

# Brazil Loses Emilinha, an Idol from the 1940s, Who Never Left the Limelight

Contributed by Francesco Neves  
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Brazilian legendary singer from the 1940s and 1950s, Emilinha Borba, died Monday, September 3, in Rio, apparently from heart problems. She was known as Radio Queen, having won her fame through a long career singing on radio. She had celebrated her 82nd birthday September 4 and the party was held in part to also commemorate the fact that she was again in good health and spirits after a fall in which he hit her head. She had been kept in the hospital for close to a month, after the accident.

Emília Pavana da Silva Borba was born in the Mangueira neighborhood, in Rio, and stayed always connected to the escola de samba (samba club) that gave name to that area. Her career started in the Urca's Casino, thanks to Carmen Miranda.

Legend has it that an aunt of Emilinha, who worked as Carmen's chambermaid, told the singer that her niece used to imitate her in musical auditorium shows. Touched by the revelation, Carmen asked the Casino owner, Mário Rolla, to give Emilinha a chance.

"I always stayed backstage because I was under age," she told an interviewer. It was there that American filmmaker Orson Welles saw her and fell in love, when he went to Brazil. The Citizen Kane's director wanted to take her to Hollywood, but she didn't like the idea. "He didn't mean a thing to me. I was so young that I had no eyes for him."

In the 1950s she became the "Navy's Favorite" and released such hits as "Aqueles olhos verdes", "Catito", "Chiquita Bacana", "Baião de dois" and "Se queres saber". And every year she recorded a new Carnaval march that went on to become a hit: "Pó de mico", "Se a canoa não virar", "Mulata bossa nova," etc

The singer was at home with her secretary, Zaira Peçanha, and her niece Elizabeth, when she felt ill, dying a short while later. Both had moved to Borba's Copacabana apartment, after her fall.

## Friend and Foe Marlene

"Emilinha was almost recovered and she was looking forward to seeing Marília Pera playing Carmen Miranda this week", said the president of her fan-club, Mário Lima. "Last Wednesday she went to a dinner celebrating the 70 years of Tupi radio and was raring to go back to her normal activities."

Ailing singer Marlene, her main rival during her successful years at Rádio Nacional and somebody who became a lasting and close friend wasn't told about her death. "She just came out from the ITU (Intensive Therapy Unit) and wouldn't be able to handle the news that Emilinha died," said her secretary Almerinda Manoela da Silva. "They are very close friends. They talked on the phone yesterday and today she already mentioned her."

Emilinha Borba recorded 89 LPs (records with six songs in each side), 71 compact disks and 117 disks of 78 rpm, that are in the WEA's collection, which has the copyrights of the old Continental recording company. Her older recordings are hard to find.

The singer never completely lost her popularity. Every year, in September, her fans have been putting together a Emilinha Borba festival, with dinner, show and presentation of her old favorite songs. No other singer, with the possible exception of her rival/friend Marlene, has ever got this kind of popular acclaim.

When the recording companies did not want her anymore, Emilinha decided to embark into a home production and financed the disk herself with the help of singer Luiz Henrique, who also produced the album.

She included her old hits and recent songs like "ECT", from the Cassia Eller repertoire and "Entre tapas e beijos", from country duo Leandro and Leonardo and she sold well.

She wasn't shy to go out herself to the streets and squares to offer directly to the public her music. She said at the time, "I love this contact with the people and I never sell less than a hundred disks, because I charge half the store price."

Always enthusiastic, she always preferred to talk about the present and the future instead of the past. "This thing about past is with my fan-club. They watch me, they register everything I do in my career because I don't keep anything. I keep walking ahead."

## Friends Talk

Singer Cauby Peixoto: "I've never seen, in any country, an idol be so beloved, be so popular as Emilinha Borba. She is an icon, and will never be replaced. She leaves a huge emptiness. I stayed always close to her to win fame, to appear in the magazines. To be close to Emilinha was to be with success. I was a great friend, she liked me a lot and trusted me. I used to take good care of her."

Actress Marília Pera: "I have a very joyful, very dear memory of her, from the radio era. I recall her very well with that little birth sign in the chin, in some movies. I didn't know she was that sick. Another day someone went to see me on stage and told me that she would be coming to my show. In 1989, when I was playing 'Elas por ela', in which I imitated her, she went up once on stage. Hopefully Emilinha's happiness, her naivete, and her kindness will last for ever. I believe that she leaves a legion of fans. I am one of them."

Writer and journalist Sérgio Cabral: "She really was a very important character. Emilinha was the person who better defines the golden phase of radio. It is impossible to talk about this era and about Rádio Nacional without mentioning her name. I was surprised by the news of her death because I had met her recently, in the party for the 70 years of Radio Tupi, and she looked fine."