

Brazilian Sertanejo

From the rural caipira music to the urban sertanejo

The history of sertanejo

It is hard to pinpoint exactly how sertanejo started, as most Brazilian music genres, sertanejo is a mixture of musical traditions that with time started being called by a different name than its initial roots. The first genre to introduce most of today's *sertanejo* tropes was known as *moda de viola*¹ which appears throughout the rural areas of Minas Gerais and the interior of São Paulo state in the late 1800s through 1930's.

The genre *moda de viola* consists of two main elements, two singers singing in thirds and two *violas caipira* a Portuguese guitar with doubled strings². *Moda de viola* songs were marginalized by most of Brazil for being under the umbrella of *caipira* music³. *Caipira* which comes from the native language Tupí and translates to "grass cutter"⁴. The term caipira quickly became derogative further marginalizing music from the rural interior of São Paulo played mostly by farm and cattle workers. This style of music appears in the 1937 recording of "*Modinha*" by the group "*Congada de Lambari*" sung by "José Francisco da Silva" (Figure-1). In 1929 "Cornélio Pires", a journalist, composer, viola player, author and filmmaker from the city of Tietê (interior of São Paulo) financed the first recording of *música caipira* with a group formed by him called "*Os Pioneiros da Moda de Viola*" (The Moda de Viola pioneers) also known as "*Os Caipiras do Cornélio*" (Cornélio's *Caipiras*)⁵. In order to fund these recordings Cornélio placed local advertisements on the covers of the 78 rpm records but his records quickly grew in popularity and soon Cornélio had recorded over fifty records with multiple *duplas caipiras* (*caipira* duets) many of which featured siblings, another established common characteristic of today's *sertanejo* music.

Through the 1950's and 1960's rhythmic elements from Paraguayan Polkas and other Latin American music genres brought the accordion to the genre that was then starting to be known as *música sertaneja*⁶. The word *sertanejo* comes from the word *sertão* which refers to the rural biomes of the northeast and the interior region of São Paulo. The term served as better branding for the up and coming music genre. At the same time the Brazilian government started to invest heavily on the infrastructure of the urban centers of São Paulo and with the large demand of workers an unprecedented migration from the rural areas to the urban centers brought *sertanejo* to the city⁷.

With the mass migration to the city *sertanejo* lyrics subjects shifted from portraying the rural scenery to often humorous lyrics about political commentary, romances and the marginalized life of caipiras in the city. Groups such as "Alvarenga e Ranchinho," "Tonico e Tinoco," "Pena Branca e Xavantinho" and "Inezita Barroso" were often played in São Paulo radio stations and proved to record labels that *sertanejo* was a profitable genre making it the third most listened genre of music by the early 1980s after MPB and *música romântica* (romantic music)⁸.

Chitãozinho & Xororó

In 1967 the famous Brazilian television host "Silvio Santos" hosted two *sertanejo* brothers "José Lima Sobrinho" (1954) and "Durval de Lima" (1957) on his show where they played their first single "*Cidade Sertaneja*."⁹ Born in the city of Rondon in the state of Paraná, the two singers learned how to play the guitar with their father who was also a composer and worked as a woodworker. The duo moved to São Paulo in the early 1970s where the radialist "Geraldo Meirelles" introduced the band as "Chitãozinho & Xororó"¹⁰ named after the birds on a song by the sertanejo duo "Athos Campos e Serrinha."

Their first official record came in 1970 with the single "*Galopeira*" (horseback riding woman) but it was in 1982 that their name would go mainstream with the release of "*Fio de Cabelo*" (hair strand) which sold over a million and a half copies (Figure-2).

The song however in many ways diverged from most *sertanejo* songs because it included a combination of synthesizers, amplified drums and electric guitars which ultimately modernized the band's sound¹¹. The sonic shift from acoustic instruments to a more pop electric sound symbolized a definite environmental shift of *sertanejo* music from rural to an urban sound and this shift was likely an important step in the growing youth acceptance of *sertanejo* as a legitimate and respectful music genre¹². A part from the electric instrumentation, "Chitãozinho" and "Xororó" (stage names) ditched the farmer shirts, boots and jeans and wore tight suits and leather jackets and long hair, a style culture brought to Brazil by the influence of 1960's pop music and the "Beatles." Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the new *sertanejo* sound consisted of mostly romantic lyrics and its acceptance was so staggering that soon many other duos such as "Leandro e Leonardo," "Zezé Di Camargo e Luciano" and "Milhonário e Zé Rico" started to use electric instrumentation and made their name in the top of Brazilian radio charts¹³.

Sertanejo Universitário

In the year of 1993 two young musicians "João Bosco" and "Vinícius Karlinke" started a *sertanejo* band in the city of Campo Grande (Goiás)¹⁴. Their band "João Bosco e Vinícius" was highly influenced by the 1980s *sertanejo* sound of "Leandro e Leonardo" and "Chitãozinho e Xororó." Being that their band was composed of mostly students their first album released in 2003 titled "Acústico no Bar" (Acoustic at a bar) was categorized by its listeners as the sub-genre *sertanejo universitário* (universitarian *sertanejo*)¹⁵. The new genre caught on and in a few years universities around the entire São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro region had *sertanejo universitário* bands. Compared to most previous *sertanejo* bands, *sertanejo universitário* music featured a highly syncopated rhythm section played on the drum set, more pronounced accordion parts and increasingly humorous lyrics that no longer had any trace of rural life and spoke solely of the dramatic life of young university students¹⁶. *Sertanejo universitário* was listened by young Brazilians of all socioeconomic classes and mirrors a cultural urban trend that is for the first time friendly to the idea of working in agriculture and cattle

farming. Another possible explanation for the success story of *sertanejo universitário* is that *Paulistanos* (residents of São Paulo) initially sung it in irony because the lyrics were so dramatic and reminiscent of the music listened by their grandparents. With time the charming irony grew into a legitimate taste and it became socially accepted to express a taste for the dramatic accordion music duos.

Though *sertanejo universitário* was booming in Brazil through the mid 2000's it was still nearly unknown outside the country, samba, bossa nova and even carioca funk were the only genres known internationally. In 2011 an artist by the name "Michel Teló" released a the single "Ai Se Eu Te Pego" (Oh if I catch you) and the song's dance caught the eyes of famous Brazilian soccer player Neymar who starred on the music video and started dancing it when he scored a goal. The soccer affiliation to the song meant that in the 2014 soccer world cup the song spread throughout Europe and Spanish speaking Latin American countries bringing *sertanejo* abroad for the first time¹⁷. Today *sertanejo universitário* songs sung in Portuguese frequently appears in Spanish speaking Latin American countries top music charts and is the most played genre of music in Brazil.

Opinion

Growing up in São Paulo as a child I've sung and danced to bands such as "Leandro e Leonardo" and "Zezé Di Camargo e Luciano" in *festas juninas*, a folk Brazilian holiday. However by my teenage years I grew embarrassed of the songs that were considered to be too rural and simple which I now see as a clear prejudice that was socially acceptable to have in the city. My perception of *sertanejo* wouldn't change until I watched the 2006 "Breno Silveira" movie "2 Filhos de Francisco" about the lives of "Zezé Di Camargo e Luciano." In this beautiful award winning film I was able to recognize the roots of *sertanejo* and the life of a music loving child in my own family's history. My grandmother grew up in the small city of Tietê where she currently has a camp house where I spent a lot of my childhood at. Surprisingly while researching for this paper I discovered that one of the most important figures in popularizing

sertanejo was “Cornélio Pires”, a Tietê born man. I was even astounded to discover the city has a museum bearing his name that I visited as a young boy. Since I left Brazil in 2010 *sertanejo universitário* took over the nation and I’m always surprised to visit my family members and hear they know all the lyrics to a genre of music that at one point we all were embarrassed to enjoy.

Another surprising conclusion I arrived in writing this paper is how this genre is still marginalized by the academic community both nationally and internationally. Perhaps its association with country music, which is also stigmatized among the academic American youth, is the reason the number of English language publications about *sertanejo* is immensely smaller than that of other genres such as samba and bossa nova even though *sertanejo* occupies a much higher spot on the Brazilian musical charts. Although *sertanejo* music is a lot more harmonically simplistic than genres such as bossa nova and choro I believe there is still a lot of value in comparing the musical elements of *sertanejo* to early Brazilian music and its European and African influences.

Conclusion

Sertanejo is a folk Brazilian music genre that came from the modernization of *caipira* music and *moda de viola*. The style was born in the rural areas of São Paulo and its neighboring states with the influence of Portuguese music with music played in *congadas*. The music genre was largely marginalized by the São Paulo urban population until a large migration to the city made the music easily accessible to *Paulistanos*. Bands such as “Chitãozinho & Xororó” electrified the genre and gave birth to a national sensation. In the early 2000s *sertanejo universitário* took Brazil’s charts and for the first time brought *sertanejo* abroad. Though *sertanejo* is still seen by some as an inferior music genre it still delights the lives of millions, its rhymes aids the Brazilian population recover from bad breakups, express their cultural identity and honor their country’s agricultural history.

Endnotes

- 1 Reily, Suzel Ana. "Música Sertaneja and Migrant Identity: The Stylistic Development of a Brazilian Genre." *Popular Music* 11, no. 3 (1992): 337–58.
- 2 Oliveira, Lucia. "Do Caipira Picando Fumo a Chitãozinho e Xororó, Ou Da Roça Ao Rodeio." CPDOC-FGV., n.d.
- 3 Alonso, Gustavo. "O Sertão Na Televisão: Música Sertaneja e Rede Globo." [REVISTA CONTEMPORÂNEA, 2011.
- 4 "Caipira." Wikipedia, May 25, 2018. <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Caipira&oldid=842847468>.
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- 6 Reily, Suzel Ana. "Música Sertaneja and Migrant Identity: The Stylistic Development of a Brazilian Genre." *Popular Music* 11, no. 3 (1992): 337–58.
- 7 Tremura, Welson. "The Development of the Brazilian Country Music and Its Relationship with Folia de Reis in Defining Rural Identity." Accessed December 18, 2018. http://www.academia.edu/1074493/The_Development_of_the_Brazilian_Country_Music_and_its_Relationship_with_Folia_de_Reis_in_Defining_Rural_Identity.
- 8 "Brazil Top 20 @ Top40-Charts.Com - New Songs & Videos from 49 Top 20 & Top 40 Music Charts from 30 Countries." Accessed December 20, 2018. <http://top40-charts.com/chart.php?cid=8>.
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- 11 Oliveira, Lucia. "Do Caipira Picando Fumo a Chitãozinho e Xororó, Ou Da Roça Ao Rodeio." CPDOC-FGV., n.d.
- 12 Oliveira, Lucia. "Do Caipira Picando Fumo a Chitãozinho e Xororó, Ou Da Roça Ao Rodeio." CPDOC-FGV., n.d.
- 13 "Brazil Top 20 @ Top40-Charts.Com - New Songs & Videos from 49 Top 20 & Top 40 Music Charts from 30 Countries." Accessed December 20, 2018. <http://top40-charts.com/chart.php?cid=8>.

14 "João Bosco & Vinícius – Wikipédia, a Enciclopédia Livre." Accessed December 20, 2018. https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jo%C3%A3o_Bosco_%26_Vin%C3%ADcius.

15 Alonso, Gustavo. "O Sertão Na Televisão: Música Sertaneja e Rede Globo." [REVISTA CONTEMPORÂNEA, 2011.

16 Alonso, Gustavo. "O Sertão Na Televisão: Música Sertaneja e Rede Globo." [REVISTA CONTEMPORÂNEA, 2011.

17 "Ai Se Eu Te Pego." Wikipedia, November 9, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ai_Se_Eu_Te_Pego&oldid=867955511.

Transcriptions

Figure 1

José Francisco da Silva

Modinha

♩ = 163

5

Figure 2

Chitãozinho & Xororó

Fio De Cabelo

♩ = 90

7

13

18

23

Musical notation for measures 23-28. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The treble staff contains chords and melodic lines with some grace notes. The bass staff contains a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

29

Musical notation for measures 29-32. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The treble staff features chords with some notes tied across measures. The bass staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

33

Musical notation for measures 33-36. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The treble staff contains chords and melodic lines with grace notes. The bass staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

37

Musical notation for measures 37-40. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The treble staff features chords with some notes tied across measures, ending with a double bar line. The bass staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment, also ending with a double bar line.