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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2605v6dk>

Journal

Streetnotes, 28(1)

Author

Garnizé, Alexandre

Publication Date

2022

DOI

10.5070/S528154980

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Music, Pandemic, and Creative Idleness!

Alexandre Garnizé

(Translated from Portuguese by Jorge de La Barre)

Abstract

Musings on creative idleness.

In these last eight months, I have been immersed in an incessant search for mental and emotional balance through music, which has moved my life since before I was born. It is by going back inward that I find Exú, my master in the sonorous dynamics of life. Exú is the master of music. Music, specifically the African music and its most varied styles and shapes, conceived me and saved me. It continues to be my guardian, strengthening me to continue living. For me, the power of music in times of pandemic and quarantine is evident.

African music is this mixture of nostalgia, lyrics, and various sensations that lead us to reflections and an appreciation for hope. Although we still don't know how to defeat this invisible pandemic enemy, music has been the force that has soothed my soul, my Ori (mind). It is music that brings the sonorous idea that we are heading towards the end of this storm.

In these months, I have taken advantage of the period of detachment, or seclusion, to review compositions, sing, dance, and play my various African instruments. I needed to silence myself to listen to my own music. I wrote lyrics, read many racial and political books, and composed melodies. Meditating, I deeply erased myself from the world, and went towards my inner self, where my ancestors and my religion of African matrix live, because I belong to Candomblé, I am reminiscent of the religiosity of the Alufá Malês. In this way I managed to overcome the loneliness of isolation, making music my daily companion, and it became more evident that music is the presence of Exú in my life, it is my ancestry, my very existence.

Being so, a continuous construction of humanity and daily learning, music cheers me up, sensitizes me, calms me down, guides me, educates me, calms me down, humanizes me. It is my pillow, my mat, my shield, and my baton. It is the cane that teleports me between infinite dimensions. Music is my channel for contact with myself and with all that dwells within me. During this pandemic and quarantine period, it is music, especially Black African music, that has been watching over my mind, soul, and body (Fig. 1).

“I am of Candomblé, I am reminiscent of the religiosity of the Alufás Malês, I am Axé Obá Igbô.”

Rio de Janeiro,
Saturday, October 17, 2020



Fig. 1. Alexandre Garnizé. Photograph: Augusto César.

Translator's Note:

Exú is worshiped in the African continent by the Yoruba people, as well as in Afro-Brazilian cults, such as the Candomblé from Bahia, and the Tambor de mina from Maranhão, among others. Exú is the Orisha of communication and language: thus, he acts as a messenger between human beings and divinities, among many other attributes. The Orishas are deities from the Yoruba African mythology that became popular in Brazil with the religions of African origin Umbanda and Candomblé. There are more than 400 Orishas in Yoruba mythology, but some of them have become more famous in Brazil, such as Exú, Oxalá, Ogum, Oxóssi, Iemanjá, Xangô and Iansã.

Ori, a word from the Yoruba language that literally means head, refers to a spiritual intuition and destiny. Ori is the personal Orisha, in all its strength and grandeur. Ori is the first Orisha to be praised, the particular representation of individualized existence (the real essence of being). He is the one who guides, accompanies and helps the person since before birth, throughout life and after death, referencing his journey and assisting him in the fulfillment of his destiny. Ori in Yoruba has many meanings – the literal meaning is physical head, symbol of the inner head (Ori Inu). Spiritually, the head as the highest (or superior) point of the human body represents Ori; there is no Orisha that supports man more than his own Ori.

Candomblé is an African diasporic religion that developed in Brazil during the 19th century. It arose through a process of syncretism between the traditional religions of West Africa and the Roman Catholic form of Christianity. There is no central authority in control of Candomblé, which is organized through autonomous groups.

The term **Alufá** means a religious leader for black Muslims in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia. It can also mean doctor, theologian, devotee, marabout. After the Malê Revolt, the word Alufá was socially banned because of its threatening connotations. The Malê Revolt was a Muslim slave rebellion that took place on a Sunday during Ramadan in January 1835, in the city of Salvador da Bahia. A group of enslaved African Muslims and freedmen, inspired by Muslim teachers, rose up against the government. Muslims were called Malês in Bahia at this time, from Yoruba Imale that designated a Yoruba Muslim.

Axé Obá Ibo is an Afro-Brazilian religious family Axé Malê Ibomina. It is associated with the cult of Obatalá, the lord of the Ibos, whose dynasty resulted from the diaspora of the kingdoms called Obás (the Ibominas). This religious family is a sacred “tree” resulting from ancestral tradition brought and planted, on Brazilian soil, by African descendents of Ibominas and Malês.

About the author

Alexandre Garnizé is a Brazilian percussionist musician, composer, historian, researcher, activist, and actor, known for his work with the bands Faces do Subúrbio, and F.U.R.T.O. Email: garniroots@gmail.com.