

**CULTURAL COUNTERPOINTS:
Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America**



**Côrtes, Almir (Universidade Estadual de Campinas - UNICAMP):
“Brazilian styles and jazz elements: Hybridization in the music of Hermeto
Pascoal”**

Abstract:

By the late 1960s, the Brazilian composer Hermeto Pascoal (1936) started producing a musical oeuvre that would become a representative part of the repertory of modern Brazilian instrumental music (known internationally as Brazilian jazz). During his non-formal musical training, Pascoal was exposed to and practiced important Brazilian urban genres such as samba, choro, baião, frevo, and bossa nova. In 1970 he moved to the US, where he lived for around four years.

During this time he became intimately involved with jazz music. Among other activities, he collaborated, played, and recorded with the jazz giant Miles Davis (1926-1991).

This paper intends to show how Brazilian styles and jazz musical elements are articulated in the music of Pascoal. The discussion is based on a definition of hybridization as a social and cultural process in which structures or discrete practices that developed separately are combined in order to generate new structures, objects, and practices (CANCLINI, 2003).

The depth of this cross-cultural process will also be examined, showing the boundaries of Pascoal's blending. Recordings and transcriptions of important pieces by Pascoal will be analyzed in order to illustrate which elements are hybridized and which are not.

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Brazilian styles and jazz elements: Hybridization in the music of Hermeto Pascoal¹

Almir Côrtes²

By the late 1960's, the Brazilian composer Hermeto Pascoal (1936) started producing a musical oeuvre that would become a representative part of the repertory of modern Brazilian instrumental music (known internationally as Brazilian jazz). During his informal musical training, Pascoal was exposed to and practiced important Brazilian urban genres such as *samba*, *choro*, *baião*, *frevo*, and *bossa nova*. In 1970 he moved to the United States, where he lived for approximately four years. During this time he became intimately involved with jazz music. Among other activities, he collaborated, played, and recorded with the jazz giant Miles Davis (1926-1991).

This paper intends to show how Brazilian styles and jazz musical elements are articulated in the music of Hermeto Pascoal. The analysis is based on a definition of hybridization as a social and cultural process, one in which structures or discrete practices that developed separately are combined in order to generate new structures, objects, and practices (CANCLINI, 2003).

The depth of this cross-cultural process will also be examined, showing the boundaries of Pascoal's blending. Recordings and transcriptions of important pieces by Pascoal will be analyzed in order to illustrate which elements are hybridized and which are not.

Keywords: Hermeto Pascoal; Brazilian styles; jazz elements; Brazilian instrumental music; Brazilian jazz; hybridization; musical analysis.

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1. Introduction

The work of Hermeto Pascoal - as a composer, arranger, and multi-instrumentalist performer - provides a substantial reference for the study of modern Brazilian instrumental music, known internationally as Brazilian jazz³. Pascoal's oeuvre is very complex, covering a wide range of techniques and musical elements. The quotation below sheds some light on his creative process:

[...] Hermeto has created a multi-directional/focal music by the use of paradoxical and ambiguous elements, such as the use of atonalism, polytonality, microtonalism. Combined or individually applied, these can be used in an entire composition or be inserted during a predictable musical event. Consequently, indeterminism, ambiguity, and the incorporation of unexpected music elements are also constantly present in Hermeto's creative process. By challenging traditional musical labels and boundaries, Hermeto places his musical system simultaneously in two semantic fields, which would be exclusive of each other, among the worlds of popular, experimentalism and or art music. At times, his innovations broaden the parameters of the popular and at others he applies popular techniques within the structural parameters of art music [...] (ZATTERA, 2010).

In keeping with Zattera's perspective, this paper will focus specifically on the articulation of Brazilian styles and jazz musical elements in the music of Pascoal. I will begin with a brief biography of the musician in order to understand his informal musical training, as well his social and cultural background.

2. Biography

Hermeto Pascoal was born June 22, 1936, in the Northeast, one of the poorest regions of Brazil. He is from a small village called Lagoa da Canoa, located in the interior of the Brazilian state of Alagoas. His first musical explorations began playfully, in early childhood. He would carve small flutes from plant stalks, playing them for birds and experimenting with their sound under water in a nearby lake. He collected scraps of iron from his grandfather's blacksmith shop, suspending them in the air and striking them to hear the different sounds he could make. Pascoal has perfect

³ The label "Brazilian jazz" is somewhat inappropriate, because it gives the impression that Brazilian instrumental music is merely a jazz adaptation. Although some Brazilian styles, like *samba-jazz* for example, could be considered "jazz made in a Brazilian way," many other styles have little or nothing to do with jazz, especially in the music of Pascoal.

pitch, and later would realize that this allowed him to hear microtonal variations. At seven-eight years of age, he began to play his father's 8-button diatonic accordion.

In addition to the challenges he faced from the poverty of his childhood, Pascoal is albino; in his youth, he could not withstand work on local plantations because of his sensitivity to the sun. His vision was also compromised by albinism, making it difficult for him to have formal education of any kind. Nevertheless, the Northeast has a rich popular culture, including several types of traditional gatherings and a variety of specific folkloric music. By the age of eight, Pascoal was playing accordion and percussion along with his father and brother at weddings and other local festivities.

In the 1950's, Pascoal, now a teenager, moved - first to Recife, then to Caruaru and João Pessoa. In these large cities, he worked with radio station ensembles, called *regionais*⁴, and played in nightclubs. During this time he began learning to play the piano, to have contact with radio orchestras, and to explore elementary musical theory.

In the late 1950's, he moved to the Southeast of Brazil, a region much more economically developed and the heart of the cultural industry. He moved first to Rio de Janeiro, then in 1960 to São Paulo. During this time, he continued working at radio stations and playing in nightclubs, while also beginning work in recording studios and learning saxophone and flute.

Nightlife and the *Regional* groups of the radio stations were a very important school for Hermeto, in which he learned, orally, a highly varied musical vocabulary, from northeastern music to serenades, *choros*, sambas, gypsy music and bossa-nova, all the way to jazz standards (LIMA NETO, 1999: 47).

In 1967, after playing with *samba-jazz*⁵ trios like *Som Quatro* and *Som Brasa*, Pascoal recorded an album with the group *Quarteto Novo*. This was his first important instrumental music recording.

In 1969, Pascoal traveled to New York City. There he composed, arranged, and performed on albums for Airto Moreira and Flora Purim, and performed and collaborated with important American jazz musicians such as Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, John MacLaughlin, Gil Evans, Thad Jones, and several others.

⁴⁴ The *regionais* (plural of the word *regional*) are small groups traditionally formed by flute, mandolin or clarinet, the *cavaquinho*, guitars, *pandeiro* and sometimes accordion. Most of the time these groups backed up famous crooners and played urban genres like *samba*, *choro* and *baião*.

⁵ The *samba-jazz* style starts out in the 1960's played mainly by trios formed by piano, drums, and bass.

According to Lima Neto (1998), Pascoal's contact with the avant-garde music produced in this period added more “ingredients” to his musical brew.

The characteristics of free jazz were: free entrance into atonality; dissolution of the meter, of the beat; research with timbres and noises; collective and ecstatic improvisation; abolition of form; etc. Hermeto assimilated some of the above-mentioned procedures, perhaps even all of them, in the 70s, when he traveled to the United States and lived there. He seems to have found, in the effervescent world of experimental American jazz, a territory where he could develop his own language, without, however, losing touch with Brazilian music, especially the northeastern music of his childhood. (LIMA NETO, 1999: 31)

By this time Pascoal was developing his solo career and recording his own albums in both the United States and Brazil. He began to achieve international renown as an instrumentalist, arranger, and composer. In the late 1970's, he returned to Brazil and settled there. At this point, he established his most important ensemble, called simply *Hermeto Pascoal e Grupo* (1981 to 1993). From this time forward, he devoted more time to composing and arranging for big bands and symphonic orchestras. Pascoal has continued composing, recording, and presenting live concerts to the present day.

His skills, his innate musicality, and his commitment to the music led Pascoal from the role of a sideman to the mainstream of international avant-garde music. This brief biography shows that although the musician had no formal training, he had expertise in many musical styles; among these are Brazilian and jazz styles.

This paper will examine three important pieces selected from the albums made by Hermeto Pascoal in the 1970's in order to see how these two styles are reflected in his music. The analysis is based on a definition of hybridization as a social and cultural process, one in which structures or discrete practices that developed separately are combined in order to generate new structures, objects, and practices (CANCLINI, 2003).

The Brazilian urban genres presented here were studied based on the period from 1920 to 1950. Radio stations began appearing around the 1920's in Brazil, and broadcasts of live and recorded music performance became a major product for the radio industry. Thus, there was a need to classify various types of music; hence, the nomenclature of Brazilian genres was born. Although most of these genres existed previously, they were stylized and classified during this period. However, it is important to say that the “rules” defining the different genres are not strict. Indeed, they are in constant transformation.

Several studies on music show that genres are cultural constructions classified by natives and that the borders between musical genres are flexible and mutable, and therefore questionable under several points of view. The scene of genres in popular music is one of intense fluidity: new genres with new labels emerge constantly, often through the intersection of multiple existing genres, or from the reevaluation of their symbolic borders. (PIEDADE, 2003:52)

During the 1950's, the cultural modernization of Brazil was promoted both politically and artistically. The radio audience declined under the influence of television, and a shift of musical tastes took place. *Bossa nova* music, emerging in the early 1950's, is now considered a watershed between “traditional” and “modern” music (NAPOLITANO, 2007).

3. Analysis of recordings and transcriptions

3.1 *Bebê* (Hermeto Pascoal)

The composition *Bebê* (Baby) was recorded on the album *Música Livre*, (Sinter/Phonogram, 1973)⁶. It is one of the most well-known of Pascoal's compositions. Since this tune was predominantly composed using musical elements of the Brazilian musical genre called *baião*, it could be classified as a “modern *baião*.”

Baião emerged as a popular musical genre in Brazil in the 1940s. It is strongly representative of the musical style of the Northeast, and today it is considered a mainstay of “traditional” Brazilian music. The musical elements from *baião* can be found through listening and transcription from important recordings made between 1940 and 1960 by *baião*'s most important artist, the singer and accordionist Luiz Gonzaga (1912-1984)⁷. Tunes like *Juazeiro* (1949), *No Ceará não tem disso não* (1950), *Baião na Garoa* (1952) and *Algodão* (1953) are good sources from which to gain an understanding of the *baião* sound.

⁶ This album was released in the US as *The Free Music of Hermeto Pascoal* (Verve, 1991).

⁷ Luiz Gonzaga stylized the genre by launching it into the musical scene of the 1940's in the city of Rio de Janeiro. One can listen to Luiz Gonzaga's recordings on <www.luizluagonzaga.mus.br>

Figure 1 – *No Ceará não tem disso não* (Guio de Moraes)

The figure above exemplifies the principal rhythmic counterpoint of *baião*. It is written in 2/4 time and has eighth notes in the melody against the accompaniment, represented above by the lower staff. Nevertheless, sixteenth notes may also be used in a *baião* melody. This example shows the mixolydian mode present in the melodies of most *baião* tunes. Other modes that can be used are the lidian and dorian modes.

In *Bebê*, Pascoal uses musical elements of *baião*, including the "groove" and characteristic articulation. In the introductory section of the piece the bass plays the characteristic rhythmic pattern with a subtle accent at the second note of each bar.

Figure 2 – Intro of *Bebê* (Hermeto Pascoal).

There is no improvisation⁸ on the recording. Some jazz procedures are evident, primarily in the harmonization. The changes (chord progressions) of the B, C and D sections⁹ consist of three consecutive II-V (two-five) sequences in minor keys.

⁸ Improvisation in this paper is understood as existing within the context of jazz, in which the player builds a solo over the changes of the tune (chorus).

⁹ The B section begins in Em7(b5), the C section begins in Cm7(11), and the D section begins in Bm7(11).

Figure 3 – B part of *Bebê* (Hermeto Pascoal).

Such progressions resemble changes found in jazz standards, as for instance, the last eight bars of *Stella by Starlight* (Victor Young).

Figure 4 – Last 8 bars of *Stella by Starlight* (Victor Young).

As may be noticed, the melody of *Bebê* is much closer to *baião* than to American jazz, especially from a rhythmical point of view.


3.2 *Chorinho pra Ele* (Hermeto Pascoal)

Chorinho pra Ele (*Chorinho* for him) was recorded on the album *Slave Mass* (WEA, 1977). As *Bebê* was composed based on *baião*, *Chorinho pra Ele* is derived from *choro* (also called *chorinho*, which is its diminutive). Therefore this tune can be considered a “modern *choro*”.

Choro began to emerge as a genre at the beginning of the twentieth century. It exerted influence on much of Brazilian popular music. The figure below shows a piece by one of the most important *choro* composers, the flutist and saxophone player Alfredo da Rocha Vianna, known as Pixinguinha (1897-1973). Here we have the melody (upper staff) with the characteristic accompaniment of a 7-string guitar (lower staff).

Figure 5 – *Naquele Tempo* (Pixinguinha).

The main characteristics of *choro* are:

- Sixteenth notes as the basic subdivision for the melody
- Basic accompaniment - sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth 
- Melodic lines formed mainly by arpeggios and chromatic approaches
- Counterpoints played in the low range

Chorinho pra Ele incorporates most of the features listed above. However, it was recorded using a mix of acoustic and electric instruments (flute, keyboards, electric bass) and has some unusual harmonic procedures when compared to “traditional” *choro*.

Figure 6 – *Chorinho pra Ele* (Hermeto Pascoal).

The changes of the first eight bars of the A section are typical of *choro*. From bar 9, there is a series of II-V sequences modulating through the keys of Bb, Ab, C, and Am. As previously noted, these consecutive II-V sequences are similar to standard jazz progressions. However, the melody is much closer to *choro*.

Generally, *choro* sections have 16 bars, and the tonic key appears in the last bar to close the section. Here, bar 16 resolves temporarily in Am, the II of the tonic key; this is followed by a cycle that starts and ends in F7 (bars 17-20). At that point, the dominant D7 chord is reached via the Eb7 (Vsub7 of D7), thus leading back to the beginning of the A section.

The B section modulates to Db, a distant key in relation to G, and also unusual to *choro*. In this section there is a jazz quotation in the melody. On bar 3 of the figure below, we can see the "Indiana bebop" lick (COKER, 1991).

Figure 7 – Excerpt of the B part of *Chorinho pra Ele* (Hermeto Pascoal).

The next figure shows an "Indiana bebop" pattern (or lick) in the key of Ab. This pattern was developed from the dominant bebop scale (BAKER, 1989).



Figure 7 – "Indiana Bebop" lick.

Again, there is no improvisation in the recording. The A section is played in double time at the ending, a resource commonly used in *choro* practice.

3.3 *Tacho* (Hermeto Pascoal)

Tacho (Mixing Pot) was also recorded on *Slave Mass* (WEA, 1977). It is a *samba*, adapted to use the 7/8 time signature.

The kind of *samba* considered "traditional" is generally sung and accompanied by plucked string instruments (*cavaquinho*, guitar) and percussion (*pandeiro*, *agogô*, *tamborim*, *cuíca*, *surdo*). Composers and singers like Donga, Bide, Noel Rosa, Assis Valente, Ary Barroso, Dorival Caymmi, and Cartola, among many others, were important in shaping *samba* characteristics.

The figure below presents a typical *samba* melodic structure accompanied by changes commonly used in this music. The lower staff shows the characteristic rhythmic pattern of the *samba* groove.

Figure 8 – *Brasil pandeiro* (Assis Valente).

In *Tacho*, the *samba* groove is adapted to 7/8 time.

Figure 9 – Sample groove of *Tacho* (Hermeto Pascoal).

Tacho's changes and melody are related to modal jazz. Although written in 7/8, the first eight bars resemble the tune *Impressions* (Jonh Coltrane).

Figure 9 –*Tacho* (Hermeto Pascoal).

Tacho changes are as follows: 4 bars of Dm7, 4 bars of Ebm7, 2 bars of Em7, 2 bars of Dm7 and 4 bars of C#m7(b5). *Impressions* changes are as follows: 16 bars of Dm7, 8 bars of Ebm7, and 8 bars of Dm7). The latter changes are identical to *So What* (Miles Davis).

Figure 10 – *Impressions* (John Coltrane).

Of the three pieces examined here, the arrangement used in *Tacho*'s recording is the most jazz-like one (theme – solos – theme). In the solos, timbre and articulation are the aspects most closely related to Brazilian music. There is improvisation from voice, keyboard, and flute. Pascoal's guttural voice, combined with some other instrument, has become one of his trademarks in improvised solos (LIMA

NETO, 2010); in this recording, he sings and plays keyboard simultaneously. After the final theme (head out), the music dissolves into an ebullient blend of random sounds, somewhat like American "free jazz", ending in total abandon.

4. Final considerations

The musical examples exposed here show us a bit of how hybridization appears in Hermeto Pascoal's music. In these selected works, he uses elements from both Brazilian and jazz styles in order to produce his particular style. The analyses illustrate that elements such as chord progressions and melodies are more hybridized than elements such as rhythmic patterns, grooves, articulation, and timbre. Since these rhythmic elements and timbre are some of the most important defining characteristics of Brazilian styles, it would be reasonable to think that by not hybridizing them, Pascoal intended to conceive his oeuvre as Brazilian music. However, the statement below shows that this is not the case:

I went to the U.S.A. with my own way of working, and with the desire of changing the habit that made the Brazilians who went there learn from the American musicians. In Brazil, there's a tendency to think that only what comes from the U.S.A. is good. Brazilian musicians go there, listen to jazz, then return to Brazil and record an album that is a copy of one of their idols. I wanted to show something else, that isn't jazz, or samba or bossa nova, because all of that bores me! (...) Yes, I make music and I'm Brazilian. Let them take that as they will (HERMETO, *Jazz Magazine*, 1984 apud LIMA NETO, 1998: 61).

Statements such as the one above, plus Pascoal's behavior during his career (BOREM; ARAUJO, 2010) show that he was constantly struggling against the associations of his name with musical movements, and with the categorization of his music into genre-specific labels. This anti-label attitude and his rebellious posture against the established cultural industry are what perhaps best define his musical conception.

Based on his biography, I believe that most of Pascoal's blending was not preplanned, but arose spontaneously from his desire to produce something different, and to escape commercial classifications. His incredible capacity for assimilating the styles he plays and hears allows him to blend them intuitively during his creative process. Pascoal seemed to find his voice in the rapidly fermenting American jazz and Brazilian

musical scene of the 1970's. "Frequently hybridization comes out from individual and collective creativity" (CANCLINI, 2003).

Brazilian musical styles and jazz elements, together with many other musical styles and unconventional sounds, are components of Pascoal's music. His particular way of combining all these elements produced a hybrid and unique music that stretched musical boundaries and established itself as one of the most compelling results of a fascinating cross-cultural exchange.

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