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Samba-enredo

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The samba-enredo emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century and, over time, ceased to be merely an accompanying song to become one of the main elements of samba schools' identity. It turns the theme into song, carries the parade's emotion, mobilizes the community and helps the public follow the story the school brings to the parade avenue.

Choosing the samba-enredo became a central moment in the schools' life. Composers form partnerships and create original works based on the theme developed for Carnival. The sambas go through elimination rounds in the rehearsal halls until a winner is chosen. Over time, this process revealed writers essential to the genre's history and transformed the halls into spaces of creation, competition, listening and popular acclaim.

Among the central figures in this history is Silas de Oliveira, one of the great samba-enredo composers. At Império Serrano, he defined an era with *Aquarela Brasileira* (Brazilian Watercolor) in 1964, *Os Cinco Bailes da História do Rio* (The Five Balls in Rio's History) in 1965 and *Heróis da Liberdade* (Heroes of Freedom) in 1969. His sambas combine historical narrative,

social criticism and poetic craftsmanship, showing how the genre can tell Brazil's story, discuss freedom and preserve the memory of its time. Martinho da Vila also brought the experience of Unidos de Vila Isabel's samba competitions into Brazilian popular music. In 1972, he presented Onde o Brasil Aprendeu a Liberdade ("Where Brazil Learn Freedom") with the school, bringing together historical memory, popular culture and the struggle for freedom. Zuzuca made Salgueiro history with Festa para um Rei Negro (A Celebration for a Black King) in 1971 and Minha Madrinha Mangureira Querida (My Godmother Dear Mangureira) in 1972. Festa para um Rei Negro (A Celebration for a Black King) became a popular phenomenon and accompanied Salgueiro's championship-winning parade in 1971.

From the parade avenue to Brazil

Some sambas went beyond the parade and reached the country through recordings, reinterpretations, radio, television and other forms of popular culture.

Clara Nunes played an important role in this movement by recording O Misticismo da África ao Brasil ("Africa's Mysticism to Brazil"), Império da Tijuca's 1971 samba and performing Ilu Ayê, Terra da Vida 9 "Land of Life"), Portela's 1972 samba. These recordings helped bring samba-enredo to new audiences, expanding its presence beyond Carnival.

Another important example is Imperatriz Leopoldinense's *Martim Cererê* from 1972, which became hugely popular and reached television. Later, *Liberdade, Liberdade, Abre as Asas sobre Nós* (Freedom, Freedom, Spread your Wings Upon Us), also by Imperatriz, from 1989, reached television audiences again when it was used in the opening of the soap opera *Lado a Lado* (Side by Side) in 2012. These examples show how a samba-enredo can travel through time and find new lives in other spaces of Brazilian culture.

Other sambas followed this path. Fernanda Abreu recorded a new version of *União da Ilha's É Hoje* (Today is the Day), one of the best-known sambas in the Carnival repertoire. Marisa Monte brought *Império Serrano's Lenda das Sereias, Rainha do Mar* ("Legend of the Mermaids, Queen of the Sea") to a new generation. Each new interpretation shows that, for some sambas, the parade ends but the music continues.

In the 1980s and 1990s, other samba-enredos became national hits and remained in collective





memory. Kizomba, Festa da Raça (Kizomba, a Celebration of the Race), by Unidos de Vila Isabel, the 1988 champion, became a cultural and political landmark of Carnival. Salgueiro's Peguei um Ita no Norte (I Took an Ita Steamer in the North), champion in 1993, became enormously popular and remains remembered for its refrain.

When samba reaches the stands Samba-enredo also crossed into another great Brazilian popular passion: soccer. Some melodies left Sapucaí and gained new lyrics in stadium stands.

In 1998, Unidos da Tijuca brought De Gama a Vasco, a Epopeia da Tijuca (From Gama to Vasco: Tijuca's Epic – a tribute to Rio Soccer team Vasco da Gama) to the parade avenue, celebrating the navigator Vasco da Gama and



the club's centennial. The school finished in thirteenth place and was relegated, but its samba had a different destiny: it became a chant for Vasco supporters and lived on in the stadiums.

Fluminense supporters also turned a version of *Gosto que Me Enrosco* (I Love Getting Entangled), Portela's 1995 samba, into a stadium chant. The composer Noca da Portela himself described the emotion of hearing his melody sung by the tricolor supporters at Maracanã.

In 2007, *A Viradouro Vira o Jogo* (Turn the Game Around) followed a similar path. Its refrain was adapted by different Rio soccer supporters and began echoing in the stadiums too.

From the rehearsal hall to the parade avenue, from the avenue to radio, television and the

stadium, samba-enredo finds new audiences, gains other voices and keeps circulating.

A samba to remember those history forgot

More recently, *História pra Ninar Gente Grande* (A Bedtime Story Lullaby for Grown-Ups), by Estação Primeira de Mangueira, the 2019 champion, once again showed the samba-enredo's political and cultural power. The work challenged established narratives of Brazil's history and foregrounded figures and groups often erased, among them Dandara, Dragão do Mar, Marias, Mahins, Marielles and Malês.

Marielle Franco's presence took on an even stronger meaning at that Carnival. Mangueira paraded on March 5, 2019, just days before the first anniversary of the councilwoman's assassination on March 14, 2018. Her name entered the samba and her image appeared on the parade avenue, turning the parade into a



space of memory and tribute as well.

The samba gained new interpretations and reached new settings, including classrooms and educational projects, showing how a samba-enredo can keep inspiring thought long after the parade has ended.

A history that keeps singing

The samba-enredo's strength lies precisely in this ability to bring together music, memory, community and reflection. It can narrate a biography, celebrate a territory, defend an idea, honor a tradition, denounce erasure, or turn history into collective emotion.

And some sambas do not end when the school crosses the parade avenue's finish line. They continue on the radio, at parties, in schools, in stadiums and in people's voices. They become part of the memory of the school, Carnival and Brazilian culture itself.

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