

Brazilian samba

The word Samba, and the musical genre Samba, has for a long time being studied to uncover its origin. We are publishing here what we think it is the most accurate.

The word Samba, in Portuguese, was derived from semba, a word common to many West African bantu languages. To the African slaves brought to Brazil during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, the word had a variety of meanings. It meant to pray, or invoke the spirits of the ancestors, or the Gods of African pantheon. As a noun, it could mean a complaint, a cry, or something like "the blues".

In Brazil, Samba is a woman with the same function of an ekeidi nagô in the banto's temples: A sacred dancer, iaô, the daughter of the saint.

In Brazil also, the African slaves called samba a religious ceremony characterized by the rhythm and choreography of the batuque. (Batuque: the act of "batucar"; to make some kind of rhythm using any kind of instrument or object, and also a Rio's version of martial art "[capoeira](#)"). The Jongo, a variant of the Samba, until today is considered a religious dance.

The first known appearance of the word Samba as a Portuguese word meaning a rhythm and a dance in print appeared in 1838, in the newspaper "O Carapuceiro", in an article written by father Lopes Gama.

In 1917, Ernesto dos Santos "Donga", recorded his song "Pelo telefone", and labeled Samba. This is officially the first Samba recording. Since then, the musicians descendants of slaves started to see the Samba as a new approach to the batuque from Angola, and determined themselves to integrate it to white society through organizations they called Samba Schools.

A pioneer of Samba, Angenor de Oliveira, was quoted as saying "In my childhood, we played the Samba in the backyards of the old ladies, whom we call "tias" (aunts), and the police stopped us often, because the Samba, then, was considered a "thing" of bums and bandits."

Unfortunately, until today in Brazil if a "white" person dedicate himself to the samba art form, he is considered an intellectual, or eccentric, but if an African descendent does the same, he is seeing like somebody who does not want to get a job, or something in that level.

Unlike other societies that cherish the Blues, the Jazz, the Mambo, the Rumba, the Reggae and others, and sees these musical art forms as a national treasure and are proud of it, Brazilian society refuses to recognize the Samba as a culture, as Brazil's main culture and pays no respect to their masters. We do not have there a Samba museum, or any kind of award to neither people nor institutions dedicated toward the promotion and preservation of the Samba culture or even a well-organized structure of promotion of this culture to international markets. The Samba in Brazil, is still an underground culture.

However, thanks to some people in Brazil and around the world who sees the Samba otherwise, some artists with their love and dedication, Samba Schools, and to general people that gather to play, sing and dance the Samba, the culture will never die, and will continuously grow strong developing new approaches and evolving forever.

By Shushil Halai