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Cantos da Floresta (Forest Songs) : exchanging and sharing indigenous music in Brazil

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Summary

This thesis presents the research process behind the project *Rupestres Sonoros*, by the São Paulo-based musical group Mawaca, that recreated indigenous Brazilian songs, and the *Cantos da Floresta* tour of the Amazon, involving an intercultural exchange with six different indigenous groups. The thesis also addresses the projects' outcomes, such as the publication of didactic books, creation of websites, workshops and new projects that seek to shed light on indigenous musical expressions.

The first chapter briefly contextualizes these projects within an overview of the various forms of views and exchanges with native Brazilian music that occurred throughout history. This historical framework is based on documents with comments made by European conquerors, priests and explorers during the colonial era as well as the various ways Brazilian musicians connected themselves to indigenous musicalities. Beginning with the romantic view of 'noble-savages' in Carlos Gomes' *Il Guarany* opera; passing through Nationalist composers such as Villa-Lobos, Marlos Nobre, Guerra-Peixe, Sérgio de Vasconcellos who used indigenous elements in their music to create a "national identity". Continuing to Egberto Gismonti's transformative contact with the Yawalapiti people in Xingu Park; and Caetano Veloso's enthusiastic take on "anthropophagic-tropicalism", including the first non-authorized partnership with a Juruna musician from Xingu; as well as the free compositions of ethnomusicologists Kilza Setti and Priscila Ermel, who used their field research experiences as inspiration. Further discussing Milton Nascimento's engagement with indigenous causes, using music as a political tool to pursue indigenous legal rights, as well as the groundbreaking project *Roots* created by the heavy metal band Sepultura after a meeting with a Xavante group in their village. I highlighted the pioneering work of Marlui Miranda, who researched and performed the richness and diversity of indigenous sonorities through her consistent projects, which reflect her aesthetic and a political engagement. The chapter closes with the unprecedented experiment produced by ethnomusicologist Sá Brito, overlaying Mehinaku and Kayapó field recordings with interventions by musicians done in studio groups and Renata Rosa in collaboration with Kariri-Xocó musicians inspired by spiritual experiences.

The second chapter describes the guiding principles of Mawaca and the process of creating art within the indigenous context — one of transit, re-appropriation and re-signification of indigenous musical traditions. My first interaction with native sonorities was when I arranged the anthropophagic song *Koixãgareh*, performed by Mawaca for many years. This song stimulated me to pursue a Master in anthropology whose main purpose was to catalog, digitize, translate and classify sound archives of the Paiter Surui people, recorded by anthropologist Betty Mindlin. The MA led me to the *Rupestres Sonoros* project with Mawaca, based on research done on recordings of Txucarramãe, Paiter Surui, Ikolen-Gavião, Huni-Kuin, Kayapó, and Pakaa-Nova peoples, that were then related to images of rupestrian art found in archeological

sites in Serra da Capivara and Monte Alegre. The graphisms on the stones were transformed into musical scores – thus serving as inspiration for Mawaca’s musicians to create imaginary soundscapes in which the Paleoindians may have lived.

The project was registered in one final performance on the *Rupestres Sonoros* CD and DVD, a musical production that combined electronic elements mixed with Afro-Brazilian and Japanese sonorities. Mawaca then travelled throughout the Amazon during the tour *Cantos da Floresta*, exchanging thoughts and music with native communities. During the tour, we met members of six groups in the states of Acre, Rondônia and Amazonas, including the Paiter Surui, Ikolen-Gavião, Karitiana, Kambeba, Huni-Kuin groups and Bayaroá Community who shared their music with us and performed in Mawaca’s concerts as special guests. The intention behind “putting indigenous musicalities on stage” was to re-create and re-signify these musicalities through new performative contexts. By sharing this exchange with a larger audience, we sought a way to shed light on these rich cultures, woefully overlooked. These experiences were formative, changing the way we conceived of and experienced music.

This experience also inspired reflections on the widespread lack of knowledge about the many indigenous populations that inhabit Brazil, whose culture and plight is made invisible. The invisibility of indigenous life makes clear the necessity of creating more projects that portray indigenous culture and people as they exist currently, minimizing the still prevalent stereotypes of native peoples as primitive and burdens for the country’s development.

The third chapter addresses these reflections’ reverberations and outcomes, which took the form of educational projects creating didactic material to share this culture heritage with teachers through workshops around the country, so they can then act as potential multipliers of these knowledges, minimizing the gap between academia and lay people. The third chapter also considers the process of cultural transformation currently underfoot, as bridges, dialogues, and paths of intercession are forged in ways where indigenous peoples are no longer “objects of study” but rather protagonists of their own history “re-existing” (Viveiro de Castro’s ‘resisting with existing’).

The thesis is about the journey of going up on stage, organizing intercultural activities, producing books, records and videos that transformed me and Mawaca, in a postmodern context, into artists that create in order to help raise awareness on the current political issues concerning the indigenous communities in Brazil. The purpose of this thesis is to reveal how music performance and research can be conducted by “anthropophagizing” knowledge, that is, consuming from a broad range of cultural sources, regurgitating and reinventing multicultural musicalities.