

Brazil's Carlinhos Antunes Cooks Smorgasbord of Arab, Jewish and Gypsy Sounds

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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The song is "Lamentos", written by famous Brazilian singer Pixinguinha, but the rhythm coming from the lute is Arab. In the sixth song of CD "Carlinhos Antunes - Orquestra Mundana", launched at the beginning of this year, Brazilian and Arab sounds meet.

The name of the song is Alaúde Virtuoso/Lamentos (Virtuous Lute/Laments). The band's name (Worldwide Orchestra, in a free translation) is a reference to what musician Carlinhos Antunes, who leads the orchestra, knows how to do best: mix the rhythms of the world.

Carlinhos Antunes has already played and researched music in 36 countries. One of them was Morocco. It was in Morocco, incidentally, that the musician, also a composer and singer, discovered that he wanted to play the sounds of different areas of the world.

"In 1987 I participated in the Moussen Cultural Festival in Asilah, a city close to Tangiers. I divide my music into before and after this meeting," stated Carlinhos, who plays guitar, viola, charango (a small 10 string guitar - five pairs - originally made out of armadillo shells), cuatro (another ten string guitar - also five pairs, but that originally had four. The instrument's name, cuatro, means four in Spanish), kora (a West African harp or harp-lute), saz (a long necked lute) and percussion instruments.

The festival in Morocco showed songs from various regions of the world, from Arab Africa, Black Africa to India and the United States.

"On the same stage I saw flamenco and an Arab worker chant. The meeting of Arab and Spanish Andalusian music. To me, music never stopped crossing that region," he said.

Carlinhos participated in the festival with the group he was in at the time, Tarancón. Around three years later he returned to Morocco, to live there.

The way found to return to the Arab country was participation in a music group that played in hotels. In Morocco, however, Carlinhos ended up dedicating himself to other musical projects and to Brazilian dance courses, together with a friend who was a dancer, at local schools.

"I spoke about Brazilian culture, about music, covered the part of dance rhythm," he explained. "I had to learn French very fast to be able to teach."

Carlinhos states that in Morocco he found many similarities to the Brazilian Northeast. "You enter a plane, fly for eight hours and arrive in a different world. But it is also similar to the Brazilian Northeast. It is the Northeast in other clothes," he said.

Among the similarities are beaches, agriculture, handicraft and shepherding. In short, the culture. Carlinhos recalls that the Brazilian northeast had strong influence from the Iberian Peninsula. "Our Latinity came from the Iberian Peninsula, which was under Arab, Jewish and Gypsy influence for a long time."

Music of the World

The musician spent six months in the African country. When he returned to Brazil, after spending four years in Spain, Carlinhos dedicated himself to establishing projects and shows with Latin rhythms and with those of the countries he lived in.

One of them was "Lorca na Rua" (Lorca in the Street), in which he mixed flamenco and Brazilian and Arab music. The presentations took place in 1996. In the following year, the composer established "São Paulo de Todos os Povos" (São Paulo of All People), in which he called Japanese, Gypsy, Arab and Indian musicians to play with him.

Spectacle "Latinidades" (Latinity) was established in 2002 and included among its participants Carlinhos, the Palestinian Samir and Wissan Jubran, on the lute, as well as Portuguese guitarist Antônio Chainho. Nowadays, Carlinhos leads Orquestra Mundana, in which eight musicians and singers participate all the time.

The group, however, usually calls one or more musicians, normally foreign, to sing and play with them. This is Carlinhos' philosophy, and he has already even played with Romanian Gypsy musicians. "I took to music the utopia of historians,"

said Carlinhos. Apart from being a musician, he is also a historian.

Orquestra Mundana currently has two Arab members, Sami Bordokan, who plays lute and sings, and William Bordokan, who plays percussion. In the group's last CD, apart from song "Alaúde Virtuoso/Lamentos", which mixes Arab rhythms to Brazilian music, the fourth track, "Mitli-Mitlac", and the eleventh, Lamma Bada lataçanna, are Arab.

Carlinhos Antunes wants to take his band to play in the Arab countries. There is not yet, however, any project in sight.

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