

The Middle-East Side of Zélia Duncan

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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"I am going to try to make this into my place." When Brazilian singer Zélia Duncan sings a stretch of song "O meu lugar" ("My place") in her shows, she is not talking about the southeastern Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro or Brazilian capital Brasília, the two cities in which she lived most of her life.

Zélia is referring to the United Arab Emirates. The song was composed while the artist lived in Abu Dhabi, in the early 1990's.

That's it. In her career, Zélia, who is now one of the most popular singers in Brazilian Popular Music (MPB), crossed the Arab world. It was in October 1991. The singer was not the celebrity she is today, but she had already recorded her first record,

"Outra Luz" (Another Light), had performed all around Brazil and had been nominated for the Sharp Award, as Revelation and Best Pop/Rock Singer. She stopped everything and travelled to the Emirates. She spent five months there.

"They were fundamental months for me, a phase of growth, where everything was used. We sang every day, my only worry was making the strength of our music clear," stated the singer in her biography, published on her official site.

Zélia played at Casa Brasil, a space at the Le Meridien Hotel. Her audience included people from all around the world, especially Arabs, Europeans and Australians.

In that period, Zélia learnt a little more about oriental sounds and found inspiration to compose. "I wrote all the time and started sending lyrics to my partners," explained Zélia. Song "O meu lugar", which was included in her second record, was written in Abu Dhabi. It was composed with the help of instrumentalist Christiaan Oyens.

According to Zélia, listening to Joni Mitchell, Joan Armatrading, Sam Cooke, Ry Cooder and Peter Gabriel, which she did while she was in the Emirates, was important to better define her musical style. They are some of my main influences.

According to a report by Zélia herself, the trip greatly affected her career. "I returned home in 1992 and noticed that I was not the same, I did not want any interference or false parameters, I only thought about returning to work, playing more acoustic music and, finally, singing my songs," she said.

Zélia was never completely satisfied with her first record. This is so true that it was after having released her second record, "Zélia Duncan", in 1994, that her career took off.

Zélia's music started playing on radio stations all around Brazil, especially "Não vá ainda" (Don't go yet), "Nos lençóis desse reggae" (In the sheets of this reggae) and "Catedral" (Cathedral). Almost all the tracks on this CD were composed in partnership with instrumentalist and friend Christiaan Oyens. "Catedral", a version by Zélia and Christiaan for "Cathedral Song", by Tanita Tikaram, was even included in the soundtrack of soap opera "A próxima vítima" (The Next Victim), further boosting her career.

Today, Zélia Duncan shares the stage and the attention of Brazilian critique with famous MPB musicians like Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethânia, Gilberto Gil, Djavan, Adriana Calcanhoto and Nando Reis. She already has eight CDs recorded, has done many shows outside the country, has had special participations in shows of famous Brazilian bands and singers like Chico Buarque and Capital Inicial, and has also been included in compilations.

This year Zélia released CD "Pré-pós-tudo-bossa-band" (Pre-post-everything-bossa-band, in a literal translation). The title of the CD shows how the singer's work varies; is a mixture of styles. Listening to Zélia is feeling a little of the taste of rock, samba, blues and pop.

The main song of her new CD criticizes the narcissistic egos of the modern world. "Everybody wants to be cool," says one of her songs. "Everybody wants to be hip. Some guys are sambaing with their ego's out", it adds.

One of the songs on the CD that most pleased the public, however, was "Vi, não vivi" (I saw, but didn't live), a romantic song written by Christiaan and Itamar Assumpção.

O Meu Lugar

(Song written by Zélia Duncan in Abu Dhabi)

Tento fazer desse lugar o meu lugar
Ao menos por enquanto
Enquanto isso durar
O que me separa de você agora
Um avião
Um oceano
Outros planos e muitos enganos

Por enquanto espero e vou vivendo
Apenas fantasio meus dias aqui
É, e isso é verdadeiro
Me troco, me arrojoo
Ao menos por enquanto
Enquanto isso durar

Como voltar
"No way"
Não sei nem divagar sobre nós
Como voltar e esperar
O prêmio intenso
De voltar pra mim diferente
Vou tentar fazer daqui o meu lugar

My place

I try to make this place into my place
At least for now
While this lasts
What separates me from you now
Is an airplane,
an ocean,
other plans
And many mistakes

For now I wait and live
I fantasize my days away
Yes, that's true
I change, I dare
At least for now
While this lasts

How to return
"No way"
I can't even think about us
How to return
And wait for the intense award
Of returning to a different me
I'm going to try to make this place into my place

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