

This Week at The Jazz Station
~ Niels Miller

THE JAZZ STATION



This country has the sixth largest population in the world, vast natural resources and a small number of “original” inhabitants. It has a long history of slave labor and a legacy of slave descendants living in economically disadvantaged parts of the country. The government has long encouraged immigration, and the cultural output resulting from this blending is popular worldwide. Its popular music has played an important role in the development of jazz, rock, and other popular musical genres.

No, this isn't a description of the US, but Brazil, the second largest country in the western hemisphere, and one whose history, demographics and cultural output are strikingly similar. The US has a long history of slavery and mixing of African and European musical traditions that produced jazz, RnB, and most of our current popular music which is exported around the globe. The original slave population in Brazil was much larger, and the mixing of African and European musical traditions there produced

choro, samba, bossa nova, and many other music genres that also have had a worldwide impact. While both countries share a history dominated by European and African cultures, the resulting cultural output is quite different.

People often refer to the US either as a melting pot, where every culture blends together into one, or a salad bowl, where each retains its individual identity while forming part of a larger entity. Similarly, some Brazilians have referred to its citizens as cultural cannibals, people who take various cultural influences, digest them, and produce something new and quintessentially Brazilian. In 1928, poet Oswald de Andrade, published the iconic "Manifesto Antropofagico" (Cannibal Manifesto), promoting this idea of "cannibalizing" different traditions as a way for Brazil to produce its own culture that was not dominated by its European past.

And so, while jazz originated in the US in the early 20th century with its roots in ragtime, Brazil has choro music emerging in the 19th century. Both are based in a blending of European musical forms and harmony strongly influenced by African rhythms. Both were performed by small ensembles with a heavy emphasis on improvisation.

While American jazz morphed into swing, big bands, and more harmonically and rhythmically complex forms like bebop, the blues remained a dominant influence, even as urban blues, epitomized by artists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, grew in popularity as its own genre. Similarly, choro continued to evolve and include elements of samba when that music burst onto the scene in the early 20th century, though the two remained separate genres. Samba eventually became so popular worldwide that touring bands in the US often included these musicians in their lineups. It even became the topic of a [Walt Disney cartoon](#) in the 1940s.

By the time the 1960s came around, the US was overtaken by another Brazilian musical craze, bossa nova, the distillation of samba rhythms to a cool, laid-back state. The popularity of bossa nova opened opportunities for other Brazilian groups such as Sergio Mendes & Brazil 66 whose "Mas que Nada" was a bossa rock hit in 1966.

With a population of around 210 million people living in extremely diverse regions, Brazil has an astonishing variety of regional and sub-cultural genres that extends well beyond the big three of choro, samba, and bossa nova. There's even a country music equivalent called Sertaneja that features a heavy presence of accordion, and to my unschooled ears, a beat akin to polka.

With so much ground to cover, you'll be happy to know that Friday's musical artist, **Vianna Bergeron Brazilian Jazz**, will be playing selections from all over Brazil: choro, samba and bossa nova, for sure, but also frevo, carnival music from the Northeast; a baião, hailing from the Bahia region (which was a center of the slave trade); a moda, which is an early song style that influenced choro; and a piece by Milton Nascimento, representative of a school of musicians from Bahia. Three of the musicians in this fantastic band are Brazilian born, another taught this music for many years at Western Oregon, and the youngest member is a percussionist who recently founded the Duck Samba ensemble at the University of Oregon. If you love Brazilian music, but want to hear new genres, or just immerse yourself in those you already know, this performance is an amazing opportunity to experience the breadth and depth of music from our Portuguese-speaking doppelganger in the southern hemisphere.