

Exclusive / Vinicius de Moraes two years later

Baden Powell remembers his friend, a symbol of the south-american popular soul

Brazil, poetry with a Bossa-Nova rhythm

Baden Powell, with his introverted nature and his bad flair to speak, has always been a problem for interviewers. But we were lucky, because Powell loves "il mattino" and because of the kind interest of the Latin-American studies institute of Roma, which has recently organized a meeting in order to remember Vinicius de Moraes during his second death anniversary.

So we could spend a whole morning with Baden Powell, talking about Brazilians and their rich music world. At last we can say we have perfectly understood the historical events that generated Bossa Nova, events which were obscure to us also because of the different interpretations of the experts.

Question: Master, could you tell us about the affinities between Brazilians and Neapolitans? You played last year with Roberto Murolo (even a beautiful guitar version of "O sole mio") and in Naples, during the 1981 tour, you have found the right feeling to play, better than anywhere else, so that a large part of your last live LP is based on the "Diana" theatre live recording. Can we say there is something which makes communication between Brazilians and Neapolitans (as far as music intention is concerned) easy?

Baden Powell: Yes, it is true, Brazilians and Neapolitans are very close: they have the same musical feeling. I think that guitar is the principal instrument for Neapolitans and for Brazilians too. I had a show in Rome together with Roberto Murolo and I talked a lot with him before playing. He told me stories about Napoli and its music and I told him about mine in Brazil. I think that our musical roots are similar even if we live in two very different countries.

Can we say that Brazilian music is influenced by Naples songs?

Surely it was, but this influence is no longer active because nowadays people do not feel the same way. Neapolitan song was very spread in the whole world and in Brazil too. I am 44 and when I was 10 or 15 every radio station in Rio de Janeiro used to play Neapolitan songs and they had a lot of success. Do not forget that half the citizens of San Paolo are Italian and the other half are their offspring. So in San Paolo the Italian influence is huge, more than in Rio where it is mainly Portuguese. However the musical influence is in your root, you can feel it in your blood, so it is clear that Neapolitans and Brazilians have the same feeling.

Your career starts with popular song, than you passed through jazz music and now you are in the concert music world. Tell me about this evolution.

It is difficult to explain my evolution in few words. All has been natural. Today you are here, tomorrow in another place, I do not think you can control life events. I think that my artistic success grew up

day by day during my whole life. And I did not follow the fashion, I've never been the guitarist or the singer of the year.

Not so many musicians are interested in so various aspects of music like you are. How does this come?

In order to let you understand my musical interests I have to tell you about the beginning of my career and of my life. I started playing guitar at 7. My father was a musician and we lived in an area near Rio de Janeiro, called San Cristobal.

I was lucky because I lived in the serenade era: I remember my father, when I was a child, taking me on his shoulder to hear serenades and I can remember them very well. When I was 7 I began to learn the Spanish classic technique with my master Florence. After the classical guitar lesson I used to go to the "Choro" one. At my master's house I could find musicians like Pixinguinha (the greatest Choro composer of Brazil) and Jacob de Bandolim and I've learned from them the secrets of popular music. I lived closed to the Morro do Mangueira, where one of the best-known samba school was and since I was a street-child, living in that environment, I had an enormous experience. The simultaneity of classical and popular music was not forced, it was natural. But in my opinion there is no separation between classical, jazz and popular music. Music is one.

Have you studied composition?

Composition has nothing to do with studying. Creating a composition is like writing a poem. You can say there are two things in the musician: interpretation and composition. When you can find these two things together in the same musician, the composition speaks loudly. I studied harmony only later on; in fact when I want to write a song I just have to look into myself.

How was Bossa Nova born and how far was it influenced by jazz?

Bossa Nova was the natural evolution of Brazilian popular music. Music develops in time, as well as people do. I lived in that historical moment and I can say that Bossa was created by the newest musicians in a very important time for Brazilian music. That was the time of Noel Rosa, improviser and lyrics composer and Noel Rosa's music gradually changed until it reached young people.

The Bossa Nova movement began officially in 1958 but had been played for a lot of years. In 1952 Dick Farney played with modern harmonies, the jazz harmony you were talking about. So we get to the question about the influence of jazz on Bossa Nova. In the fifties there were some bars in Copacabana where they used to play jazz so the harmonic jazz world was well-known in Brazil. But in 1946 Johnny Alf composed a Bossa Nova (Rapaz de bem) which became well-known only in 1954. Bossa Nova had a slow beginning. The international success was reached by Vinicius de Moraes with "Chega de Saudade",

a song in which north-american influences are difficult to find. Bossa Nova rhythm is very simple in comparison with the samba rhythm. Bossa Nova was simple for the musicians and it became comprehensible to every audience because samba original rhythms are more difficult to understand. So we can say that Bossa Nova is a Brazilian product, only on the harmonic side you can find some jazz influence and I can say that Brazilian musicians used to improvise before the coming of jazz.

You talked about a great poet who was very important for the development of Brazilian music, Vinicius de Moraes, for you more than a friend or a lyric-composer.

It is not easy for me to talk about Vinicius. I met him at one Copacabana bars when I was 18 and I worked there. Vinicius used to come to that place every night for my show. Then I entered his house and I stayed there for 3 months without getting out for a single minute.

We drunk whisky and wrote songs. He was 24 years older than I was but we felt music the same way. We composed the songs that you all know. To me it was a school of life. Vinicius was like a father to me and I feel an orphan without him. I think that all the partners and the composers who worked with Vinicius feel like orphans now because he was the most important person of popular Brazilian music and you can say that also for poetry and for Brazilian culture in general. He had the gift of communication. He knew how to be a friend. I've never met a person who's not in love with Vinicius.

I've never seen him nervous or quarrelling with someone. He had a special tenderness for everyone. That was a kind of catechism for large part of the Brazilian composers. Vinicius brought lyric into music and exalted Woman in the song. It is not easy to find someone who really understands poetry but Vinicius explained that to people.

Nowadays everybody know the power of Vinicius' poetry. When Vinicius died in Rio everybody was very sad, poor men, taxi drivers, everybody. Vinicius' power was great because it impressed workers and intellectuals.

In which way were Women treated in the Brazilian song before Vinicius?

Very bad, Vinicius was the first to exalt Woman, to exalt love to the woman, changing completely her role in the songs.

You (and other Brazilian composers too) have a predilection for Bach. Why so many Brazilians love Bach?

Bach is defined by Vinicius "the uncle of the Brazilian marcha-rancho", the march leading the Carnival popular music (which derives in some aspect from the Venice carnival). So Bach influenced the marcha rhythm and Chopin influenced the songs for his sentimental feeling and his melodic expression.

A short definition for samba?

In my blood there are Indian, African and Portuguese roots. The Brazilian man is born of these three roots and here samba is born as well.

You have lived far from Brazil for a lot of time. Do you know what is happening there nowadays?

Today there is nothing really important. There is a great interest in the ancient Brazilian music and there are new composers but I can't see the beginning of a new Brazilian music era.

Afro Samba – magic, phatos

Di mattina abbuio / di giorno attardo / di sera annotto / di notte ardo / ad ovest morte / gli vivo contro / del sud captivo / mio nord e' l'est / gli altri computino / passo per passo / io muoio ieri / nasco domani / vado ov'e' spazio / mio tempo e' quanto.

In these verses (translated by the poet Ungaretti) is the entire essence of Vinicius de Moraes, with his ups and downs and his personality so humane. "Nothing in our life is forever, there is no everlasting partner, no everlasting woman" often said Vinicius who brought the tenderness and the shudder of his passions not only in his poems but also in his songs, in which, sometimes, the feeling's tone is almost sketched.

In other songs the music is sweet and light, but in most of them he sings about sympathy, love, women, friendship.

Together with Baden Powell, Vinicius created "afro samba" recovering typical Bahia music styles in which the African musical influence is strongly anchored with its polyrhythmic, magic, myth, mystery. Vinicius worked together with a lot of Brazilian musicians, often with great results, but the feeling with Powell was perfect. The greatest Brazilian guitarist has found the sensual rhythms and the fascinating melodies to dress Vinicius' verses and most of their work has been recorded.

Last "Maracana" lp, "Brani rari e inediti di Baden Powell e Vinicius de Moraes", a touching gift from Powell to his dead friend, reveals ten songs (half of them unreleased) performed by Baden Powell's voice and guitar. And what a luck he is alone! Because if you compare some songs with previous versions recorded with a group it is clear that Baden can show his skill at its maximum degree when he is alone. With his thin voice, almost diaphanous, always in-tune, Powell's guitar acquires an enormous importance.

Sometimes it seems more effective than an entire rhythmic session, as in "Deixa" and in "Formosa", sometimes it competes in melody with his voice in songs like "Cancao de enganar tristeza", "Cancao de ninar tristeza" and "Cancao de amor em paz" (all three unreleased) showing off calibrated touches and creating sounds full of pathos and magic. We can say without exaggeration we have never heard, neither in a record nor alive, a guitarist-singer with Baden Powell' skills and to consider this new record as indispensable and worth receiving the "Discography Review Award".

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