

Brazil's Ziraldo Adds Arab Character to His Cartoon Universe

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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O Menino Maluquinho (The Nutty Boy), a character created by writer and cartoonist Ziraldo Alves Pinto, is going to get an Arab friend. He will have two large dark eyes, will eat kibbehs and will be called Nansirinho. The little Arab should be included in one of the next stories in Menino Maluquinho comics published every month by publishing house Globo. Nansirinho will be inspired on one of the cartoonist's childhood friends from the southeastern Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, whose name was Al-Nansir. Ziraldo was born in the city of Caratinga, in Minas Gerais, where he lived close to Arab families.

"I grew up eating kibbehs and Arab food," he explained. The writer lived in a region of the city where there were many families of Arab origin. Most of them worked in trade.

Part of this life was transferred into Ziraldo's Menino Maluquinho comics. Released in 1980 as a character in a book, Menino Maluquinho is one of the most famous creations by Ziraldo.

The author gave the boy typically Brazilian characteristics: he is mischievous, has many friends and loves playing football and eating sweets at his grandparents' house. Another detail: he is a philanderer.

Ziraldo has 189 books published, 40 of which are about the Menino Maluquinho. Since he was created, the character has already been adapted to the theater, comics, children's opera, videogame, Internet and cinema.

The films generated great repercussion for Ziraldo, both in Brazil and abroad. The first, released in Brazil in 1994, is called Menino Maluquinho - The Film, and the second, released in 1999, is Menino Maluquinho 2 - The Adventure. Both together won almost 20 awards.

The first film even won the Golden Cairo at the Cairo International Film Festival for Children, in Egypt, as soon as it was released.

"I was very surprised with the award in Egypt. After all, it is a film about a western bourgeois," he said. Ziraldo has no works published in the Arab countries, but he says he would be interested in case some publishing house showed interest.

In all, the author from Minas Gerais has already sold 10 million books in Brazil and abroad. The Menino Maluquinho alone has sold 2.5 million.

In Uruguay, for example, his works and characters are as well known as they are in Brazil. He also has books published in other countries, like Portugal, Germany, Italy and Spain. Most of the works distributed outside the country, however, stayed in Latin America.

The children from South Korea and India will be the next to read stories by Ziraldo. Korea is going to publish the Menino Maluquinho books and India the Menino Maluquinho and Flicts, the first book released by the cartoonist, in which the main character is a color. The works by Ziraldo have been translated into English, Spanish, German, French, Italian, Basque and even Esperanto.

Past and Future

Apart from a writer and cartoonist, Ziraldo is a painter, poster producer, journalist, playwright and caricaturist. He began his career publishing humor pages and cartoons in newspapers and magazines, in the 1950's, but really became famous when he released his first comic book in the 1960's, entitled Turma do Pererê (Pererê's Gang).

The first children's book, Flicts, was published in 1969. After it came various others, among them the Menino Maluquinho, and series As Tias (The Aunts), Bebê Maluquinho (The Nutty Baby), Bichim and others.

He was also one of the founders of O Pasquim, a paper released in 1969, which became famous as it was against the military dictatorship in Brazil. In the same year, Ziraldo won the International Oscar for Humor at the 32nd International Caricature Salon in Brussels.

Today, apart from being a collaborator in various Brazilian newspapers and having comics O Menino Maluquinho and Julieta, Menina Maluquinha (Julieta, the Nutty Girl) published monthly by Globo publishing house, Ziraldo also works on projects for third parties.

One of them is for the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae). In August, the Sebrae released a series of comics in which there are clues for small businessmen, in a humorous manner, as to how to run their companies. The comics have messages about how to generate faithfulness in customers and plan, create associations, increase sales and focus on the business.

One of Ziraldo's next steps will be transforming the Menino Maluquinho into a television character. TV Cultura is going to start showing, in November, a children's program that will have the Menino Maluquinho as its main theme, as is the case with another program, Castelo Rá-Tim-Bum. A total of 27 programs will be transmitted, according to information supplied by a spokesperson for Ziraldo.

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