

Conflation and conflict in Brazilian popular music: forty years between 'filming' bossa nova in *Orfeu Negro* and rap in *Orfeu*

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Abstract

Popular music plays important roles in two related films portraying Brazilian slum life. Based on a 1953 play by Vinícius de Moraes, Marcel Camus's 1959 film Orfeu Negro, and a 1999 feature by Brazilian director Carlos Diegues titled Orfeu, augment traditional samba styles with bossa nova and rap, respectively. Interpreting musical style as allegorical texts within fictive landscapes, this paper examines conflation and conflict among musical meanings, Brazilian social histories, and discursive identities marking the twentieth century. Broad aspects of Brazilian political and socio-cultural development are implicated, such as authoritarianism, the politics and sociology of race, technological advances, mass media, and modes of modernisation. Here, bossa nova and rap engage society through reflexive and generative interpretations within a narrative designed to illustrate connections between processes of innovative, trans-national cultural production, myths of national identity, social change, and the powerful role of popular music in film.

Introduction

Bossa nova and rap act as textual windows into ideas concerning Brazilian society in two films portraying *favela* life ('hillside slum'); both are adaptations of the classical Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.¹ *Orfeu Negro* ('Black Orpheus'), a 1959 French production directed by Marcel Camus (1912–1982), and a 1999 feature by Brazilian director Carlos Diegues (b. 1940) titled *Orfeu*, are closely based on *Orfeu da Conceição*, the carnival-period verse play completed in 1953 by famed Brazilian lyricist, playwright, critic and diplomat, Vinícius de Moraes (1913–1980). The tragedy of doomed love particular to the Eurydice and Orpheus myth is allegorical, symbolising along with the entire Orphic myth complex, aspects of the human condition. Bossa nova and rap serve as more than mere soundtracks; they engage with aspects of the Brazilian condition. 'Filming' refers to both the cinematic act and the presence of, a film of, possible meanings associated with these musics, their correspondences through interpretation, and their relations to the world. These interpretations relate to changes and institutions in Brazilian society, avoiding the consideration of cultural production as autonomous of socio-cultural context. Theorised textual meanings engage distinct yet overlapping cultural authorities emerging from socio-historical necessity: