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TROPICÁLIA  
Addendum: Websites and Articles

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\* Selected websites

<b>Tropicália-related websites</b>	
<b>Tropicália Exhibits</b>	
Barbican exhibit (London)	<a href="http://www.barbican.org.uk/tropicalia">www.barbican.org.uk/tropicalia</a>
Tropicalia exhibit at House of World Cultures at 2006 World Cup (Berlin)	<a href="http://www.hkw.de/en/programm2006/copa_da_cultura/_copa_da_cultura/projekt-detail_3.php">www.hkw.de/en/programm2006/copa_da_cultura/_copa_da_cultura/projekt-detail_3.php</a>
Tropicalia exhibit (New York City)	<a href="http://www.bronxmuseum.org/exhibitions/current.html">www.bronxmuseum.org/exhibitions/current.html</a>
Tropicalia exhibit (Chicago)	<a href="http://mcachicago.org/exhibitions/exh_detail.php?id=14">mcachicago.org/exhibitions/exh_detail.php?id=14</a>
<b>Caetano Veloso</b>	
Official site for Caetano Veloso	<a href="http://www.caetanoveloso.com.br/index2.php">www.caetanoveloso.com.br/index2.php</a>
Nonesuch Records site for Caetano Veloso	<a href="http://www.nonesuch.com/Hi_Band/index_fra_meset2.cfm?pointer=veloso.gif">www.nonesuch.com/Hi_Band/index_fra_meset2.cfm?pointer=veloso.gif</a>
<b>Gilberto Gil</b>	
Official site for Gilberto Gil	<a href="http://www.gilbertogil.com.br">www.gilbertogil.com.br</a>
<b>Os Mutantes</b>	
Official site for Os Mutantes	<a href="http://www.osmutantes.com">www.osmutantes.com</a>
Luaka Bop site for Os Mutantes	<a href="http://www.luakabop.com/os_mutantes">www.luakabop.com/os_mutantes</a>
<b>Gal Costa</b>	
Official site for Gal Costa	<a href="http://www.galcosta.com.br/">www.galcosta.com.br/</a>
Trama Records site for Gal Costa	<a href="http://www.trama.com/porta1v2/internacionalv2/album.jsp?id=4702">www.trama.com/porta1v2/internacionalv2/album.jsp?id=4702</a>



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\* Selected Tropicália articles from:

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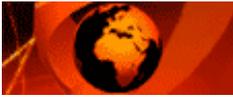
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**Rolling Stone**



**CNN** INTERNATIONAL  
**.com**





## **A taste of Rio in central London**

By **Bruno Garcez**  
BBC Brazil

**Brazil's influential Tropicalia movement is the subject of a major three-month festival at the Barbican Arts Centre in London.**



A psychedelic band with a worldwide cult following, a government minister with a musical past and an arts exhibition that invites bare-footed punters to touch the works on display.

These apparent random elements are part of Brazil's

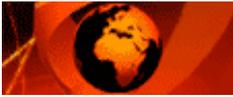
Tropicalia, one of South America's most creative and influential artistic movements.

The movement emerged in the late 60s, a period in which young Brazilian artists were eager to challenge the country's military rulers and combine their own native influences with new ones from the US and Europe.

"Tropicalia was about updating Brazilian culture to the spirit of the times," says singer-songwriter Gilberto Gil, now Brazil's Culture Minister.

"In the 60s there was a revolutionary process going on. Young people were creating new approaches to life, proposing new trends. Tropicalia was the equivalent in Brazil."

Although Gil and his musical partner Caetano Veloso are normally credited for having invented Tropicalia, its emergence can also be attributed to the artist Hélio Oiticica, whose works are now being shown at the Barbican.



## Installation

Created in 1967, Tropicalia reflects Oiticica's connection with the shanty towns of Rio by reproducing a "favela" and inviting the visitor to walk through its small, colourful accommodations.



Another installation instructs the audience to take off their footwear and follow a shanty town scenario while stepping on pebbles, sand and wet soil.

In Gil's view, London is an ideal city to host a Tropicalia festival. Both he and Veloso came to the capital as refugees in 1969

following their arrests by Brazil's military regime.

"London sheltered us, and we found many points in common with what we were doing back in Brazil.

"It was the land of the Beatles and the Stones, of Mary Quant and the mini-skirt. It's only natural that it now acknowledges itself as a crucial city for the tropicalists."

During his time in the capital Gil would also mingle with local musicians and find new influences for his later works.

"I used to hang around with Jim Capaldi from Traffic, David Gilmour from Pink Floyd and Alan Watts, who later joined Yes. I saw Miles Davis perform and watched John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

"It was in London that I played electric guitar for the first time. When I went back to Brazil, I was a different musician."

## Psychedelia

But if London can be hailed as the Tropicalia capital of Europe, the works of the tropicalists have travelled way beyond its boundaries.



"There have been events in New York and Chicago, and I have received PhD works made by students in Belgium and Germany," says Gil.

One of the highlights of the Barbican festival, which runs until 22 May, is a concert by Os Mutantes, a band from Sao Paulo often dubbed the "Brazilian Beatles".

The band, who are reforming specially for the event, famously combined 60s psychedelia with traditional elements of Brazilian music and can count David Byrne of Talking Heads as one of their biggest fans.

Often considered as transgressors in the 60s, some of the artists that rose to fame with Tropicalia are now among the most popular in Brazil.

But Gil says being a best-selling artist and a government minister is not in contradiction with the ideals of the movement.

"I am many things: a composer, a musician and a minister. I see no complication in that. Above all, I am still a tropicalist." \_

**SAO PAULO, Brazil (Reuters) -- Not many government ministers wear their hair in dreadlocks but not many are also world-renowned music stars like Brazil's Gilberto Gil, who will be lauded at the Latin Grammy awards show on Wednesday.**

Gil, culture minister in the government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, says he sees both roles as part of a single project.

"There is no double-shift in my life," he told Reuters in an interview.

The 61-year-old artist, who hails from the state of Bahia, will be honored as Man of the Year at the Latin Grammy ceremony in Miami.



He is also in the running for his third Grammy for his 41st album "Kaya N'Gan Daya - Ao Vivo," a collection of songs written by late reggae king Bob Marley.

The Man of the Year award pays tribute to Gil's contribution to culture and music, which he has made a mission in this developing country full of social contrasts.

"Popular music represents the strength of the spirit and the expression of a nation. It has become an important institution to the people of Brazil," Gil said.

In his eight months in the Cabinet, he has traveled to many cities in Brazil's interior trying to bring their own music and art to a wider audience.

Gil was already one of the best-known cultural figures in this nation of 170 million people and has a substantial international following.

He started his career as a businessman, becoming a manager at the consumer products giant Gessy Lever in Sao Paulo. But the music played louder in his heart.



### **Considered a radical**

By 1968, he had helped found Tropicalia, the musical movement that followed Bossa Nova, with singers Caetano Veloso, Gal Costa and others. Wearing psychedelic clothes and mixing Brazilian rhythms with Anglo-American sounds, he and Veloso were considered radicals.

The two were imprisoned by the military government and then sent into exile in London in 1969.



Returning to Brazil and his beloved Bahia in 1972, he devoted his career to music and environmental activism.

His only political affiliation has been with the Green Party and he also founded ONG Onda Azul, a nongovernmental organization that fights for the preservation of water resources.

When Gil became minister, many critics said he would be unable to deal with the complexities of the job. Others said his intention to keep performing on weekends was not fitting for a political figure.

He saw no contradiction between the two jobs, he said, describing a recent encounter.

"The other day I was walking with the guitar at my back and a man came and said 'look at your pen,' pointing to the guitar," he said.

The man said the guitar was "the pen" with which Gil wrote his most important documents.

As minister, Gil wants to increase Brazil's film output to 100 from 30 movies a year.

He also wants to reform laws for financing cultural activities, promoting creation of a lottery similar to Britain's. Proceeds of the British lottery are pumped back into the nation's cultural life.

"Brazil was, is, and will be in fashion," he said.



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**Posted: Mon., Mar. 26, 2007, 8:17pm PT**

## Gilberto Gil

(Royce Hall; 1,800 seats; \$65 top) Presented by UCLA Live. Reviewed March 24, 2007.

By [STEVEN MIRKIN](#)

**Watching Gilberto Gil at Royce Hall on Saturday night, it was hard to believe the performance was part of his first solo acoustic tour. The Brazilian musical legend (and minister of culture) stepped easily into the singer-songwriter role, and his simply presented, two-hour perf was assured and enchanting.**

The vocal and guitar setup echoed that of "Gil Luminoso," his 1999 album that DRG Brazil released domestically this year. But the album's pensive, philosophical mood is replaced onstage by a celebratory joy.

As he sang more upbeat material such as "Maquina do Tempo" and "Luar," his phrasing had a rhythmically elastic percussive feel, glancing off the melody like skipping stones on a lake. On "Metafora" and other ballads, his voice turned tender, embracing the notes with a sensual hug.

Gil's sure sense of rhythm extended even to his commentary. While he's not fluent in English, his attempts to speak it came in short, almost poetic bursts: "I was staying at the top of the world/It was beautiful/Yes/Then I came to Los Angeles."

The setlist was a wonderfully mixed bag, including material from Augustin Lara, a Mexican songwriter of the 1950s who influenced Gil, Caetano Veloso and other members of the Tropicalia movement; the Beatles; Blind Faith; and two songs from Bob Marley, including a vulnerable yet steadfast version of "No Woman, No Cry."

Gil doesn't just sing, he growls, whistles, hoots and pushes his warm voice into a sweet, piping falsetto. And on just about every song, he invited the sellout aud (more than a few calling out greetings and requests in

Portuguese) to join in. His guitar playing is just as varied: There was a lightness to his touch on bossa novas and sambas such as "Esoterico" and "A Linha e o Linho," but he emphatically strummed the strutting train song "Expresso 2222" and the caffeinated, Carnivale arrangement of "Palco."

There may have been only one man onstage, but there was enough warmth, love, intelligence and sheer talent on display to power an orchestra.

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/story.asp?l=story&r=VE1117933204&c=34>

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April 13, 2007

## Music

**Brazilian Culture Minister Rocks Out with New Album**

by Julie McCarthy



Frank Perry

Musician Gilberto Gil is Brazil's culture minister. His latest album, *Gil Luminoso*, will be released in the United States March 15. AFP/Getty Images

*Weekend Edition Saturday*, March 3, 2007 · The military leaders who ruled Brazil for two decades considered Gilberto Gil's music subversive. Today, as cultural minister, he is one of the country's most visible diplomats.

The 64-year-old musician has a career that spans four decades, covering rock, the gentle beats of Bossa Nova and everything in between.

Gil has often received inspiration from politics. He co-founded Tropicalia — an avant-garde movement that melded musical styles — with longtime collaborator Caetano Veloso in the 1960s.

Both men were exiled to London and returned to Brazil to perform under the name The Sweet Barbarians.

Along the way, hardship has only fueled Gil's art.

"We should not take suffering as collateral or a side-effect of life," he says. "Suffering is an ingredient you have to use."

Gil talks about some of the songs on his latest album, *Gil Luminoso*. He begins a North American tour March 15.

**Three From 'Gil Luminoso'**

- 'Preciso Aprender A So Ser'
- 'Copo Vazio'
- 'Cerebro Eletronico'

**More on Tropicalia**

- June 28, 2004  
[Caetano Veloso and David Byrne in Concert](#)
- April 24, 2006  
[Brazilian Composer Tom Ze](#)
- July 25, 2004  
[A Fresh Take on Tropicalia](#)

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## **Bread And Circuses**

Brazil's madcap post-tropicalista Tom Zé is still making the avant-garde go pop.

By Will Welch

The first time I ever heard a Tom Zé record was a couple years back. I was sitting in my living room while a coworker put a selection of Brazilian tropicalia records from the early '70s on my turntable—Caetano Veloso's sensual croon-rocking, the frenetic, almost looped repetition of Gal Costa's *India*. But none of them were as surprising as Zé. As soon as the needle dropped on his 1973 album *Todos Os Olhos*, I was blindsided by what I heard—and what I saw. The cover of the album is a close-up photograph of a marble clinched in an anus; the picture has been rotated 90 degrees so that together, anus plus marble equals eye: *All The Eyes*.



The music was grounded in a heavy-hitting samba rhythm, with bright but jarring acoustic guitar, choruses singing ecstatically in mush-mouthed Brazilian Portuguese, and what sounded like vacuums shrieking hysterically, terrorizing the percussion with an electro-future industrial glee. The music sounded experimental as all hell—it always playfully operated at two opposite sonic poles

simultaneously—but wild experimentation doesn't make you recklessly, happily confused. Pop music does.

If there is any one defining feature of Tom Zé, it is his ability to create contradictions and delight in them so completely that, ultimately, he's able to have it both ways. The music sounds as though it's built with blocks made from a mixture of elements that are, elsewhere, simultaneous impossibilities: the country and the city; the living room and the street; the third world and the

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first; the organic and the industrial; pure sound and pure emotion; pure intimacy and pure collectivity; the familiarity of tradition and the surprise of the avant-garde. The result is music that is only elementally—not holistically—weird. Zé is distinct from almost everyone else who has been called avant-garde because the “difficulty” for the listener that the tag implies doesn’t really apply to him. He has taken brilliantly bizarre, creative and intellectual routes to making music that is utterly joyous, listenable and often danceable—if not always hummable. \_\_\_\_\_



Born in the state of Bahia in Northeastern Brazil in 1936, Tom Zé now lives in São Paulo, where he runs his production office out of his apartment with his wife Neusa. He wakes up at six in the morning to practice Tai-Chi, and when the in-house office closes at six in the evening, Neusa reads to him; on one recent evening they read Harold Bloom’s *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* In talking me through his daily routine, Zé (through his friend and translator Chris Dunn) refers un-specifically to his “work.” I ask him what “work” means, and he says, “I’m doing something very important: I’m becoming literate.” It turns out that by

“literate,” he means learning how to use a Mac for email and the basics of a sound editing program. The playful manner of speaking—and the investment in computer literacy—is classic Zé, whose long musical history is inextricably intertwined with literature, Dadaist turns of phrase and technology.

In the late 1960s, bossa nova had firmly taken hold of Brazil, until a loose collective of young intellectual musicians stripped it away from all of its factions—those who were making hits with it and those who were making protest music with it and those who were doing both. They opened it up by incorporating rock & roll from outside of Brazil as well as rural music like *forró* and contemporary classical or “serious” music from within, re-imagining bossa nova as a broad, miscegenated, playful, postmodern version of itself. They used commercial jingles to out-pop pop and the Dada-like lyrical circularity to out-subvert the protestors. The manifesto of Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Zé and others was a compilation album called *Tropicalia Ou Panis Et Circensis* and it forcefully announced their arrival. The individual careers of Veloso and Gil would explode after their introduction; Zé, however, stuck closely to his own unique version of tropicalia’s mold and experimented within that framework. He built a homemade

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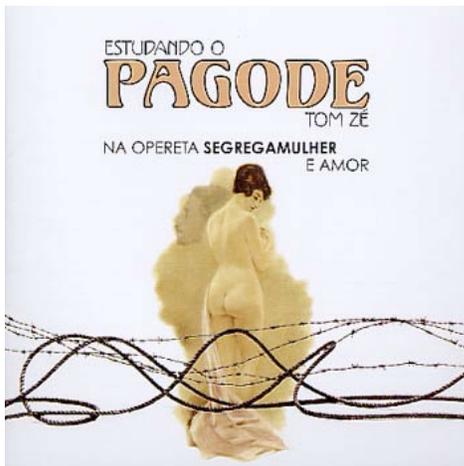
instrument that was more like a madcap inventor's contraption: a series of doorbells on a keyboard that triggered blenders, vacuums, floor polishers and more. Despite his initial association with Veloso and Gil, however, he faded into obscurity over the course of the '70s. \_\_\_ Years after Zé had disappeared from the public consciousness of both Brazil and America, in 1989, David Byrne was digging for records in Rio when he blindly picked up an album called *Estudando O Samba*. Stunned by what he heard when he got back to his turntable in New York, he enlisted the help of Arto Lindsay and tracked down the man responsible for the 1976 album, who, at the time, was apparently without a record deal and on the verge of leaving São Paulo to pump gas at his cousin's fuel station. But in 1990, Byrne's label Luaka Bop released *Brazil Classics 4: The Best Of Tom Zé*. The critics, Brazil-obsessives and general music lovers everywhere were thrilled with what has been largely (if grotesquely) called Byrne's "discovery." Since then, Luaka Bop has also released *The Hips Of Tradition: The Return Of Tom Zé* (1992) and *Fabrication Defect* (1998), and in 1998 Zé toured America with his frequent collaborator Jarbas Mariz and Chicago indie-experimentalists Tortoise as his backing band. Onstage, he and Mariz donned helmets and knocked out sambas on each other's heads; he led audience sing-alongs of "Hey Jude"'s "na-na-na-na" chorus; in hesitant English, he invited everyone to plagiarize anything from everyone freely. \_\_\_\_\_

America's obsession with music from the rest of the world generally works in waves, but the fascination with Brazil is now well entrenched. Byrne founded Luaka Bop in 1989. Beck recorded his song "Tropicalia" for *Mutations* in 1998 and a similar Brazilian influence is all over 2005's *Guero*. Samba and bossa influences have peppered the releases of Chicago indie and indie-jazz bands like Tortoise, the Sea And Cake and the Chicago Underground collective throughout the '90s and '00s. In 2005, Diplo and MIA helped spark dance parties based around the lo-fi "funk" coming out of Brazil's favelas. Caetano Veloso was photographed backstage at Carnegie Hall for this magazine. Perhaps, then, it should just be annoying, not surprising, that the reviewers of Zé's short 1998 tour were already falling into the initial stages of snark: it was as though the more defensively elitist critics were already saying, "He's got that exotic Brazilian thing that you assholes can't resist." \_\_\_

Although Tom Zé lives and works largely outside of the specifics of that conversation, the spaces it creates are nevertheless his playground. Zé tells me that there's an ongoing conversation in Brazil regarding the state of "the song," the song being something of a national treasure there. Apparently, research conducted in São Paulo shows that the young generations aren't engaging in any sort of collective exchange of ideas, and they have painfully short attention

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spans. Some are saying that the great era of Brazilian songwriting is over. Zé responds to this public conversation saying, "I don't have this romantic myth that I'm an inspired genius or a great tunesmith—the sirens don't sing for me. So what they are suggesting doesn't matter to me one way or another. I am someone who does a different kind of cultural work. I can't get lost, because I myself am lost myself. I embody lost. I can't get lost, because I am lost *itself*." In removing himself from the conversation about song in Brazil, Zé also sidesteps those fans in America who fetishize his zaniness, his funkiness, his Brazilian-ness, and those critics who are snarky about it. Part of the fun of listening to his records is the joy of channeling Zé's postmodern sense of himself as an outsider—*lost!* \_\_\_\_\_



In March, Tom Zé's newest album, an "operetta" (of sorts) called *Estudando O Pagode*, comes out in the States. The first song, "Ave Dor Maria" is an almost club-ready rocker. The verses and choruses are built from a dirty, chunky guitar line, straight-ahead rock drumming, an almost spitting vocal about the evil of women and a brash call-and-response between a menacing saw and the wimpy squeaks of a toddler's toy. It breaks, however, for a surprising bridge, in which the band finds a deeply funky groove while a woman sings a spiritualized call to the Virgin Mother, asking her to protect women from "the afflictions visited upon us by men." Over the next 15 tracks, Zé leads the band and various choruses through an elaborate mess of songs that alternately scream and whisper, dance and cry, hold tight in the pocket and spazz out completely. Almost all of the songs are busy, but Zé and his young producer Jair Oliveira use space to open the songs up and create a diversity of feeling. Sometimes the sounds are tight, claustrophobic and in-your-face, as though the band is in your living room; other times the songs are open, airy and distant, as though the music is seeping through the windows from blocks away. \_\_\_\_

*Pagode* is essentially a concept album about pain and sexuality—it understands the world as a matrix of male domination. The characters include a jury, a chorus of accusers, a donkey, a "feminine orgasm," a professor, Don Quixote, a homosexual group parading at the Vatican, and so on, and the story is framed as a brutally lopsided battle of the sexes. Zé conceived of the record in 2000, while reading about the history of women in labor on a flight from Portugal to Brazil. Then, when back in São Paulo, he read a report that 70% of Brazilian university

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women don't enjoy sex and don't feel comfortable talking about it. "At first, I thought of it not from this broader cultural perspective, but in terms of my own personal experience as a man and my relationships with women," Zé remembers. "I was noticing how I had an early girlfriend where it seemed like she enjoyed having sex, and then I had many girlfriends after where there was a sense of reticence or repression—that they weren't enjoying it. For many women, whether it's conscious or not, men can potentially be an enemy, and that would explain why, in moments of intimacy, it would be very difficult for women to participate."\_\_

The word "pagode" (pronounced, approximately, *pa-go-jee*) in the title *Estudando O Pagode*, is the name for a style of party music that's a stripped-down sub-genre of samba, born in Brazil in the late '70s and early '80s. Zé reminds me, however, that before the term referred to a kind of music, it was a disparaging name for someone who is unreliable, dishonest, a sort of sly hustler. Pagode also carries class implications. Zé lives on a street of high rise apartments in São Paulo and his building is flanked by buildings that house working class residents on one side and elite residents on the other. Pagode is extremely popular among Brazil's working class (some albums sell in the millions), and Zé hears the music coming from the more modest apartments every weekend. Yet the music is disparaged by the elites who live on the same block.\_\_Zé also notes, however, that pagode itself is a very masculine form, full of sexually derogatory language; there is a bottle dance performed to the music in which a woman grinds suggestively over a bottle that stands on the floor between her legs. Pagode, then, is a fitting touchstone for Zé's album: the record is based on a music that has been excluded and marginalized, but also itself excludes and marginalizes. On new song "O Amor É Um Rock", a series of choruses curse love over a blunt, wah-wah-heavy guitar riff, saying, "Love is egotistical," "Love cares only for itself," and "Love is a rock song/ And it's personality is pagode."\_\_\_\_\_

At their most immediate, Tom Zé's songs sound like the inspired machinations of a genius who's just a little bit mad—a little bit crazy. Yet as I spoke with him and listened to him chatter in Portuguese, it seemed like the craziness—the circularity, the intentional obfuscations, the contradictions—somehow came closer than anything straightforward to touching the elusive capital-t Truths that music strives for, almost like those half-life fractions from ninth grade biology that keep approaching zero even though they can never quite get there.\_\_While working on the transcription soon after our interview, I noticed something that I hadn't noticed during the actual conversation. When Zé said that he's not a part of the great line of Brazilian tunesmiths, he added, "the sirens don't sing to me"

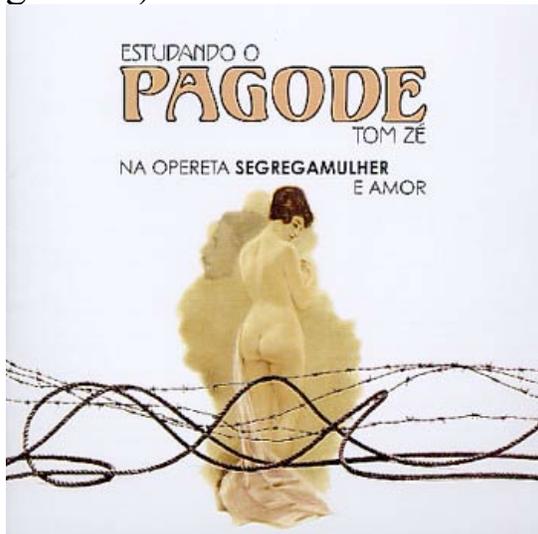


rather than “the muses don’t speak to me.” It could have just been a matter of translation, but still, the distinction between the two seems important: the muses inspire the poet, while the sirens drive their listeners insane. Before talking to him, I would’ve imagined Zé as an Odysseus-like character, a proud and brave eccentric who would stuff wax in the ears of his crew but lash himself to the mast of the ship so he could listen to the sirens without wrecking the boat on the rocks—someone who would have it both ways. But perhaps the rest of us are the ones trying to be the brave warrior-hero Odysseus, going mad as the sirens sing for us, and Zé’s got the wax in his ears. He’s aware of what’s going on around him, but is ultimately willfully lost—maybe working on some new lyrics, figuring out how to make music on his new computer and, after six o’clock, listening thoughtfully as his wife reads aloud to him.

## FROM A TO ZÉ

The Brazilian musician Tom Zé is turning seventy this year. Zé is one of the founders of tropicalia, a loose musical aggregation that began in São Paulo in the late nineteen-sixties; leaned heavily on late-period Beatles, bossa nova, and studio experimentation; and included such performers as Zé, Caetano Veloso, and Gilberto Gil. In the early nineteen-nineties, when Zé was unknown in the United States, David Byrne issued, on his Luaka Bop label, a selection of Zé's earlier work. This was not a minor development—Zé was about to start working at a gas station when Byrne called. Zé's songs sound like they were written by someone who knows only a few of the rules but wants to get in the game right away.

Short, simple phrases are layered over each other in distinct rhythms, creating an effect like a round. Zé has a distinct preference for the high and chattering sounds of instruments like the cavaquinho—a Brazilian relative of the ukulele—and something that sounds like a very squeaky harpsichord. When he feels especially percussive, he will break out a household item like a bicycle pump or a vacuum cleaner. (During a rare live performance at Irving Plaza in 1999, Zé played a solo with a metal grinder.)



Zé's newest album, **"Estudando o Pagode"** (Luaka Bop), is described as an "unfinished operetta" about power, gender, and the role of women in society. Zé has dedicated the album to five cultural figures, including Charles Darwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and his extensive liner notes include quotations such as "The

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school of male chauvinism is the home, or the home of male chauvinism is the school?” Non-Portuguese speakers may want to read the translated libretto, which plays out the story of a black teen-ager who, after being mistreated by a professor, abuses his girlfriend. She then turns to prostitution to pay for her psychology studies. Even without the words, Zé is fluent in the language of sound. There’s a chorus of chipmunks (or at least sped-up humans), a loud female orgasm, and a range of bright musical loops that bounce comfortably off each other. One can only hope that an American benefactor will be brave enough to mount this merry disquisition on a stage here and coax Zé into performing again.

— *Sasha Frere-Jones*

# The New York Times

## Os Mutantes Finally Bring Their Craziest to America

By Jon Pareles

Published: July 24, 2006

Forty years after Os Mutantes got started in Brazil, this band played its first American concert on Friday night at Webster Hall. And for the length of its set, the psychedelic 1960's were back: the 1960's of playful ambitions, blithe eclecticism, virtuoso silliness and lighthearted but genuine rebellion.



Os Mutantes (the Mutants) were at the center of the late-60's tropicalia movement, a particularly Brazilian mixture of intellectual ferment, pop novelty-seeking and try-anything experimentalism.

There was defiance in it as well as joy; it emerged while Brazil was under an increasingly repressive military dictatorship.

Two of the movement's great songwriters, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, were sent into exile; they wrote one of Os Mutantes' best-known songs, "Panis et Circenses" (Latin for "Bread and Circuses," alluding to the Roman emperor Nero). Tropicalia was gleefully modernistic, marveling (with many layers of irony) at the effects of mass media and global interchange. Political points were usually made obliquely, not through direct protest but by

# The New York Times

laughing at restrictions.

“Please, don’t you ever ask me things I wouldn’t like to talk about,” Os Mutantes sang in “Technicolor,” from an album they recorded in English as the 1970’s began. Introducing “El Justiciero,” a cha-cha about a protector of the poor (with lyrics, for some reason, in Spanish), the guitarist and singer Sérgio Dias Baptista wryly dedicated it to Donald Rumsfeld.

Until a London concert this year, Os Mutantes had not performed since 1973; their remaining show is at the Pitchfork Music Festival in Chicago on Sunday. Two of the band’s three founders — Mr. Baptista and his brother, the keyboardist Arnaldo Baptista — have reunited, along with their longtime drummer, Ronaldo Leme. Rita Lee, who sang and wrote songs for the original band, was replaced by Zélia Duncan, and backup musicians and singers helped recreate the elaborate vocal, rock and chamber-pop arrangements of Os Mutantes’ albums.



The music now sounds like vintage 1960’s rock, directly influenced by the [Beatles](#) and San Francisco rock with undercurrents of samba and bossa nova.

There’s little jam-band sprawl; Os Mutantes, whose members had classical music training, preferred to pack ideas into songs

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the length of a pop single and to fill their choruses with doot-doot-doots and shoo-bops. (When Mr. Baptista did take a guitar solo, however, he could make his instrument sing and slash like Carlos Santana or Eric Clapton.)

Because Os Mutantes' songs are so full of quick changes, the music doesn't just sound nostalgic. It also anticipated the current era of sampling and juxtaposition. The band began Friday's set with a song from 1969 that imagined Don Quixote getting a chance to sing on television, with music that switched styles every 20 seconds or so, from light-opera vocal harmonies to fuzz-toned garage stomp to slow, mock-bluesy rock to a brief bit of improvised chaos. And that hardly exhausted Os Mutantes' inventiveness; they had lilting pop melodies, Latin rock, mock-Baroque counterpoint and even something like an anthem: "Balada do Louco" ("Ballad of a Crazy Man"), written by Arnaldo and sung by Sérgio. "They say I'm crazy to think this way, but I'm happy," he sang in Portuguese. "It's better than being normal."

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## Tropicalia Legends Os Mutantes Reunite for U.S. Shows

*Brazilian psychedelia pioneers -- with fans from Wayne Coyne to Beck -- promise onstage antics, new music*

On July 21st, Brazilian psychedelic legends Os Mutantes, once known for their outrageous multimedia spectacles, will reunite for their first tour since 1973. The shows will be the first ever in the U.S. for the group.

"Anyone calling themselves the Mutants feels like our brothers," says Flaming Lips frontman Wayne Coyne, who will share the stage with the Mutantes during their July 23rd performance at the Hollywood Bowl.

While founding singer Rita Lee will not perform -- "I bless this



Mutantes reunion," she chimed in over e-mail, "but I'm not in the mood to get back into the past" -- brothers Arnaldo and Sergio Dias Baptista and drummer Ronaldo "Dinho" Leme will be joined by a sextet of musicians.

Founded in 1965 in Sao Paulo by the teenage Baptistas and Rita Lee, who later married Arnaldo, the trio quickly became local television stars. "They're still kids, and they play astonishingly well -- and they know *everything*," producer-arranger Rogerio Duprat,

who later served as their George Martin, remarked at the time. "It can't be true!"

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Through Duprat's introduction, the band became involved in tropicalia, a burgeoning artistic movement formed in reaction to the military dictatorship that seized control of Brazil in a 1964 coup d'etat. The Mutantes'

subsequent albums combined joyous mop-top harmonies, sound collages, orchestral flourishes and Brazilian rhythms.

"We were well-informed," says Sergio. The sons of a local politician/poet/tenor and a composer mother, the young Baptistas were exposed to an array of culture, from technology to popular American and British music. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was the Beatles who stuck.

"In 'Le Premier Bonheur Du Jour' [on 1968's *Os Mutantes*], we didn't know that you could reverse tapes," Sergio recalls. "We listened to the *fffffft, ffffffft, ffffffft* sounds that the Beatles had, and we wanted to do the same. So we got one of those manual insecticide pumps and filled it with water. We *destroyed* the fucking Neumann microphones." At their upcoming U.S. shows, he adds, "we're gonna play with the pumps!"

In December 1968, after passing an act that limited free speech in the media, the Brazilian government arrested and eventually exiled Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, two of tropicalia's leading musicians. "We were always under threat of being kidnapped or being tortured," Baptista recalls. "It was very heavy. The reactions happened because . . . we were long-haired guys. We were playing guitars."

By the early 1970s, the government allowed Veloso and Gil to return, but drugs and chaos had taken a toll on the Mutantes. Rita Lee and Arnaldo broke up and soon left the band to pursue respective solo careers. Sergio continued under the Mutantes name until 1978. "I just couldn't change myself to become something that I wasn't," he explains. "I was a Mutante. So I kept on."

Rita Lee became one of Brazil's leading rock singers. Plagued by mental health problems, Arnaldo managed to record several solo albums, before severely injuring himself in 1982 escaping from a psychiatric

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hospital. Sergio continues to record, operating a studio in Sao Paulo, and lived in the United States for a time, working with former Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera.

In 1993, the Mutantes famously rejected a personal request from Kurt Cobain to perform with Nirvana. Other hipster devotees, including David Byrne and Beck, will be happy to see them, now that they're finally performing Stateside. Beck purportedly named his 1998 album *Mutations* - - with its lead single, "Tropicalia" -- in tribute to Os Mutantes. And Byrne issued the pioneers' *Everything Is Possible* anthology on his own Luaka Bop label, which will be releasing an expanded edition this September. New music from the reformed group, Sergio suggests, may follow. And it may be time for a tropicalia revival. *Bread and Circuses*, a Mutantes documentary, is in the works, and the Mutantes' May 22nd unveiling at London's Barbican Centre (with opening act Devendra Banhart guesting on Gilberto Gil's wild "Bat Macumba") was part of a season-long tropicalia retrospective.

"It's humbling," Sergio says of the attention. "You get the realization that all of this doesn't belong to you. Music is the language of the universe! I know I'm sounding hippie now, but it's great to see it happening. I'm dying to play." *Os Mutantes dates:*

7/21: New York, NY, Webster Hall\_

7/23: Los Angeles, Hollywood Bowl (with the Flaming Lips)

\_7/24: San Francisco, Fillmore Auditorium\_

7/26: Seattle, Moore Theatre\_

7/28: Denver, Cervantes Masterpiece Ballroom\_

7/30: Chicago, Pitchfork Music Festival