the tendency, especially in North America, of naming all the instruments of the *reco-reco* family as *guiros*, as a result of the standardization that the media usually does, when it considers anything below the USA as "salsa". The *guiro* is a calabash made type of scraper, historically used by Latin music, occupying a special place in Cuban and Puerto Rican music. It can be said that it is a "cousin" of our *reco-reco*, but to take one for the other is a mistake.

English researcher James Blades, afore mentioned, when writing his important book *Percussion Instruments and their History*, comments on the existence of a scraping idiophone in Brazil called the *reso-reso*. This instrument would be made out of a "bamboo stalk or a toothed calabash (*guiro*)" (Blades, p. 454-55). We can find there the



generalization I had mentioned on the previous paragraph, regarding the guiro. And it is also known that there has never been an instrument in Brazil called reso-reso. This same designation (reso-reso) appears in Brindle's publication as well (1978, p. 105). In fact, this is one of the only two books on percussion, which until the conclusion of this article (2) , are part of the collection of the Alberto Nepomuceno Library of the Music School of UFRJ, where the Delgado de Carvalho Virtual Museum of Musical Instruments is hosted, and to where the present text is entailed. The above mentioned authors have probably based themselves in the same mistaken source in order to write their works.

NOTES

- (1) Professor Adriana Olinto Ballesté is the Coordinator of the Delgado de Carvalho Virtual Museum of Musical Instruments and a researcher of the Brazilian Institute of Information on Sciences and Technology.
- (2) It's worth mentioning that the present text was written and concluded in February 2013. On the following month, with the intention of updating the percussion collection of the Alberto Nepomuceno Library of the Music School of UFRJ, Docent Pedro Sá has donated ten different titles by author Luiz D'Anunciação to the aforesaid institution, being some of these publications exclusively destined to the study of typical instruments of the Brazilian rhythm. In the occasion, his MA dissertation was also donated (SÁ, 2009), a research which investigates the subject.

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Pedro Sá is a Master of Arts majored in Music by Unirio, with a CNPq grant. As a complementation of his studies, he took the following courses: percussion with Luiz D'Anunciação and Miquel Bernat, vibraphone with Arthur Lipner and Hamony, Instrumentation/Orchestration and Musical Analysis with Nelson de Macedo, and took part in the biggest percussion convention in the world, PASIC, in Indianapolis, USA, in 2011, where he attended dozens of master classes of renowned percussionists of actuality, such as Steven Schick, Anthony Cirone, Vic Firth, Percussion Group Cincinnati, Gordon Stout and Stanley Leonard, amongst others. A Docent at the Music School of UFRJ since 2007, he acts on the areas of Percussion, Chamber Music, Research, Licentiate and Extensions. He teaches in holiday festivals throughout Brazil, such the Londrina courses (State of Paraná) and Music Bands Funarte Panels (Rio de Janeiro and Aracaju, Sergipe). In parallel, since 2002, he occupies the position of 1st Timpani soloist and chief of the percussion suit at the Petrobras Sinphonic Orchestra (Opes), one of the country's most renowned music ensembles, under the artistic direction of Isaac Karabtchevsky. Before joining Opes, he occupied the position of 1st Timpani soloist at the Brazilian Symphonic Orchestra (OSB) for 12 years, having entered the orchestral body at 16 years of age, a rare fact in a professional orchestra. He took part in various recordings and tours throughout Brazil, Mexico and the USA (concerts in the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York). As a chamber music player, he had his début with the Abstrai Ensemble, in numerous works in educational performances about contemporary music, as well as presentations in various editions of the Contemporary Brazilian Music Biennial.