HOST INTRO: Fuzzed out, distorted guitar. The Beatles. Social unrest. Samba drums? During the late 1960s, a Brazilian rock movement emerged and asked: ‘just what is the Brazilian identity?’ A close-knit group of musicians combined traditional Afro-Brazilian sounds with the new rock-and-roll influence and created the Tropicália movement. Facing opposition from the military regime and ardent Brazilian nationalists, they ventured to expand what it means to be Brazilian. Sophie Joseph, Evan Williams, and Zach Hoyt investigate.

MUSIC TRACK 1: (30 seconds of music—“Tropicália” by Caetano Veloso)

TRACK 1: In the 1950s, Brazil grew economically and industrially, hopeful about the state of their country. But, that’s not the way it turned out. In 1964, there was a military coup that replaced the democratically elected president. People felt really strongly about what happened, and music was a way for them to express their feelings. But not everybody agreed on how to do that. On one side there were these university students who believed that Brazilian music should be strictly Brazilian. On the other side, there were working class folks that got hooked on the rock scene and didn’t care about the foreign influence. Dr. Dan Sharp, an ethnomusicologist studies the music of northeastern Brazil, says:

ACT 1/Daniel Sharp
“This whole idea that either you’re politically engaged as a musician or you’re escapist and alienated and part of the problem—that needs to be demolished. That binary. That either or kind of thinking is part of the problem. That you can dance all night to something escapist and maybe that might help you blow off some steam so that then you can protest in the morning.”

TRACK 2: The Tropicalia movement said that you can do both, dance all night and fight the power in the morning.

MUSIC TRACK 2: (30 second music interlude—“Domingo no Parque” by Gilberto Gil)…

TRACK 3: Dr. Chris Dunn, expert on Luso-Brazilian studies, names the most important musicians from Bahia of the Tropicália movement: Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa and
Tom Zé:

ACT 2/Christopher Dunn
“And so you have this Bahian group from Salvador with all of its rich, musical traditions rooted in Afro-Brazilian culture coming down to the south first to Rio de Janeiro and then eventually to São Paulo where they hook up with two main groups. One, a phenomenal young group of psychedelic rockers who came under the name of Os Mutantes, the Mutants, who were just phenomenal musicians who were very sophisticated in their reading of the rock tradition.”

TRACK 4:
The result of this hooking up was the Tropicalista movement and the concept album “Panis et Circensis.” These musicians chewed up other cultures and spit it out as authentically Brazilian—a concept known as cultural cannibalism. Dunn elaborates on this:

ACT 3/Christopher Dunn
“Caetano Veloso wrote in his memoirs several years ago that ‘cannibalism fit us like a glove. It was perfect for what we were trying to do. We were eating metaphorically The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix, in other words, consuming them, devouring them, taking what they had, learning from them, appropriating elements from what they were doing to make something new.’”

MUSIC TRACK 3:
(30 second music interlude—“Panis et Circensis” by Os Mutantes)…

TRACK 5:
The song we just heard means “bread and games.” It comes from when the Romans had gladiator fights and put out food so people would have fun and forget their problems. Like the Romans, Brazilians also suffered under their government. The Tropicalistas were telling them “you don’t have rights; the government is just trying to throw you under the bus.” But, the government began censoring the media, and the Tropicalistas were forced into exile. Carina Ribeiro, who studied in Brazil last year, says that Brazilian university students grabbed their guitars, went out onto the quad, and played Tropicalista songs while professors struck at the public Brazilian universities last year:

ACT 4/Carina Ribeiro
“…Mas também há pessoas quem escutem e recebem inspiração das palavras. Por exemplo, muitos universitários adoram essa música. Durante a greve no ano passado das universidades federais, havia pessoas quem tocaram essa música para a galera.”

"... But there are also people who listen and receive inspiration from the words. For example, many college students love this music. During the strike of federal universities last year, there were people who played this music for the crowd."
TRACK 6:
Brazilians eventually embraced the beliefs of the Tropicalistas. Native Brazilian, Juliano Mendoça, explains:

ACT 5/Juliano
“No começo, né, do tropicalismo muitos pessoas achavam que ia atropelar de uma certa forma a nossa cultura, mas na verdade foi só uma... integrou uma coisa boa de positiva, né.”

In the beginning, right, many people thought that Tropicalia would destroy our culture in a certain way, but in reality it only... it integrated a good and positive thing.

TRACK 7:
While Brazilian musicians nowadays do not necessarily draw upon the Tropicália movement, they owe a great debt to the doors the movement opened. The Tropicália movement broke the taboo regarding what makes something Brazilian and made the way for other musical movements to avoid the alienado stigma. Again, Chris Dunn adds:

ACT 6/Christopher Dunn
Today, the Tropicalist intervention of the 1960s, as radical as it was at that time now, is the status quo. It’s what everyone does at a certain extent. It’s what it means to make innovative Brazilian popular music right now. At least for one segment of society. You have all these regional scenes and a big do-it-yourself scene. You have a huge rap and hip-hop scene that owes nothing to Tropicália.

TRACK 8:
Tropicalistas made waves in Brazilian music, and today’s musicians are making bigger waves. The Tropicália Revolution opened up the doors for modern musicians to experiment and create unprecedented sounds, continuously changing and evolving what it means to be “Brazilian.” For WTUL, we’re Sophie Joseph, Evan Williams, and Zach Hoyt.

MUSIC TRACK 4:
(30 second music interlude—“Bat Macuma” by Os Mutantes)…