

THE HUMAN TRADITION IN **MODERN BRAZIL**

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recognition and support for his efforts to preserve the historic treasures of the colonial boomtown, Ouro Preto. Soon, however, federal officials, annoyed by Vicente's criticisms, forced out this local preservationist and asserted the authority of the national government over historic sites. Norma and Vicente's vignettes demonstrate how individuals participated in and shaped the cult of Brazilian nationalism.

Geraldo Pereira

Samba Composer and Grifter

BRYAN McCANN

Manifestations of Afro-Brazilian culture evoked starkly ambivalent responses from the mostly white and light-skinned Brazilian authorities and business leaders who dominated the dissemination of cultural products to the broader public. Tolerance and even a nativist appreciation for aspects of Afro-Brazilian religion, dance, martial arts, music, and folkways (mostly practiced on the margins of formal institutions and commerce) gave way from time to time to violent repression. Many Europhile republican officials and intellectuals associated these manifestations of African culture with savagery and backwardness, which needed to be eradicated for Brazil to progress. For them, the complexion of the population not only needed to be "whitened" by subsidizing European immigration, but the tone of the national culture needed to be bleached as well.

During the 1920s and 1930s, a new appreciation of Africa's contributions to the development of a uniquely Brazilian national culture became fashionable among white intellectuals, artists, and consumers. Samba, based on African rhythms, descended from the slums in the hills surrounding Rio to its wealthy downtown. Instead of trying to suppress African cultural influences, political leaders such as President Getúlio Vargas used government funds to promote Carnival parades and the samba music that accompanied them as tourist attractions. The city of Rio was Brazil's cultural and political axis, and its influence increased under Vargas. It is no accident that samba, a musical genre that took its definitive form in Rio, became identified as Brazil's "national" music. Samba was not only good music, but its success was buttressed by federal support and the new technologies of radio and the recording industry, which were centered in the capital. Brazil had a wealth of other musical genres that could have been selected over samba for promotion as the national sound, but these genres mostly came to be identified as "regional" musical traditions.

Geraldo Pereira came from a provincial city to Rio as a young man, in search of a better life. He became celebrated as an archetypical Carioca (resident of Rio), the malandro (streetwise hustler), and an innovative samba composer. As Bryan McCann's biography of Pereira shows, he never managed to make a fortune from his hard-won fame. As a dark-skinned man from the slums, Pereira's recording career was stunted. Instead, the

mostly white performers who crooned Pereira's catchy tunes and the recording moguls who produced their records enjoyed the financial rewards of his labors. Pereira led the life of a *malandro* to the hilt: hard drinking, womanizing, fast talking, and street fighting. He often lived from hand to mouth but never failed to dress elegantly. Pereira's life and songs helped to define the iconic image of the *malandro* and the uniquely Carioca flavor of Brazil's "national" music.

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Malandros are like sharks of the asphalt: if they stop moving, they die. During the peak years of their circulation, from the 1920s through the early 1950s, they moved in the interstices of Rio de Janeiro, sliding back and forth between the underworld and the world of law-abiding citizens, between poverty and the middle class, between night and day. They gathered in the dancehalls, cafés, and corner bars of the city and scattered in the back alleys of its red light zones. Dressed in the most dashing attire—a pressed linen suit, a natty straw hat, patent leather shoes with spats—they moved with rhythm, grace, and flair. They strove to remain one step ahead of the police who hounded them, the women who suffered for their broken promises, and the creditors who held their worthless debts. Geraldo Pereira was the model of a *malandro*, and this was his world. As he cruised the streets of the city he wrote, sang, and peddled sambas that translated this world into rhythm and melody, revealing its intricacies and its dilemmas with perfect economy and arresting insight. At the age of thirty-seven, a single punch from a rival *malandro* knocked him cold on the sidewalk outside a downtown bar. He died days later.

To backtrack a little: the *malandro*, or rogue, is an iconic figure of modern Brazilian life. The term apparently comes from an Italian word for petty thief or brigand. In the early decades of the twentieth century in Rio, it came to signify a man who lived on the margins of the law, surviving by his wits in the brothels and gambling dens of the city. The stereotypical *malandro* was black or of mixed race and a sharp-dressed, heart-breaking hustler. He was associated with samba from the early stages of the genre's growth. As samba evolved in the 1920s from a ludic, impromptu form played by amateurs for a group of onlookers into a commercial, composed form played by professionals for a paying audience, sambas about *malandros*, or in the voice of *malandros*, became a staple of

the genre. Indeed, it was samba that turned the *malandro* from mere stereotype into cultural icon. It was also samba that gave the *malandro* his ambiguity—he was disdained by elites and bureaucrats and alternately feared and admired by the members of the lower orders. To residents of the city's growing *favelas*—the hillside shantytowns that were spreading rapidly over Rio's sheer granite peaks—the *malandro* could be a powerful symbol of the evasion of authority, a feat much to be admired among the illegal squatters who were generally treated as natural criminals by the authorities.

To a young man who had traded rural poverty for urban poverty, who could not suppress his vaulting ambition to move in higher circles, and who discovered in himself a marvelous inclination for samba, the *malandro* was an enormously seductive figure. This pull goes a long way toward explaining Geraldo Pereira's studied *malandragem*, or *malandro* practices. Pereira was not a natural-born *malandro*—that creature does not exist. Instead, he sought to give flesh to the icon of the period's sambas, including his own. In the process, he drank, danced, and hustled himself into an early grave, but not without leaving behind some seventy sambas, including a dozen that figure among the genre's all-time greats and that marked an important stage in its evolution.

TO THE METROPOLIS

Geraldo Pereira was born in Juíz de Fora, Minas Gerais, in 1918. Today, Juíz de Fora is one of Brazil's leading provincial industrial cities, but at that time it was a dusty rural outpost largely controlled by local land barons. Pereira's family was of the kind who depended on such patrons for sustenance and security and who pledged their labor and their votes in return. Pereira later recounted that in his childhood he worked as a *candeeiro de boi*, or cattle drover, leading the herd from corral to pasture on the dirt paths of Minas. If he attended school in Juíz de Fora, he had little to show for it. By all accounts, he was illiterate when he arrived in Rio de Janeiro.¹

He came sometime between 1929 and 1931, following his older brother Mané, his mother's child from a previous union, who had migrated to the city years earlier. Mané had established himself in Mangueira, a *favela* just north of downtown and one of the early strongholds of samba (a distinction it still maintains). He arrived at a moment when Mangueira, the city surrounding it, the genre of samba, and Brazil itself were undergoing transformations that would mark them profoundly. In the realm of high politics, Getúlio Vargas in 1930 led a coup that brought to a close a long-running political confabulation between the

landowners of São Paulo and Minas Gerais and that initiated Vargas's own long chokehold on the presidency. He would remain in office until 1945, presiding over the dictatorial Estado Novo between 1937 and 1945, and would later return as elected president from 1950 until his suicide in office in 1954. Vargas brought a centralizing, industrializing energy to his long tenure, attempting to transform Brazil from agricultural exporter into modern industrial giant. His efforts in this regard did not entirely succeed, but they did help to modernize Rio—the capital until 1959—and make it more than ever the bureaucratic and cultural center of the country.

Rio failed utterly to reckon with the unforeseen consequences of its modernization—the unplanned, unregulated *favelas*, populated primarily by rural migrants such as Pereira who were drawn to the city by its promise of opportunity. Upon arrival, they found that employment was hard to come by, and the pay insufficient to fulfill any aspirations of an apartment in the city when they could find it. Mangueira, for example, was surrounded by a glass factory, a hat factory, and a ceramic factory, all of which depended on the labor of the *favelados* and none of which paid common workers enough to live anywhere else. The *favela* became almost a captive labor pool for such industries as well as for the unskilled occupations of the growing city's service sector—delivery boy, seamstress, shoeshine boy, *pau para qualquer obra* (jack of all trades).

Samba, in the meantime, was going through its own transformation, and it drew on the same pool of talent. In the late 1920s a group of young, untrained *sambistas* from the neighborhood of Estácio, just across the valley from Mangueira, tinkered with the samba rhythm, emerging with an infectious 2/4 swing that lent itself to syncopated percussion and brief, catchy melodies. Their sambas were simple enough to be learned, played, and sung by almost anyone, making them perfect for Rio's many *blocos*, or informal Carnival parade bands. At the same time, the Estácio composers decided to turn their own *bloco* into something more formal and permanent and founded the samba school of Deixa Falar, or Let Them Talk. Other neighborhoods began their own samba schools, and these became the principal attractions of the city's increasingly spectacular Carnival parade. Mangueira's foremost samba school, Estação Primeira da Mangueira (First Station of Mangueira), quickly became one of the largest and best organized.

The growth of the broadcasting and recording industries signalled even more profound transformations for samba. Around the same time that Geraldo Pereira arrived in Rio, the multinational recording companies RCA Victor and Odeon established affiliates in Rio. The city already had a handful of radio stations, which were quickly growing more

commercial, more professional, and more dedicated to promoting popular music. Above all, they sought talent among the young performers of the city's hottest music, samba—with one important reservation. In the 1930s and through most of the 1940s, radio and the recording studios were limited to white and nearly white Brazilians. This restriction was neither a policy nor an acknowledged practice, but the expression of a deep-seated and covert racism that limited the opportunities of black Brazilians at every turn. Dark-skinned musicians such as Geraldo Pereira and his closest peers might play on records or in radio backup bands, but they would not be stars, at least for the time being. As a result, the composers of Estácio and Mangueira were far more likely to sell their sambas to white singers than to taste fame and fortune themselves.

SANTO ANTONIO

Much was made at the time of the distinction between *cidade*, the city, and *morro*, the hill, or *favela*. The *cidade* stood for order, wealth, and work, while in the vision of most elites the *morro* stood for chaos, poverty and idleness. The racial overtones of these stereotypical characterizations were inescapable: in the discourse of *cidade* and *morro*, the *cidade* was figured as white and the *morro* as black, or more generally Afro-Brazilian. In truth, Rio's *favelas* were home to a diverse population but were certainly predominantly black and brown. If the discourse of *cidade* and *morro* tinged *favelados* with the label of idlers, it also gave them cultural capital. But the *morro*, with its all-night samba jams, its communal intimacy, its old women from Bahia—the keepers of African traditions—also stood for play, spirit, and deep cultural roots. These qualities became highly prized among *morro* residents themselves, who looked upon Carnival, and samba in general, as an opportunity to display these attributes before the stodgy lower city.

The *morro*'s separation from the *cidade* also permitted the rise of local strongmen who filled the gaps of commerce, justice, and rule. Geraldo's brother Mané was one such figure, directing local affairs in Santo Antonio, a section of Mangueira. (The *favela* itself was already the size of a bustling town, with its own discrete neighborhoods.) Mané owned a bar that served beer and *cachaça* to the residents of Santo Antonio. He built and rented out several shacks in the neighborhood. (*Favela* life, unregulated though it was, did not necessarily free residents from the burden of rent.) He loaned money, charged interest, and sent enforcers when the payments were delayed. And he mediated neighborhood disputes, encouraging reluctant grooms to keep the implicit promises they had made

to their "dishonored" conquests. In the absence of formal justice, Mané's decrees were more or less binding. Residents of his patch of turf either conformed or left.

Geraldo Pereira thus arrived in Mangueira impoverished but with a powerful patron on the hill. Mané quickly put his brother to work in the bar and to selling vegetables door to door in the neighborhood. Pereira, for his part, took every opportunity to flee from his brother's watchful eye, preferring to spend his time instead taking in the sambas performed by a local *conjunto*, or regular group. He attended elementary school, desultorily. Outside of school, however, he showed a tremendous ambition to learn, convincing neighborhood residents to teach him to read. A few years after his arrival, he also studied guitar with a local composer, quickly absorbing enough to start composing his own sambas and then leaving off his training. Guitar would remain for him primarily a composition tool rather than a means of expression.

By 1937, Pereira was spending a great deal of his time hanging out in the *quadra*—a kind of open dance floor and training space—of the samba school Unidos da Mangueira, which briefly shared the hill with the better known Estação Primeira. Unidos da Mangueira was based right in Santo Antonio, and its *quadra*, like those of most samba schools, served as a community center. Here, Pereira learned the methods of the school's composers, testing out his own first attempts at rhyming quatrains in improvised sambas.

He also undertook the far more unusual task of producing his own play in the school's *quadra*. If inventing a few samba verses was almost an expected rite of passage for the young *favelado*, writing plays was only slightly more common than playing polo. Theater in Brazil was strictly a middle-class phenomenon. Geraldo Pereira, however, produced a play set in the *favela* that spoke intimately of its conflicts. No script survives, and it seems likely that Pereira never wrote any formal dialogue, preferring to create a rough plot and to let his actors—friends from the neighborhood—improvise their parts. The sketch concerned a young *malandro* whose girlfriend, returning to the *favela* from her daily work as a maid in the city, is beaten by another man. Outraged by this affront to his honor, the *malandro* confronts his rival and shames him. Not surprisingly, Pereira took the leading role for himself.

The plot established several of the themes that Pereira would continue to explore in his samba compositions. The young woman's work takes her out of the *favela* and thus exposes her to danger. The *malandro* reacts possessively but entirely without compassion—what angers him is not that his girlfriend has been beaten, but that another man has encroached on his territory. Relying on a combination of physical force

and verbal agility, the *malandro* then asserts his power and makes his rival look like a fool.

The production in the *quadra* closed with the cast singing a Pereira samba recounting the plot, largely from the perspective of the *malandro*. Several years later, Pereira sold the samba, "Na Subida do Morro" (Going Up the Hill), to the singer Moreira da Silva, who recorded a successful version that added his own impromptu verses to Pereira's original lyrics. These lyrics are extraordinarily violent in their description of the *malandro's* confrontation with his rival, but this description is ambiguous: it is impossible to tell whether the lyrics recount a bloody beating or are merely threats and boasting. This ambiguity is itself a key to Pereira's work, which frequently alludes both to the power of language as a weapon and to its slippery nature. The *malandro's* hustle, in this work, is a confidence game that depends on his stylish and powerful image and above all on his silver tongue.²

Pereira never again tried his hand at playwrighting or production (although he did appear several times as an actor). His early venture in the theater, however, reveals his ambition to make his mark in some way. His potential avenues for success were few. It must have been clear to him that a job in one of the factories surrounding Mangueira would lead nowhere. He could become a boss on the *morro* like his brother, but the endless responsibilities of that course did not suit him. He could aim for a job in the lower ranks of the expanding civil service, an opportunity for occupational respectability. This he tried, working in the stockroom of the city administration's Schools Department, until he concluded that the job's demands of attendance and punctuality outweighed its security and benefits. Or he could attempt to parlay his musical ability and his imagination into success as a *sambista*, beyond Santo Antonio and Mangueira, in the city below.

FROM THE PRAÇA TIRADENTES TO THE CAFÉ NICE

The greater population of Rio de Janeiro never heard of Pereira's play, but in Santo Antonio it was a hit. Alerted to Pereira's growing reputation, the directors of Estação Primeira soon seduced him away from Unidos. Pereira became one of a stable of extraordinarily talented *sambistas* at the larger school, and his name would forever be linked to its tradition. Unidos dissolved several years later, essentially swallowed up by its neighbor.

Pereira's association with Estação Primeira brought him into contact for the first time with the music market. Composers such as Cartola,

one of the founders of Estação Primeira, were regularly approached by white singers with access to radio shows and to record companies who were looking for material. At times, these singers bought compositions outright, registering the copyrights in their own names. More frequently, they gave at least some credit to the real composer, registering themselves as "collaborators." This was business as usual, and no one at the time looked upon it as exploitation.

Indeed, middle-class composers occasionally engaged in the same sorts of practices, despite their greater access to the music market. For most composers, the goal was to get one's material before the public in any way possible, letting copyrights take care of themselves. This practice was a rational response to the nature of the market. Although Getúlio Vargas had done a great deal to strengthen copyright protections in Brazil, helping to make music a viable industry, the payment of royalties was still extremely unreliable. Everyone knew that only the big-name singers got rich in music, by selling tens of thousands of records and demanding high performance fees.

The relaxed attitude of many composers toward copyrights also reflected the transition of popular music from pastime to profession. Not so long ago, samba had been a collective activity and its refrains had derived from multiple, anonymous sources. As with every popular genre, many of the early recorded samba hits were slightly more polished versions of these urban folk creations. By the late 1930s samba was already well on its way to becoming an art of individual stars and established authorship, but it still retained enough of the collective spirit of its origins to make rigid adherence to the idea of individual intellectual property unlikely. For a composer on the *morro*, as a result, trading copyrights of dubious value for an immediate payment equivalent to perhaps a month's minimum salary seemed like not a bad deal at all.

Geraldo Pereira got his first break in the music market late in 1939, at the age of twenty-one, when the singer Roberto Paiva recorded "Se Você Sair Chorando" (If You Leave Crying), a samba that Pereira had co-written with Nelson Teixeira. Pereira collaborated with nearly twenty different composers over the course of his career, and that collaboration ranged from the nominal participation of famous singers to true mutual authorship. This helps to explain the lack of coherence in his work, which varies widely in subject matter, perspective, melodic approach, and quality. The best of his compositions bear the unmistakable mark of his genius for incisive portraits of daily life in the marginal neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro, rich in the slang of the *favelas* and with a singular melodic buoyancy. "Se Você Sair Chorando" does not fall into this category—it is undistinguished and formulaic. Paiva was a second-rank singer, not

the type who could make a hit out of ordinary material, and the samba was not a great success.

Pereira was thrilled that the tune was recorded but disillusioned when it brought him neither fortune nor fame. What it gave him was an entrance into the world of samba in the *cidade* and its peculiar routines, quite different from those on the *morro*. He began hanging out around the Praça Tiradentes, a downtown plaza surrounded by nightclubs and theaters that staged musical revues. The sidewalk on one side of the plaza was known as the *calçada de fome*, or walk of hunger, a parody of Hollywood's *calçada de fama*, or walk of fame, because of the penniless composers who gathered there to peddle their sambas to singers, revue producers, and nightclub managers. Pereira became a regular on the *calçada de fome*, buttonholing the star singers with whom he became increasingly familiar. Eager to come across as something other than an impoverished *favelado*, he dressed always in a pressed suit and shirt, sprinkled himself with cologne, and manicured his nails. He also continued to study the elements of writing, taking great pains to avoid the embarrassment—common among *favela* composers—of presenting a samba with spelling and grammar errors.

The popular singers, for their part, were in a much better bargaining position, but they too were always on the lookout for talent, and Pereira clearly had it in abundance. By late 1940, Ciro Monteiro and Moreira da Silva, the two men who would become Pereira's greatest interpreters, had already recorded his work. Monteiro was white, and Moreira da Silva was of mixed racial descent, with fair skin. Both had greater access to the music market than the dark-skinned Pereira, who dreamed of his own singing career. To be fair, both were also superior singers: Ciro Monteiro had a gift for hitting the perfect emphasis on Pereira's unusual melodies, playing with the beat with relaxed verve. And Moreira da Silva acted the part of the *malandro* with consummate flair, embodying the rough-and-tumble characters of Pereira's work.

As Pereira became better known in the early 1940s, he spent less time on the *calçada de fome* and more at the tables of the Café Nice, located a few blocks away on stately Rio Branco avenue, the city's main thoroughfare. The Nice was known as the samba stock exchange: it was where composers, performers, and radio producers gathered to talk shop, trade information, and collaborate. At the Nice, white middle-class composers and ambitious *favelados* such as Geraldo Pereira came together on roughly equal terms, a rarity in the context of Rio's implicit racial hierarchy.³ With his good looks, his smooth talk, and his enormous talent, Pereira did well for himself in this environment. He was soon finding singers to record his work at the rate of about four sambas per year,

mostly just before Carnival, when Rio's music industry kicked into high gear.

He soon discovered that the recording was only half the battle. Once the recording was made, composers were expected to join forces with the singers in promoting it in any way possible—making the rounds of the radio stations, asking producers to play the record, or, better yet, inviting the singer for a live performance. It meant visiting the local nightclubs and requesting the tune from the house band. And at Carnival, it meant hiring a group of musicians to parade through the streets, playing the composition over and over and hoping a crowd would follow along. When undertaken by a street-smart operator such as Geraldo Pereira, all these activities could come under the heading of *malandragem*, depending as they did on charm and *jogo da cintura*—literally, play of the waist, and figuratively, subtle maneuvering. But taken together they proved harder and more time-consuming than real work. Pereira quit his job at the Schools Department in order to dedicate all his time to this exhausting routine. He did so uneasily, however: his samba was not making him wealthy by any stretch, and its precipitous changes in fortune were the very opposite of the civil servant's secure monotony.

EARLY WORKS

Pereira's first hit was a 1940 collaboration with Wilson Batista on a samba entitled "Acertei no Milhar" (I Hit the Lottery), recorded by Moreira da Silva. Batista was several years older than Pereira and had been a significant composer since the early 1930s. His portraits of crafty *malandros* and hard-luck characters from the lower rungs of Rio society had a deep influence on Pereira's own work. "Acertei no Milhar" portrayed one such character—a working-class stiff named Vargulino who dreams that he has won the lottery and can indulge all his yearnings for wealth and leisure, only to awaken with a start to the dull routine of his daily job. Moreira da Silva later stated that this samba was Batista's alone and that the older composer had merely added Pereira's name at the behest of the singer himself, who knew that Pereira would dedicate considerable energy to promoting the samba if his name were attached.

This explanation is plausible—the samba is more typical of Batista's work than Pereira's. While the composers shared similar subject matter (with Batista leaning more toward working-class characters and Pereira more toward the *favela*), Batista more commonly used clever twists such as the "surprise" ending of "Acertei no Milhar." More indicative was their use of language: Batista relied on narrative and rarely used slang,

while Pereira used images and dialogue and reveled in slang. "Acertei no Milhar" is a first-person narrative and contains almost no slang. What Pereira probably gave the composition is the unusual name of Vargulino's wife, Etelvina, which happened to be the name of one of Pereira's nieces. And the way in which that name is invoked as the samba's first word—an abrupt, rising four-note melody—is typical of Pereira's striking opening statements.

Over the next four years, Pereira wrote a number of semi-successful sambas, but nothing that would establish him as one of the most talented composers of the city. That recognition came in 1944 with his enormous hit, "Falsa Baiana" (False *Baiana*). Like the *malandro*, the *baiana*, or woman from the northeastern state of Bahia, was a cultural icon in Brazil. *Baianas* represented African tradition in cuisine, music, and attire—the latter a flowing white lace dress with numerous beads and amulets. The iconic *baiana* was seen as the carrier of African rhythm who, by migrating to Rio, had enabled the creation of samba. There was some truth to this image; samba had originated in the 1910s in house parties hosted by old *baianas*. But the link between *baianas* and samba had outgrown any historical foundation and had become part of national lore. (Indeed, by regulations approved by Getúlio Vargas, every samba school in the official Carnival parade had to feature a wing of *baianas*.)

Pereira's samba compares the false *baiana*, who merely puts on the costume for Carnival, to the real one, who has samba in her every movement. When the false *baiana* enters the samba circle she just stands there. No one claps, no one sings, and the samba dies. In contrast, when the real *baiana* enters, she swivels her hips and leaves her onlookers with their mouths watering, saying, "Hail, Bahia!" The melody skips along the rhythm like a stone skipping over rolling waves. Ciro Monteiro's recording brought the *baiana* to life perfectly, making the samba one of the biggest hits of the year and, eventually, a standard of the genre.

If Pereira had never written another samba of note, "Falsa Baiana" would have been enough to establish him as a significant composer. As it happened, he wrote several more of similar grade, rounding out a body of work that, while small in comparison with that of Batista, for example, is nonetheless captivating. Months after Monteiro recorded "Falsa Baiana," the Anjos do Inferno, or Hell's Angels, recorded Pereira's "Sem Compromisso" (Without Commitment). (The Anjos do Inferno were a mild-mannered, clean-cut vocal quartet and had nothing to do with motorcycles.) In "Sem Compromisso," the scene is one of Rio's *gafieiras*, or dancehalls. Ranging from working-class dives to posh salons, they constituted one of the city's principal forms of leisure. They featured live bands (decked out in tuxedos, brass instruments gleaming, in the fancy

joints) playing the popular music of the moment and were often graced by star singers who stopped in to plug their tunes. The *gafieiras* were one of the few venues where a respectable young couple could grab hold of each other without condemnation. The speaker in "Sem Compromisso" is a young man hoping to take advantage of this situation. His girlfriend, however, keeps dancing with another man (although she swears it is "without commitment"). The speaker threatens and cajoles, but his girlfriend dances away.

As in "Falsa Baiana," the melodic line bobs and weaves in the basic samba beat, creating a rhythmic tension that seems to pull the lyrics along irresistibly. In the words of Roberto Paiva, "only the mute cannot sing 'Sem Compromisso.'" ²⁴ These two 1944 compositions helped to inaugurate a strain known as "samba teleco-teco," an onomatopoeic term referring to the syncopation of the vocal line and the underlying rhythm. The emphases in Pereira's melodies sometimes fall on the strong beat, sometimes on a weak one, and not infrequently on a weak beat and then held through the strong one. The effect of these rhythmic tensions is similar to that of a polarized electromagnetic track that pulls along a train, with the distinction that before the listener can get accustomed to the polarities in Pereira's melodies, he sprinkles his lyrics with clusters of plosive and sibilant consonants that echo the sounds of samba percussion. Indeed, the percussive nature of Pereira's lyrics makes the vocal line itself an adequate substitute for varied instrumentation, a quality that João Gilberto emphasized in his stripped-down bossa nova recordings of Pereira's work twenty years later. In Gilberto's voice and guitar rendition of "Sem Compromisso," the lyrics take the place of tambourine and hand drums.

This syncopated style was one of Pereira's hallmarks. The other was his incisive vision of *favela* life. His most compelling early expression in this vein was the samba "Golpe Errado" (Unfair Blow), which Ciro Monteiro recorded in 1945. The lyrics to "Golpe Errado" begin with a brief, quasi-cinematic description of a *malandro* strolling with his girlfriend ("Here he comes in his starched, white suit . . ."), and then note that his real woman is off working as a maid in a white man's house. The narrator notes that this woman—not necessarily his wife, but at least his domestic partner—will even bring him his supper later, and observes that his callous exploitation of her is an "unfair blow." All this is expressed in seven brief lines. The first three are sprinkled with references to color, referring to the *malandro's* white suit, his brown girlfriend, his black woman, and, finally, her white employer. This quick survey of the spectrum shows us the *malandro's* style but also suggests that in this case, at least, this style merely perpetuates Brazil's phenotypical hierarchy. The

following four lines then pass judgment on the *malandro*—this is an unfair blow. A second verse adds further incriminating evidence, describing the *malandro* leaving for the samba jam just as his woman returns from work.

The moral judgment of the refrain is unusual in Pereira's work; he ordinarily limited himself to dispassionate reporting on the lives of his characters. The explicit condemnation of "Golpe Errado" seems to stem not so much from the *malandro's* mistreatment of his woman—not at all unusual in Pereira's work—but from the fact that this particular mistreatment forces the woman to go work as a maid to support his lifestyle and his adulterous affairs. The true *malandro*, the samba implies, should be self-sufficient. The perfect economy of the lyrics opens up these interpretational possibilities rather than prescribing them strictly—another characteristic of Pereira's work.

A MALANDRO IN SEARCH OF HIMSELF

"Golpe Errado" might have been a self-portrait but for the fact that Pereira's wife did not bring him supper. While still in his teens, Pereira had become a ladykiller in Mangueira. In 1938, just as he began to break into the world of samba, one of his seductions reaped the inevitable consequences. The young woman's father learned of the affair and came after Pereira demanding that he "repair her honor" by marrying her. Pereira's brother Mané had built his reputation on settling such disputes in Santo Antonio, and he forced his younger brother to go through with the marriage. By all accounts, Pereira did not even bother to return with his wife from City Hall. He never lived with her, limiting himself to occasional visits—one of which apparently produced a son—and providing no financial assistance. The marriage had no noticeable effect on his habits of seduction.

Pereira was only too eager to leave behind his wife and Santo Antonio. He began renting a series of rooms in working-class, often squalid neighborhoods in the city, hoping to remain close to the dancehalls, the recording studios, and the radio stations. When money ran out, he retreated up the hill to friends and family. Only with the success of "Falsa Baiana" did he make the residential transition from *morro* to *cidade*. Even then, his financial problems were far from over. In 1946, despite the fact that he had several hits to his name, he returned to civil service, finding a job as a truck driver hauling trash for the city. At least, that was the job description, and Pereira registered for a license to make the job legal. He never slowed down his constant circulation in samba circles,

however, making it impossible for him to show up for any regular work. According to his girlfriend at the time, he struck a deal with a local politician, swinging votes for the politician in Mangueira in return for a no-show job in the Sanitation Department. According to Moreira da Silva, ever so often Pereira gave a free show to bureaucrats in the department to maintain his cushy deal. Such arrangements were far from unusual in the government ranks. The job paid poorly, but it guaranteed Pereira a pension he would not survive to collect and health benefits that could not save his life.⁵

In the *gafieiras* that he attended both to plug his music and to cruise for conquests, he cultivated the image of a *malandro valentão*—a tough guy, *que topa qualquer parada*, ready for any scuffle. Out of the spotlight he was less courageous, or more sensible, backing out of fights when he could, limiting the blows when he could not. According to one fellow composer who had had a stormy relationship with Pereira, “he always wanted to fight embracing,” grabbing his opponent in a boxer’s clinch. He found it easier, apparently, to fight with Isabel Mendes da Silva, his on-and-off girlfriend throughout much of the 1940s. The two cultivated a pattern of abuse and reconciliation, each spending the night in jail at least once for domestic violence.⁶

Mendes da Silva interpreted Pereira’s violence as the consequence of racial anxiety stemming from Pereira’s fear that the color of his skin was holding him back. In her words, “he really wanted to get rich, but he had a complex . . . he had some kind of shame because of his color.” Other observers came to similar conclusions, reporting that “he had a persecution anxiety, and he thought color was the problem.”⁷ Such psychological interpretations would be debatable even with far richer knowledge of Pereira’s personality. Coming as they do secondhand and at a great chronological remove, they cannot be considered reliable as a character assessment. But they do point to the fact that Pereira, unlike virtually any composer of his generation, was willing to address racial inequality explicitly. The black women in his sambas go work for white families, and that is an unfair blow. While this observation hardly seems radical by any current standard, it was unusually frank in a context in which references to racial inequality were deeply discouraged.

If Pereira did believe that the color of his skin limited his material success, he was certainly correct. By the late 1940s, there were a few, isolated black singers beginning to hit the big time, but they were an anomaly. (Indeed, the nickname of one of them—Blackout, or Blecaute, as it was usually spelled—suggests just how uncommon it was to see a black face in the glossy magazines that chronicled the world of radio stars.) As a composer who hoped to cross over to success as a singer, Pereira faced imposing odds.

LATE WORKS

Whether or not Pereira himself had a persecution complex, many of his sambas portray characters experiencing disillusionment, betrayal, or persecution. In most cases, these misfortunes are purely romantic—the woman goes off with another man—and thus differ little from the themes explored by any number of contemporary *sambistas*. In a few cases, however—and most of these are among Pereira’s best works—the calamities described speak more directly to the dilemmas of *favela* dwellers and *sambistas*. While this portrayal is often satiric, it helps to reveal a side of Rio that the daily newspapers completely ignored. Pereira’s 1947 samba “Pisei num Despacho” (I Stepped on an Offering), for example, is told in the voice of a *sambista* who has, as the title suggests, trod on an Afro-Brazilian spiritual offering. These offerings—perhaps a candle, some flowers, and one or two objects of significance to the supplicant or to the spirit being invoked—are frequently placed at the corners of crossroads, which are sacred spaces in all Afro-Brazilian sects. As a result of his pedestrian insensitivity, the speaker in “Pisei num Despacho” loses his ability to dance and to compose sambas. He goes to the *gafieira* but has no luck with the ladies. His only cure will be to journey to the distant suburbs to visit a *pai de santo*—an enlightened elder capable of reading the spirits’ will and appeasing them.

The depiction of Afro-Brazilian spirituality in the samba is neither exotic and mysterious nor mocking and simplistic. The speaker’s dilemma is comical, but his resort to a *pai de santo* is entirely reasonable. As listeners in the *favelas* and the working-class neighborhoods would know, the suburb mentioned in the samba—Caxias—was indeed home to several esteemed *terreiros*, or spiritual centers. Pereira gave his work the specificity of local detail that would make it resonate with listeners—primarily poor and working-class Afro-Brazilians—who had themselves journeyed to such *terreiros*. (Ironically, a few years later, Pereira’s former girlfriend Isabel Mendes da Silva would give up her hard-drinking life in the city to become the leader of a spiritual sect in the suburbs.)

The following year, Pereira had what was perhaps his most lucrative hit, “Que Samba Bom” (What Great Samba). The composition is unusual in Pereira’s work in that it is unabashedly enthusiastic and positive, relating neither deception nor disillusionment. It describes a hot samba jam, with plenty of booze and women to spare, where even fools are “*se arrumando*,” or taking care of themselves. The melody is also simpler and more direct than Pereira’s syncopated marvels. In the recording by Blecaute, “Que Samba Bom” became one of the year’s top-selling records.

Despite its success, Pereira soon returned to a more complex approach. His “Ministério da Economia” of 1951 satirizes the proposed

creation by Getúlio Vargas—newly returned to office as the elected president—of a Ministry of the Economy to guard against inflation. The lyrics take the form of an open letter to the president, praising him for a step that will doubtless lift *favelados* out of poverty. In contrast to the nationalistic sambas that characterized the late Estado Novo, however, the praise of government here is clearly tongue-in-cheek: “Sir President . . . Now everything will be cheap/ Now the poor will be able to eat . . . I won’t have to eat cat anymore.” The closing line repeats this sentiment; the cats on the hill will laugh with pleasure, knowing they will now be safe from the *favela*’s stew pots.

Eating cats was by no means common in Mangueira. Pereira, rather, makes use of an exaggerated image of extreme poverty to give his samba a more sarcastic bite. The real power of the lyrics, however, comes from the speaker’s exultation that now he will be able to call home his “*negra bacana*,” or righteous black woman, from her job as a maid in a rich woman’s apartment in Copacabana. It is unclear whether the speaker is intended as another *malandro*, who takes advantage of his woman’s hard work to fund his own idleness, or a more typical *favelado* worker himself. The sly tone of the lyrics shows that he is no stranger to *malandragem* and thus may give some weight to the first interpretation. Regardless, what is perfectly clear is that the overarching economic structure has forced the black woman into menial service in the home of a wealthy white woman. In its sarcasm, the samba suggests that Vargas’s economic overtures toward the poor would do nothing to change this basic, de-meaning truth—an allegation that turned out to be completely correct.

Pereira followed “Ministério” with two sambas that show *favelados* attempting unsuccessfully to mitigate this inequality through *malandragem*. In both “Polícia no Morro” (Police on the Hill, 1951) and “Cabritada Malsucedida” (Unfortunate Goat Stew, 1953), a *malandro* named Bento steals a goat from a *doutor*, an elite gentleman. In “Polícia no Morro,” Bento uses the goatskin to make a drum, and in “Cabritada Malsucedida,” as the title suggests, he intends to make goat stew. In both cases, the police climb the hill in search of the goat. In “Polícia no Morro,” they shut down the samba and prevent the school from parading. In “Cabritada,” they break up the party and arrest everyone in sight. The hapless narrator of that samba only gets out of jail when his wife’s employer goes to the police station and pulls some strings. The pessimistic implication is that the *favelados* are ultimately at the mercy of the authorities and the elites. Only the ruling classes can manipulate the workings of justice, and the best that the *favelados* can hope for out of interaction with the *cidade* is a good patron.

In “Escurinha,” a 1952 samba, Pereira suggests that complete separation might be a better course. *Escurinha* literally means “little dark girl.”

To a reader from the United States, this term comes across as inevitably racist. In the Brazil of 1952, this was not so. The myth of racial democracy—the idea that Brazilians lived in prejudice-free racial harmony—had prevented diminutive race-based terms from taking on any apparent deprecatory meaning. Thus, when the “*negro*” or black man of “Escurinha” pleads with the title figure, he does so in a tone of affectionate intimacy. He urges her to leave her work as a maid and return to the *favela*. Instead of promising her a palace, he promises to share his *barraco*, rigorously and honestly listing its appointments: four earthen walls, a zinc roof, a floor of wooden slats. More important, he claims that as director of the samba school, he will make her its queen. He offers, in other words, no material luxuries, but rather a cultural glory within a small, closed community. This life is a long way from racial democracy.

“Escurinha” also marked the height of Pereira’s use of percussive sounds in his lyrics. Its opening lines, written (and sung) in rough Portuguese typical of the *favelas*, sound like a rhythm section working at full strength: “Escurinha/ tu tem que ser minha/ de qualquer maneira/ te dou meu boteco/te dou meu barraco. . .” (Escurinha, you must be mine, in any way, I’ll give you my bar, I’ll give you my shack. . .) The director of the samba school, fittingly, speaks in pure samba.

DECLINE

Pereira’s success as a composer brought him no peace. On the contrary, the experience of frequently hearing his sambas on the radio without getting rich made him bitter and suspicious. On many occasions, he accused the composers’ association charged with distributing royalties of fraud and corruption, to little avail. He found no great fortune as a singer. He had rhythm and style, but in comparison with masters of the genre such as Moreira da Silva, his voice was thin. He recorded many of his own compositions, but they tended to sound much better in versions by other singers. Although he sang frequently as a guest on various radio programs, no station ever hired him as a regular performer.

Pereira allegedly had his tonsils removed at least partly because he believed they were interfering with his singing. He responded poorly to the operation and bled profusely for days. In the early 1950s his health began to decline rapidly. He ate little and drank constantly; and the more he drank, the more he looked to fight. In the words of one colleague, “Geraldo, when he drank, asked for consent to be irritating, and then he abused that consent . . . when drunk, he was obsessively truculent.”⁸ As the mid-1950s approached, he was drinking almost all the time, from the start of his day at around 11 AM to its finish, when the *gafieiras* closed at

around 4 AM. Toward the end of his life he supposedly drank cheap cognac by the liter, hoping that it would cure impotence.

At the same time, he never gave up his ambition to keep learning, to keep improving his skills. He made several attempts in this period to learn to write music, believing that it would bring him greater respect among his colleagues. Distracted by drink and his constant round of Rio's nightspots, he never followed through. He gained a reputation as unreliable when he broke contracts with singers and with other composers. In 1954 he signed on for a prestigious long-running gig in São Paulo, but he could not bear to be away from the *gafieiras* and the girls of Rio on the weekends. He missed so many shows that his co-stars eventually gave up on him.

In 1954, Pereira wrote "Esurinho," his final composition of note, a samba that reads like autobiography. The *escurinho* of the title "used to be a good little black man," but since he got out of jail he cannot stop brawling. He threw over the *baiana's* tray of delicacies and went up to the *favelas* looking for a fight. Worst of all, he found it. He disrupted the samba on the hill, bringing it to an end. For a *malandro*, there could be no worse sin.

In early May 1955, shortly after his thirty-seventh birthday, Pereira had a barroom disagreement with Satã, or Satan, a famed *malandro* of Lapa. Satã, as everyone knew, was homosexual and liked to cross-dress. Later, he became known as Madame Satã (whose biography is featured in Chapter 14). Satã had lived, drunk, and fought in the streets of Lapa since Pereira was just a boy, in the early 1930s. Then, that downtown neighborhood was a buzzing hive of cafés, cabarets, and brothels frequented by locals and travelers of all classes. By the early 1950s it was decidedly down at the heel. The cabarets had shut down, the cafés had lost most of their customers, and most of the brothels had been pushed farther away from middle-class neighborhoods. A few of the old bars remained, and it was in one of these that Pereira and Satã had their notorious encounter. Both its causes and course are mysterious. Pereira may have mocked Satã for his sexual proclivities, or he may have merely told Satã to be quiet. He may have thrown the first punch, or taken it. What everyone agrees on is that Pereira provoked the fight and that Satã knocked him out (although witnesses differ as to whether this happened in the bar or on the sidewalk out front).⁹

Satã later claimed that medical negligence—a delayed ambulance, careless doctors—caused Pereira's death. More likely, Pereira's health was so ruined that he could not recover from even minor trauma. He died of internal bleeding several days later in the Public Servants' Hospital. He was admitted there not because of his public service as *sambista*,

much less *malandro*, but rather because of the job he rarely showed up for, that of truck driver for the Department of Sanitation.

NOTES

1. For basic biographical details see Alice Duarte Silva de Campos et al., *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira* (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE, 1983).
2. On ambiguity in "Na Subida do Morro," see Claudia Matos, *Acertei no Milhar: Malandragem e samba no tempo de Getúlio* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1982), 195–97; on the general importance of verbal skills to the *malandro*, see pp. 85–86.
3. Nestor de Holanda, *Memórias do Café Nice* (Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1969).
4. Roberto Paiva, as cited in Campos et al., *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira*, 143.
5. Campos et al., *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira*, 103. Moreira da Silva also held a civil service sinecure as an ambulance driver. By his own reckoning, at least he went to work more often than Pereira. Author's interview with Moreira da Silva, 1997.
6. Campos et al., *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira*, 77, 88, 91–92, 103, 106.
7. Isabel Mendes da Silva and Luiz da França, as quoted in Campos et al., *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira*, 27, 103.
8. Fernando Pimenta, as quoted in Campos et al., *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira*, 24.
9. For various versions of the fight between Pereira and Satã see Luis Fernando Vieira et al., *Um Escurinho Direitinho*, 58; and Campos et al., *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira*, 132–36.

SUGGESTED READINGS

There are two full-length biographies of Geraldo Pereira: *Um Certo Geraldo Pereira*, by Alice Duarte Silva de Campos, Dulcinéa Nunes Gomes, Francisco Duarte Silva, and Nelson (Sargento) Matos (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE, 1983); and *Um Escurinho Direitinho*, by Luis Fernando Vieira, Luís Pimentel, and Suetônio Valença (Rio de Janeiro: Relumo Dumará, 1998). Claudia Matos offers a fascinating analysis of the representations of *malandragem* in Pereira's work in *Acertei no Milhar: Malandragem e samba no tempo de Getúlio* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1982).

There are several excellent works in English on the general history of samba. For the roots of the genre, see Peter Fryer, *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001). For the rise of samba as the dominant national genre, see John Chasteen's translation of Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). For samba's importance in everyday Brazilian life, see Alma Guillermoprieto, *Samba* (New York: Vintage, 1990). For a more general survey of Brazilian music, see Christopher McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha, *The Brazilian Sound* (Philadelphia: Temple

University Press, 1998). My own forthcoming book analyzes popular music and the formation of a national popular culture in Brazil between 1930 and 1954. *Hello, Brazil: Popular Music and the Making of Modern Brazil* is tentatively scheduled for publication by Duke University Press in 2004.

Domingos da Guia

A Mestizo Hero on and off the Soccer Field*

LEONARDO AFFONSO DE MIRANDA PEREIRA

Historian Leonardo Affonso de Miranda Pereira tells us a story of triumph and tragedy as lived by one of Brazil's first international soccer stars of African descent. Domingos da Guia was one of the most prominent members of the first generation of professional nonwhite athletes who broke through the color barriers that limited the acceptance of brown and black players on Brazil's most prominent club teams as well as on its international teams. For the first time in 1938, Brazil sent a national team to Europe that included black and brown players. These men were to defend their country's honor on the soccer fields of France, a nation that most Brazilians considered the epitome of culture, taste, and civilization. At the time, sports competitions had become a venue for demonstrations of national superiority. Adolf Hitler attempted to capitalize on this concept when Berlin hosted the Olympic Games in 1936. Germany and the United States were awash at this time in racist and nationalist ferment ranging from the black-shirted ideologues of the Nazi Party to the white-sheeted members of the Ku Klux Klan. Nations contested ideas of racial and national superiority through sports in a period of tense international relations that ultimately erupted into the violence of World War II. Brazilian sports journalists and intellectuals depicted Domingos da Guia as the perfect representative of the nationalist myth of racial democracy in the 1930s because of his mixed racial heritage. However, like composer Geraldo Pereira (see Chapter 7), Domingo's life and his words belie the very idea of Brazil's racial democracy that he was said to represent.

Soccer has long been one of Brazil's greatest sources of pride. The national team has the best record of any in the world, and it is the only team to have won the coveted World Cup soccer championship five times. This recognition, however, did little to remove important barriers to the ability of Afro-Brazilians to fully participate and compete in the areas of commerce, education, and government. Entertainment and sports provided one of the few avenues to fame and fortune that opened up for nonwhite Brazilians in the 1920s and 1930s. But, as Professor Pereira's biography of Domingos shows, these advances were often fleeting.

*Translated by Peter M. Beattie.