

2/19/14

Interview of Dan Sharp (DS), Professor of Music, focused on Brazil

204 Dixon

3:00pm

Edward Sapp (ES), Kaila Lopez (KL)

KL: Could you start by introducing yourself?

DS: Sure, I am Dan Sharp and I am an ethnomusicology professor here, so I was jointly appointed both in Latin American Studies and Music. I do research on Brazilian popular music, specifically northeastern Brazilian popular music.

ES:...So I guess we wanted to start off with the figure of the malandro in popular music, that's our focus of research this time. So if you could wanted to speak on that, just defining what it is.

DS: Sure, nothing more than that?

ES: Just for now, just defining the general concept of the malandro, what it means, and then we'll ask if he's a negative or positive figure.

DS: Sure, it's definitely part of stories that Brazilians tell themselves about themselves. The malandro is a figure that shows up all over early Samba, and when we think about the way in which in the 1920s and 1930s samba became really put up on a pedestal as Brazil's national music, it makes sense to really scrutinize it. Think about what's going on there, the mystery of Samba that Hermano Vianna writes about is the process in which music that was more of a niche, that was linked to socially marginalized Afro-Brazilians in Rio specifically, all of a sudden was transformed into something that was thought of as representative of Brazilian national character. The malandro specifically is someone who is the life of the party, always very well dressed, is kind of a rogue and a rake, there are lots of kind of evocative words in English that don't quite translate. Someone who's very suave, someone who gets by their wits, and can get around the rules. You might not completely trust him, but you want to have him around as part of the life of the party. It's linked to the Samba musicians. You can imagine how this has, depending on your point of view, either a positive or a negative side. I think of it as kind of coming down to, if you have a baseline assumption that society is unjust, then you can potentially think of the malandro as kind of a hero because he gracefully gets around the arbitrary and unjust rules, he manages to make a life for himself without having to be subject to the drudgery of everyday work. But then if you believe that society's rules are there for a reason and that there is a kind of baseline justice to it, then you would be more inclined to think of him as lazy and a problem. And as Samba became nationalized there was some talk about that, that it's not exactly representational of a model productive citizen, right?

ES: Definitely. So the malandro is sort of a necessary response to an unjust system that oppresses lots of people with arbitrary rules and bureaucracy and corruption. But, from the

perspective from somebody from the United States it could seem like the malandro is just kind of a cheat or some sort of a roguish person doing wrong.

DS: Right, well, yeah people talk about whether the basis of your moral sense is more absolute or more situational and in Brazil its very common to navigate certain situations thinking of it as, you know, like for example when you're dealing with a faceless bureaucracy that has its elements that are definitely Kafka-esque and if you were to follow all of the rules, you could be waiting in line for sixteen hours, and so trying to charm the person that can help you and see if they can help you bend the rules. A slightly different concept is more of an idea of jeitinho, but there's a similar kind of flexibility there. In the case of the malandro, I'm trying to think of where you were going with that question....

KL: Okay, I have a quick question. Do you think the malandro is portrayed positively or negatively in most Brazilian music? How do you think the brazilians themselves look at the malandro? Obviously the lower classes raise them up, but is that the popular culture ideal?

DS: I wouldn't even say that, I wouldn't divide it in terms of classes, because for example if you've watched the movie "City of God", there are characters that are very anti-malandro, like an estranged girlfriend. We haven't talked about the gender component of it, the malandro is to some a masculine ideal and to some a real creep, unreliable, not marriage material. And so I'm going to duck the question of trying to assess how he's portrayed in popular music in general because it really varies, but it's a figure that allows people to make their arguments about whether they romanticize him or whether they use him to comment more critically on certain aspects.

ES: Finally, do see any similarities between the malandro in Brazilian music and ethno music culture, and New Orleans?

DS: Yeah, I think it's common among us "Brazilianists", who are here in New Orleans, I've had this conversation with Chris Dunn before, that there are certain ideas within the US... in hip hop culture that have certain parallels to the malandro and are kind of similarly ambivalent, like when in songs people talk about hustling to make it, or in gangster rap talking about the moments that kind of glorify drug dealing as a way to get out of a difficult situation. There are ways in which, for me having spent a lot of time in Brazil, the kinds of personalized relationships and flexibility, bending rules, and the assumption of corruption, that you can make parallels between Brazil and New Orleans. It's a complicated thing, there are also limits to the comparisons, but I think it's a fair comparison to make.

KL: I think that's all we need, thanks!

2/19/14

Entrevista com Curtis Pierre (CP) de Casa Samba, English Highlights
1555 Magazine St.

10:00 am

Entrevistadores:
Edward Sapp (ES)
Kaila Lopez (KL)

ES: Today we're going to talk about the theme of the malandro and Brazilian culture. What is the significance of "malandragem," in your perspective?

CP: About the malandro? The malandro is the face of the streets, he knows all the tricks of streets, he is very smart, but he works primarily in the streets. And here, people in New Orleans have a frase: "you can't out-joke the jokester." And the jokester is the same figure as the malandro. The malandro here represents a face about—he doesn't live in the streets, but he has the same street smarts. Normal people don't understand the streets. You'll find him on the corner. He'll ask, "are you interested in buying something?" There are places where only he knows to go. But there are two senses: this can be a bad thing or a good thing for himself, not for you. Everything he does is for himself.

KL: Are there differences between the bureaucracy and corruption in Brazil and New Orleans?

CP: Regarding the malandro?

KL: With the malandro or the government.

CP: This is the primary reason why the malandro exists, because of bureaucaracy. I'm going to give you an example. I did a job for a university, and they had to pay me. They wait more than three weeks to write a check. So, I don't know, nobody knows how you could do a job today and somebody would wait three weeks to write a check. Anyways, this is bureaucracy; but, if you do something for me today, I have to respond to you at the same time. I don't have, ask you today, and you respond to me "in the next few weeks." This isn't right. But that bureaucracy is an example of bureaucracy. A malandro quickly sees insides the centers of community, government, he sees this quickly. For this, he is very intelligent. For this, he doesn't do, he is going to do something to find another way to get what he wants quicker. He isn't going to stay or wait for his "jeito" to arrive. He goes ahead, he knows, knows more than me, he works ahead, he goes.

ES: I have one more question about New Orleans. Do you think that the same type of "malandragem" regarding government and bureaucracy exists in New Orleans?

CP: The problem with comparing New Orleans and Brazil is that people here are sometimes oblivious. In Brazil, they more or less understand what's going on; but they don't want to know

the differences. He's going to do what he's going to do. Brazilians also have a more lenient government for those who sell things on the street. They can sell water, drinks. You arrive in Brazil, walk along the road and you'll hear, "Beer! Coca-Cola!" Here, you can't do that. You can't earn money without a license. The bureaucracy, you have to go to the city hall to do everything, to organize and also you must waste a lot of money on them to earn more than nothing. I believe it's worse here than Brazil. [In Brazil,] People are much more open to do things without bureaucracy, but this is because of the city. You have more opportunities here.

March 24, 2014

Interviewers: Kaila Lopez and Edward Sapp

Interviewees: Rodrigo Lerner and his friend João

English Translations of Particularly Interesting Sections

ES: What is malandragem like in the upper class of Brazil?

RL: I think that in Brazil, in the upper classes, malandragem is an exchange of favors between businesses, governments; all of Brazil is an exchange of favors.

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KL: Have you experienced malandragem in your lives?

RL: In São Paulo, you have to pay a fee to get into driving school, plus an unofficial 200 dollars to get the card that says you've passed driver's ed. It's *malandragem* because it's illegal, but everyone does it. Me too, I paid for the card, but then the drivers education school I was enrolled in closed, I failed the test, and they ran off with everyone's money, including my own. I tried to be a malandro like everyone else, but I just ended up losing my money.

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J: Alright, I also have a story from when I was a boy in the hospital with my mom. This guy wanted me to pay 20 Brazilian Reals so that I could spend time in the hospital and I said I didn't have much money. He said no. He asked me for a financial note and he said that I would have to leave if I didn't pay but the truth is they scam everybody and if you spend a lot of time in the hospital you will need to pay them to stay. They run a business off of this. This is only one example of malandragem.