

## Brazil's Favela Sounds Promise Hot Season in London

Contributed by Guy Burton  
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Music from the favelas near the Queen's home at Buckingham Palace? It may sound unlikely, but it happened last Saturday night. After three months in winter hibernation Batmacumba was back at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) on the Mall in London, just down the road from the Royal Family.

Batmacumba's stalwart presenter, DJ Cliffy was leading the charge, along with fellow DJ and producer, Roc Hunter, who ably assisted on the turntables.

And the club night's first appearance since New Year's Eve brought with it not only a large and enthusiastic crowd of Batmacumba regulars, but also some of the latest sounds coming out of Brazil, including baile funk.

Baile funk is more often associated with the favelas or shantytowns that appear on the periphery of Brazil's urban areas. It has tended to receive a bad press, with Brazil's media full of sensational stories of associated drug consumption, sexual license and gang-related violence regularly filling the media.

But slowly baile funk seems to be gaining respectability, including through its exposure abroad. Over the last year Londoners in the know have had a weekly slot on Resonance FM (Tuesdays, 1-2pm on 104.4FM), which has brought the sounds of the favela to a wider audience.

Slightly rougher in sound and production values than Batmacumba's usual drum and bass, samba and jazzy tunes, baile funk still comes across as a breath of fresh air to most other London club nights.

With Brazilian music increasingly well catered for throughout the British capital, gyrating one's hips to rapped Portuguese lyrics accompanied with synthesisers down the road from the Royal Family is a captivating image.

But Batmacumba isn't only about innovation. As one of the granddaddies of London's Brazilian music scene, it has a long and large list of loyal followers to support and maintain. And so last Saturday it proved, with the regular drum and bass, samba and jazzy tunes put out by the DJs proved.

When the floor became too crowded and sweaty we raised our eyes above the DJ and followed the multimedia show on offer; this time the offerings included a black and white cops-and-robbers film, a car racing from the 1970s and a documentary on music with talking head appearances (and subtitles) from Daniela Mercury, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso.

Alternately, relief could be found at the bar. When it could be reached the overworked bar staff were not only serving up the usual draught beer, but caipirinhas as well as £5 a go. The result? A suitably happy and mixed crowd, from Brazilians and Japanese to hippy chicks and clubbing regulars of all ages.

Admittedly though, the ICA has never been the ideal club venue in which to dance. It can be too cramped and the ventilation on the dance floor is poor.

The bar and dance areas are separated by a staircase where it's forbidden to linger; the token steward can get bolshy about it at times. But then all the flaws which hold back the venue are also its strength: the tight and intimate press of the crowd may well be part of Batmacumba's attraction, reinforcing the sense that you're part of something small and exclusive.

And when the claustrophobia gets too much, the ICA's other features - its bar and restaurant area - become a good hideaway, where you can sit back and relax, while listening to DJ Cliffy's record collection.

But recent - and unrelated - news has suggested the ICA is in trouble. London's media has publicised a lack of direction and purpose emanating from the institution, resulting in a change at the top.

Its new director, Ekow Eshun, is reportedly not taking up his post for a couple of months while he thinks through what he plans to do with the place.

But whatever he decides and given the number of enthusiastic clubbers flocking through the ICA's doors on Saturday night, Batmacumba looks set to stay. And with the club night back on the dance calendar for the next few months, summer in London never looked better.

Batmacumba plays at the ICA, The Mall, London, SW1  
Tickets: £6/£5 concessional/Free for ICA members

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