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Orkestra Rumpilezz: Reinventing the Bahian Percussion Universe

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Abstract: This article considers representation, identity, perception, reception, and musical appropriation, within the so-called Bahian Percussive Universe in Salvador, Bahia, through the lens of Orkestra Rumpilezz. Rumpilezz is a relatively new big band from Salvador that specializes in the mixture of local rhythms (particularly from *candomblé*) with jazz. This orchestra portrays, constructs, and reinvents the local musical culture as centered in percussion and rhythm, engaging local and global discourses about the nature of African-derived musics. Based on ethnographic research, music analysis, and recent approaches to the study of music in society, here I discuss possible reasons for Rumpilezz's positive reception in Salvador.

Resumo: Este artigo considera a representação, identidade, recepção e apropriação musical dentro do conhecido universo percussivo em Salvador, Bahia, através da lente da Orquestra Rumpilezz. A Rumpilezz é uma Big Band relativamente nova de Salvador especializada na mistura de ritmos locais (particularmente do *Candomblé*) com o Jazz. Esta orquestra retrata, constrói e reinventa a cultura musical local como centrada na percussão e ritmo, juntando-se aos discursos local e global sobre a natureza das músicas derivadas da África. Baseado em pesquisa etnográfica, análise musical e abordagens recentes ao estudo da música na sociedade, aqui eu discuto razões possíveis para a recepção positiva da Rumpilezz em Salvador.

Introduction

Orkestra Rumpilezz is a 20-piece big band from Salvador (Bahia, Brazil) composed of horn players and percussionists. Since its founding in 2006 it made a great impression not only in Bahia, but also across Brazil because of the centrality given to percussion, an element proudly felt to be representative of the local traditional music culture and of a larger African

diaspora. Although Rumpilezz's trademark is the mixture of candomblé rhythms with jazz, other features make them unique, like the lack of a typical big-band rhythm section, the percussive flavor of their arrangements, and the spatial configuration of the musicians on stage. Even though they do not receive even a fraction of the media attention that popular singers of the stature of Daniela Mercury enjoy, today they are acclaimed by critics, featured in TV shows, followed by a reduced but growing audience, and their music is used as background of promotional videos of governmental institutions in Bahia that advocate respect for people of African descent. Recipient of the most of major awards that an instrumental group can receive in Brazil, Rumpilezz offers a case study of the ways music is constructed in a place of great African influence like Salvador, and of the causes, consequences, and possibilities of the common phenomenon of mixture of local and global musical forms.

Central to the musical venture of Rumpilezz is what its director Leitieres Leite calls the universo percussivo bahiano (UPB) or Bahian Percussion Universe. This is evident at least in four ways: 1) spatially, they place five percussionists in the middle of the stage, surrounded by fifteen horn players; 2) symbolically, all musicians are dressed in white, a color associated in Bahia with candomblé, the afro-religious world from where the richness of the UPB is thought to come; 3) Visually, while percussionists

dress in elegant white tuxedos and leather shoes, horn players wear beach clothes like shorts, T-shirts, and sandals; and 4) structurally all the musical arrangements are based on the claves and toques of *candomblé* and other urban rhythmic styles from Bahia.

The repertoire of Rumpilezz draws from the local UPB and the North-American jazz big-band tradition. Both traditions are highly valued by musicians and audiences in Salvador, the first one for representing a positive legacy from Africa and the second because it is considered glamorous and a sophisticated improvisational resource for local instrumentalists. Eclecticism is also locally valued and Rumpilezz is seen by many listeners and musicians as a fine combination of the best of two contrasting worlds present in Salvador: ours (the familiar and oral UPB) and theirs (erudite, written jazz). We will see how Rumpilezz helps to produce a sense of locality that is translocally minded (Apadurai 1996) and where the categories us and them blur.

In this paper I argue that the secret of the success of Rumpilezz is threefold: First, by making emphasis on percussion and bringing the UPB to the fore many Afro-Bahians feel represented, connected with their local culture and ancestry, and connected with an international African diaspora which music is felt to be dominated by rhythm and percussion. Second, combining the UPB with jazz, an international prestigious music tradition

that has become somewhat familiar for Bahians after being appropriated by local musicians, adds value to the UPB. And third, the combination of those two traditions is made in ways that have not been seen before. Leitores Leite seems to make the whole orchestra play percussion similar to the way alabês¹ play their intricate patterns inside the terreiros de candomblé². Audiences and musicians are then, exposed to a new aesthetic and symbolic experience that opens up new possibilities of interaction and imagination.

A Bahian Percussion Universe

Salvador vibrates with percussion of all sorts. The pulsation of carnival associations like Olodum, Ilê Aiyê, and Filhos de Gandhi, baterias de capoeira, groups of samba do Recôncavo, and Afro-religious percussion ensembles of various origins fills up the urban soundscape evoking the multiple influences that have shaped local percussion traditions over time. Not surprisingly, rhythm, percussion, and eclecticism are considered key elements of the local music culture. Many people of African descent in the city identify themselves very strongly with these percussion groups, somewhat endorsing a widespread idea that African and African diasporic musics are dominated by rhythm.

1 Alabê is the title of the master drummer of a candomblé house. He (traditionally only men play drums in candomblé) conducts the music during the ceremonies and takes care of the instruments (Cardoso, 2006:14)

2 Terreiro or casa de candomblé is the compound where a specific candomblé community celebrates their ceremonies, perform ritual preparations, store sacred parafernalia, and sometimes where initiates live.

Discourses about music and culture in Bahia and Brazil are heavily racialized (Sansone 2004). As in many other parts of the world, rhythm and percussion are often felt to be related to blackness and by extension to Africa. Kofi Agawu warns about this linkage. For him the idea that African -and by extension African derived musics- are dominated by rhythm is a myth that has contributed to construct African and African derived music as a phenomenon essentially different from Western music, which is in contrast, portrayed as predominantly melodic or harmonic (Agawu 2003). He claims that this is a neo-colonial idea that other-fies Africans and justifies unbalanced power relationships resultant from centuries of colonialism (ibid).

Over eighty percent of the population in Salvador is of African descent, including blacks and mestizos. This makes it the city with the highest African influence in the country (Garcia 2010). Unfortunately figures also reflect that the majority live in poorly served areas, earn low incomes, and still struggle against discrimination (ibid). While this picture of Salvador as a black, poor, and rhythmic city where African culture thrives fits the neo-colonial model criticized by Agawu, it also reflects social and historical realities, as well as the importance Afro Bahians give to percussion traditions.

In Salvador many Afrocentric movements have been historically linked to percussion groups. For instance, the Movimento Negro Unificado

(MNU) or Unified Black Movement created in 1978 to centralize the struggle of Afro-Brazilians against racism, was linked in Salvador to the Movement of Blocos Afro which was initiated in 1974 by Ilê Aiyê (Garcia 2006). Over the last four decades blocos afro have contributed grooves, songs, dances, activism, and social work to raise the self-esteem of the black population in Salvador by promoting an aesthetic of *beleza negra* or black beauty. Both the music and the dance of these groups are heavily based on traditional samba, candomblé, as well as in other Caribbean and North American rhythms. Claudia Couto Sigilião explains how the eclecticism of the music of these groups gave it local and global appeal:

The music of blocos afro, elaborating the characteristic rhythmic cell of samba, brought a younger and more pop character to the traditional sound of samba, making the music take a bigger dimension than the movement (of blocos afro) itself. In the realm of world music, which privileges ethnic musics, samba-reggae fits perfectly as it recreates African sonorities, mixing them with Brazilian and Caribbean rhythms, played in various types of drums. Afro-Bahian music turns global as Salvador starts to appear in the world stage as an important node of music production (Sigilião, 2009:244)

As Sigilião points out, not only global rhythms have local echoes in Salvador, but local beats are also heard and consumed somewhere else. That makes the UPB an unstable entity that is affected by translocal power relations (Appadurai 1996) and reformulated through multiple choices made by local musicians and audiences. The aesthetics of local music traditions, testimonies of local musicians and audiences, and scholarly accounts indicate that rhythm and percussion are the preferred musical choice in Salvador.

As rhythm and percussion became integral to Afrocentric projects in Salvador, percussionists gained centrality and prestige. Sigilião explains:

Afro-Bahian music groups are formed around the percussionist because he is recognized as a creator. He is the main attraction, the representative of a musical language which strength comes from the sound of the drums. In reality, the percussionist (now) needs to create and improvise greatly as he was raised to the position of composer. Before the phenomenon of 'ethnic music' which coincided with the movement of reafricanization, the percussionist did not have that role. (Sigilião 2009:245)

Percussionists coming from the candomblé world are especially respected in circles of popular music because they master a wide range of rhythms potentially applicable to almost any other context outside the terreiros, and also because they represent what is locally considered the core of Afro-Bahian culture: candomblé. Gabi Guedes³ says that candomblé musicians are equipped with an encyclopedia of complex and diverse songs, melodies and simple and compound rhythms with duple and triple subdivision that prepares them to play outside. For him, the music played outside the terreiro (with the exception of Orkestra Rumpilezz) is too simplistic (p.c. May 1, 2012).

Eclecticism and tradition are both valued within specific contexts in the UPB. Many local musicians like Macambira⁴ claim that Bahian

3 Gabriel Guedes or Gabi Guedes is one of the most reknown candomblé percussionists of Salvador. He is also well known in the local popular music scene both as a percussion teacher and as a professional musician. Currently he is the main percussionist of Orkestra Rumpilezz.

4 Marivaldo Pereira de Brito, best know as Macambira is a professional percussionist from Salvador. Besides teaching Afro-Brazilian percussion in his own studio in Salvador, he regularly accompanies popular artists like Carlinhos Brown, Gilberto Gil, Cidi Guerreiro and Ze Paulo. He is also an ogan (initiated drummer) of candomblé.

musicians, particularly drummers, are better than any other in successfully appropriating rhythms from other parts of the world. For him blocos afro and popular music are ideal contexts to demonstrate one's creativity by making these mixtures (p.c. Mar 31, 2012). On the other hand, traditionalism and preservation are celebrated in certain musical contexts.

Jose Jorge Carvalho signals that there is a strong emphasis on preservation on candomblé drumming and dancing patterns (Carvalho 1993:3). This is confirmed by Gabi Guedes and Macambira himself who agree that within the world of candomblé innovation and eclecticism are undesirable because changing old drumming traditions threatens the efficacy of the music in the ceremonies (p.c. May 1, 2012). Drummers may demonstrate their musicianship in one of those contexts or in both, as Guedes, Macambira, and many others do.

In sum, the UPB is not only rich in local traditions inherited from Africa, but also eclectic and dynamic. It is constantly being reformulated through combinations of local and foreign music styles. Local views signal that both the creative appropriation of foreign rhythms and the maintenance of local African derived music traditions are key characteristics of the UPB.

Among the local traditional styles, candomblé traditions of various nations⁵ (e.g. Keto, Gegê, Angola) enjoy authority, but other groups like blocos afro, afoxés⁶, traditional samba groups, and capoeira groups have great popularity too. Most of what is considered musically traditional in Salvador is heavily centered in percussion. This is one of the reasons why people say that Salvador is a place dominated by percussion. As a center of African-descent culture Salvador conforms to the construction that African music - in contrast to western art music- is mostly rhythmic. Local musicians (including those of Rumpilezz) and audiences, scholars, media, and governmental institutions constantly reinforce this idea. The UPB functions as a key reinforcer of local and international identities centered in black ethnicity.

Jazzing-up the UPB

The commercial phenomenon of world music of the 1980s brought the paradigm of fusion between local or 'ethnic' musics with popular, often

5 African diasporic cultures and identities in Bahia were largely based on specific nations reconstituted under and after slavery. These nations provided a concrete link with an African homeland, a neo-African identity, and the possibility to adopt a specific African derived tradition in a context where most slaves were highly mixed (Rohrig 2005:158,159). In Bahia each candomblé house typically identifies itself with one of the three predominant nations (Keto, Gegê, or Angola). The Keto (or Nagô) are related to the Yoruba, the Gegê encompasses influences from the Fon and the Ewe; and the Angola (or Bantu) includes Congo and Angola.

6 Afoxés are large carnival percussion groups whose emblematic rhythm is a secular version of the candomblé rhythm ijexá.

Western derived music forms that are perceived as fundamentally foreign, to the fore. According to Charles Keil, this paradigm has impacted musicking in radical ways:

There is another stylistic phenomena found around the world these days that... is the spread of a symphonic or bolshoi model-the "big unison sound"-being applied to local traditions in order to make them competitive as "high popular culture" or "dignified..." in western and global markets. Very subjectively, that is how I see and hear it; a primal other meets the west and becomes "us," a big orchestra and/or chorus with a conductor. (Keil, <http://musicgrooves.org> accessed on July 12, 2012)

Keil's observation partially applies to Salvador, where local music traditions have been combined with global musical forms to dignify them (e.g. Rumpilezz or The Orquestra Afro-Sinfônica) or to augment their commercial appeal (e.g. axé music bands like Banda Eva). However, we have seen that the local music culture is constantly reformulating through combinations of local and foreign music styles, making the categories 'them' and 'us' very hard to define. Besides, he suggests that with these fusion projects the primal other (Afro-Bahians in this case) wants to become us (western). As I will show, the effect that Orkestra Rumpilezz exercises on local musicians and listeners is far from a westernizing one.

Since the introduction of European marching bands, and the beginning of the carnival tradition, percussionists have paraded in the streets along with brass players. For decades both groups have been able to balance with each other dynamically in street performances without

amplification. Compositional music created with the intention to valorize Afro-Brazilian culture has also used the device of mixing drums from the UPB with horns at least since the 1940s when Bahian Abigail Moura founded the Orquestra Afro Brasileira. Since 2008 Bira Marques has been doing something similar, though at a larger scale, with his Orquestra Afro Sinfônica. Nowadays most commercial groups of popular music like axé music and pagode combine drums from the UPB with harmonic-melodic instruments like horns and keyboards. In fact, many of the major blocos afro in Salvador like Olodum, Ilê Aiyê, and Timbalada, accompany popular singers and participate in these fusions.

Some discourses in Salvador dichotomize the local UPB and foreign, erudite music. A stream of discourse portrays written erudite music as more rigorous and formal than the oral UPB. As horn players are usually socialized in the local music scene to read scores, and percussionists are not⁷, horns are associated with written erudite music and drums with oral music of the UPB. These discourses nonetheless, need to be nuanced. While the UPB has gained prestige among people from Salvador since the 1970s for its role as identity marker for Afro Brazilians, musics perceived as erudite (particularly Euro-American art music and jazz) seems to be the

⁷ Although most percussionists of the UPB traditionally learn and perform music orally, some can read scores, especially those who play in larger bands of popular music. In Rumpilezz for instance, there are at least two percussionists who can read music that I know of.

foreign other against which the UPB earns respect. However, despite its foreignness, jazz is also felt as a closer other (or perhaps a distant us) in Salvador because of its Afro diasporic roots (Sandra Lima, p.c. May 14, 2012), a familiarity with the style acquired through a long history of mixture with local popular musics (Leitieres Leite, p.c. April 27, 2012), and its improvisational aspect, which is considered akin to the ability of local percussionists to create as they perform (Gabi Guedes, p.c. May 11, 2012).

Flavio Queiroz noted that for many musicians in Salvador improvisation is an essential element of Brazilian popular music (Queiroz 2010). He reported that there are various improvisational techniques associated to local music styles, but that they are considered limited by some musicians when compared to those offered by jazz (*ibid*, 25). In fact, the jazz language (particularly its harmonies and improvisational techniques, not so much its repertoire) is so cherished by musicians in Salvador, that some would equate Brazilian instrumental music with Brazilian jazz (*ibid*, 20). In his historical account Queiroz explains how jazz penetrated the local music scene since the 1960s through local musicians who went to study jazz in North American universities, European jazzmen who settled in Salvador, Brazilians from other parts of the country who came to teach jazz in Salvador sponsored by local institutions, and through locals studying jazz (or jazz-influenced) recordings mainly by Hermeto Pascual, Miles

Davis, Chick Corea, Weather Report, and John McLaughlin (ibid). In the meantime local musicians formed influential bands like Sexteto do Beco, A Banda do Companheiro Magico, and Raposa Velha to play their versions of jazz. Jazz has been indigenized by these musicians in Salvador for over a half a century. Despite locals know about its North American roots and may still identify it as music of the other, today local instrumentalists consider jazz improvisational techniques an integral part of their music tool kit too.

In the eyes of many, a mixture of horns and drums could represent an encounter of erudite music and the UPB. In fact, many authors like Abigail Moura, Leitores Leite and Gerson Silva⁸ developed musical projects with the specific agenda of exalting the UPB. This exaltation of African derived culture in Salvador is partly related to a desire to compensate a long history of social inequalities. The Orquestra Afro Brasileira, founded during the 1940s in Salvador by Abigail Moura, fused assorted Afro-Bahian drums with voice and a nine-piece brass section. The purpose was to promote and ennoble Afro-Brazilian culture by demonstrating that Afro-Brazilian music could also be played with horns coming from -an ostensibly-

⁸ Gerson Silva is a professional guitar player and arranger of Carlinhos Brown band. He arranged various popular tunes of Olodum for a 13-piece brass band (3 trombones, 3 trumpets, 3 alto saxes, 3 tenor saxes, and 1 tuba) and a small bloco afro (2 fundos, 4 surdos, 1 snare drum, and 1 repique). The group performed at the inaugural event of the 2012 Olodum School activities and had, according to its creator, the intention to show prospect students the beauty of samba-reggae, an emblematic rhythm of the UPB (Gerson Silva, public communication, March 23, 2012).

more prestigious tradition. Despite his vindictory idea, Moura thought that Afro-Bahian instruments were barbaric and horns were civilized. Leitieres Leite, the leader of Rumpilezz, opposes this idea. In personal interview he stated that his idea was demonstrating that the UPB has rigurocity, that it derived from old organized systems of making music (p.c. April 27, 2012). Although Leite and Moura had the same purpose in dignifying the UPB, the former sees both traditions as equally sophisticated, civilized, and respectable and the latter assumed that one music tradition was more civilized than the other.

Orkestra Rumpilezz

The word Rumpilezz combines the names of the three sacred atabaques (drums) from candomblé: rum, rumpi, and lê plus the last two letters of the word jazz. This clearly evokes the two main musical languages Leitieres Leite engages in dialogue in his compositions and arrangements. As in most big bands, Rumpilezz has a robust brass section of 5 saxes (2 altos, 2 tenors, 1 bari), 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 bass trombone, and 1 tuba. On some occasions soprano saxes, flutes, piccolos, or flugelhorns may be added. With regard to instrumentation and orchestration, Rumpilezz is unlike typical big bands: 1) there is no rhythm section of piano, guitar, bass, or trap set; 2) the lowest horns (tuba, bari sax, and bass trombone) form a separate section which covers all bass lines; 3) the role of comping,

usually improvised in jazz bands by the piano or the guitar, is replaced by written vamps executed by one or two horn sections or by combinations of instruments from different sections; 4) the rhythm of basslines, vamps, and melodies is inspired by rhythms of candomblé ceremonies. The result is a dense orchestral texture that evokes the polyrhythms the orixás dance to inside the terreiros; 5) Percussion includes three atabaques plus an agogô (the candomblé quartet), and assorted drums from the UPB: three surdos, two timbales, a repique, a snare drum, cymbals, and caxixis. 6) Like funk groups from the 1960s in North America, these percussion instruments create a series of basic grooves with which horn players align with their written vamps.

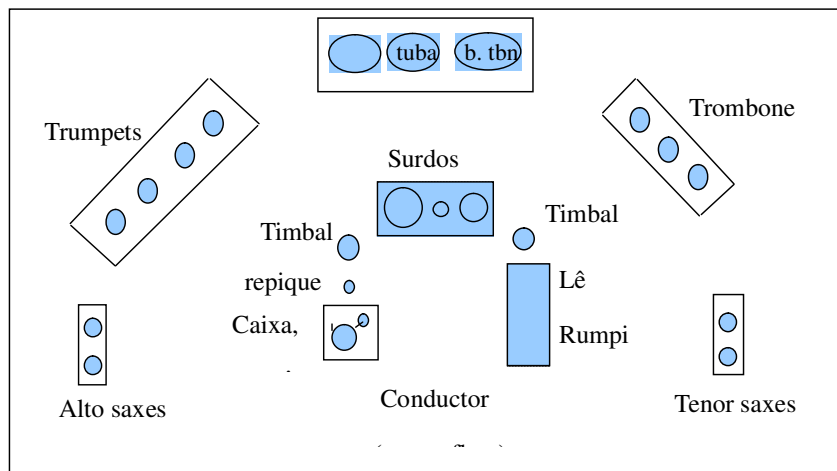


Figure 1: Spatial configuration of Orkestra Rumpilezz on the stage

Featuring The UPB

One of the things that struck me most when I first saw Rumpilezz was the importance given to percussion in a big-band. Many other people I asked shared this impression. Drums are carefully wrapped in white cloth, as in some candomblé ceremonies. Dressed in impeccable white tuxedos, placed in the middle of the stage, percussionists are the protagonists of the show. They always look relaxed and playful, and seem to be in permanent connection with the rest of the band and with the public. Although some drummers can read music, Leite does not provide them with any notation in keeping with the predominantly oral character of the UPB. Once percussionists negotiate with Leite what they will play, they memorize their parts during group rehearsal and individual practice (Gabi Guedes, p.c. May 11, 2012) and do not use any written aids, as horn players do. This highlights the visual contrast between horns and percussion, between jazz and the UPB, and by extension between them and us. While those who play music guided by a score are pushed to the back of the stage, the ones who play memorized music (including Leite, the conductor) stand in the front line.

This is deliberate. In personal interview Leitieres Leite stated that his idea with Rumpilezz is to showcase the richness of the UPB and to demonstrate that its rhythmic structure is elaborate, organized, and rigorous

(p.c. April 27, 2012). By creating a compositional music that treats the resources of Afro-Bahian music as organized systems, Leite wants to dignify percussionists and to debunk pejorative visions, whether real or imaginary, towards the UPB. He dedicated Rumpilezz's first album to "our doctor musicians: the percussionists of Bahia who elaborate, preserve, and disseminate this rich and diverse BAHIAN PERCUSSIVE UNIVERSE." (liner notes of the album Leitieres Leite & Orkestra Rumpilezz, 2009).

Placing percussionists in the center of the stage in the context of a big-band is a statement that reflects the privileged position percussion holds in Rumpilezz and by extension in Salvador. In Euro-American ensembles, brass players are typically placed in front of percussionists. This may have many pragmatic explanations related to the size of the instruments, dynamic levels, or bodily postures and positions while playing. Having percussion at the back of the stage could also symbolize the secondary role of this section in these types of groups. By placing five percussionists standing up with their large drums forming a semicircle at the center of the stage, Rumpilezz reverses this logic.

Having the players dress in white also reinforces the importance of UPB. White is a colour associated in Bahia with the Afro-religious world of candomblé. Every Friday one sees hundreds of candomblé devotees on the streets of Salvador dressed in white to pay respect to Oxalá, the

father of all orixás and creator of the world, according to candomblé mythology. Friday is the day of Oxalá and white is his colour. The importance of this deity of Yoruba origin in candomblé is such that white has come to represent, in the public sphere, all the nations (Keto, Gegê, Angola) and even their more syncretic relatives candomblé de caboclo⁹ and umbanda¹⁰. In all candomblé celebrations I attended in Salvador people dressed predominantly in white, independently of the orixá to which it was dedicated¹¹. Initiates also observe a white dress code during the whole period of initiation.

Candomblé drumming is considered the core of the UPB. Carvalho wrote that candomblé, as well as other traditional cults of African origin "concentrate some of the most powerful symbols shared or at least known by most Brazilians: the orishas... and the drum ensembles, among which the better known are the atabaques of Bahia" (Carvalho 1993:3). Bahian

9 Candomblé de caboclo is a syncretic religion where Amerindian spirits (caboclos) are worshipped in addition to orixás. Although candomblé de caboclo and umbanda are considered as separate cults, Carvalho claims that the former is the Bahian version of umbanda, a generic term applied to other syncretic cults accross Brazil (Carvalho 1993:9)

10 Umbanda is an Afro-Brazilian religion that blends candomblé, with catholicism, spiritism, kardecism, and Amerindian religious practices. Despite enjoying more national popularity than any other Afro-Brazilian religion, the umbanda movement is criticized because it is considered a "whitening" of the African tradition in Brazil (Carvalho 1993:9).

11 Each candomblé celebration is dedicated to one or various specific deities, each of which have their own attributes, elements of nature, parafernalia, colors, and day of the week associated to them.

dancer Sandra Lima stated that rum, rumpi and lê are the instruments that represent more genuinely traditional Bahian music (p.c. May 14, 2012). Candomblé, its music, and its dance, make her feel proud of her black ethnicity and connected with her ancestral roots. Leitieres Leite and alabê Gabi Guedes, the main percussionist of Rumpilezz, share Sandra's perspective. They claim that the ancestor of all forms of Brazilian samba is kabila, a type of samba played in candomblé houses of the Angola nation. Saying that samba comes from candomblé is a strong claim as samba is considered the quintessential genre of Afro-Brazilian popular music and dance. In every performance Leite asks the percussionists of the orchestra to play three types of samba: samba-reggae, samba duro, and kabila. He then explains to the audience that kabila is the great-grandmother of samba; that it came from Angola during the transatlantic slave trade; and that it was preserved inside the terreiros de candomblé. In his composition O Samba Nasceu Na Bahia (Samba was born in Bahia) he uses claves and toques of kabila as if to demonstrate this point.

Bahian percussionists are also dignified during Rumpilezz shows by their style of dress. While they wear elegant white tuxedos and leather shoes, horn players dress informally with white shorts, T-shirts, and sandals. The contrast is acute. The uniformity observed in most large music groups

in Salvador is broken purposefully to highlight the importance of percussionists.

A subtler way in which Rumpilezz pays homage to the UPB is heard in how compositions are structured. Rhythms of basslines, vamps, and melodies played by the horns as well as the individual layers of percussive grooves are inspired by the rhythms played in the atabaques inside the terreiros, or in the drums of street samba.

Each piece draws from a candomblé toque or samba carnival rhythm. As in all groove-based musics of African origin, each such groove is composed of various layers of different lengths temporally guided by an explicit or implicit timeline pattern which in turn defines a metric period. Leitieres Leite, Gabi Guedes, and other local musicians refer to these timeline patterns either as agogô patterns, for the eponymous instrument that usually materializes it, or as claves. I will use the generic term clave to refer to these timeline patterns¹². In a candomblé ceremony in Salvador one can hear at least a dozen different clave patterns accompanying a variety of toques and songs for the orixás. These claves are aligned with the melodies of the orixá songs in specific ways, as Angela Lühning demonstrates (Lühning in Cardoso 2006:379). In addition to this family of clave patterns,

¹² The term clave is amply used in Caribbean music circles to refer to a small group of specific timeline patterns, particularly (33424). Although Leite and Guedes use this term, I am not sure if they know its Caribbean origin.

Leite also uses some claves from street samba played by blocos afro and afoxés in his compositions.

A clave or clave variation underlies each composition. An important consequence is that most music phrases are "in clave". Playing "in clave" is a phrase often used among Caribbean musicians and scholars, particularly in salsa, to describe "when the rhythmic structure of a composition does not clash or cross with the clave" (Washburne, 1997:66). In his analysis of the use of clave in jazz, Washburne proposed the following guidelines to determine if a music phrase is "in clave":

1. Accented notes correspond with one or all of the clave strokes.
2. No strong accents are played on a non-clave stroke beat if they are not balanced by equally strong accents on clave stroke beats.
3. The measures of the music alternate between an "on the beat" and a "syncopated beat" phrase or viceversa, similar to the clave pattern (only valid for certain clave patterns spanning two measures).
4. A phrase may still be considered in clave if the rhythm starts out clashing but eventually resolves strongly on a clave beat, creating rhythmic tension and resolution. (Washburne (1997:67), the text between parenthesis in numeral 3 is mine)

In the following excerpt of *A Grande Mãe* -a piece played as introduction and closure at every Rumpilezz' performance-, each layer of the groove is "in clave" (see figure 2). Leite confirmed this by saying that all the melodies and grooves he designs for the orchestra already have

candomblé or samba built-in clave patterns (p.c, April 27, 2012). He internalized all these elements of the UPB from early age when he studied and played street samba and candomblé drumming¹³. On the Brazilian TV show Metropolis Leite explained:

I spent a lot of time studying in detail the claves and rhythms (of candomblé and street samba), so that I could deconstruct them for composition. From the deconstruction of each rhythm I started composing the repertoire of the orchestra. (Radarcultura, 2010)

Thus, composing or improvising musical phrases "in claves of the UPB" is not only an intentional activity of certain musicians, but also an internalized practice acquired through familiarity with the music idioms of the UPB.

¹³ In personal interview Leitieres Leite (April 27, 2012) declared that before becoming a reed player he was a percussionist. He used to play percussion in blocos afro and took lessons with alabê Moa do Katende.

A Grande Mae

Leitieres Leite
Tranc. Juan Diego Diaz M.

$\text{♩} = 123$

Sax Flute

Tpt. Tbn.

Tuba Bari B. tbn.

Clave

5

Balance out ----->

The image displays two systems of musical notation for an excerpt from 'A Grande Mãe'. Each system consists of four staves: a vocal line (treble clef), a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs), and a percussion line (drum notation). The first system begins at measure 9. The vocal line features a melodic line with a 'Resolution' label above the final measure. The piano accompaniment includes a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests. The percussion line shows a steady, rhythmic pattern of notes and rests. The second system begins at measure 13. The vocal line is mostly silent, with a few notes. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The percussion line remains consistent with the first system.

Figure 2: Excerpt from A Grande Mãe (my transcription)

The rest of Rumpilezz's repertoire is based on (and played in) other clave patterns from the UPB and sometimes on variations of them, as illustrated in figure 3. In fact, the success of Rumpilezz' music could be partially attributed to the variety of candomblé claves used in their repertoire.

A Rumpilezz performance may even be compared to the sequence of toques and songs played in the first segment of candomblé ceremonies. This sequence -called *xirê* in candomblé circles-, includes toques and songs for some sixteen orixás. Most toques' clave patterns identify them, but sometimes, two different toques may share the same clave, like *agueré* and *awô*, respectively associated with Oxossi¹⁴ and Ossain¹⁵. The same happens with the repertoire of Rumpilezz. Most pieces have their own clave pattern, but a few share the same one such as *A Grande Mãe* and *Balendoah* (see figure 3). Audiences pick up on these subtleties. Sandra Lima stated that a show by Rumpilezz was a sort of contemporary *xirê* (p.c. May 14, 2012). This statement speaks positively about Rumpilezz at least in two ways: firstly, it associates Rumpilezz with candomblé, a world that makes her feel proud of her black ethnicity; and secondly, it speaks of the great variety of claves and rhythmic structures present in Rumpilezz' music, which suggests diversity and sophistication, aspects highly valued by her.

¹⁴ Oxossi is the Ketu orixá of hunting and the forest.

¹⁵ Ossain is another Ketu orixá that dominates plants and leaves.

Piece	Associated toque	Clave pattern
<i>A Grande Mãe, Balendoah</i>	<i>Vassi for Ogum¹⁰ (Adevê)</i>	
<i>Das Arabias</i>	<i>Vassi (shifting the position of the downbeat and the subdivision)</i>	
<i>Anunciação</i>	Variation of <i>vassi</i>	
<i>O Samba Nasceu na Bahia</i>	<i>Samba duro</i> <i>Samba afro</i> <i>Kabila</i>	
<i>Taboão</i>	Samba-reggae	
<i>Alaafia</i>	Variation of <i>sató</i>	*
<i>Temporal</i>	<i>Ilú</i> <i>Ijexá</i>	
<i>Feira de Sete Portas</i>	Variation of <i>ijexá</i>	
<i>Adups Fafa</i>	Variation of <i>vassi</i>	

* I have not been able to establish the *clave* underlying *Alaafia*

Figure 3: Toques and claves associated to each piece of Rumpilezz

Another device Leite uses to "candomblify" his compositions is to create polyrhythms in the horn sections that emulate those heard in the terreiros. For this purpose he vertically stacks rhythms coming from rum variations of various candomblé toques. For instance, in the groove of A

Ogum is the Ketu orixá of iron, hunting, and war.

Grande Mãe (shown in figure 2), flutes/saxes as well as the low brass section play phrases with rhythms very similar to a couple of rum variations I learnt from Guedes for toques barravento and agabi respectively. In addition to this, trumpets and trombones thicken the groove with a theme built from a crossrhythm typically used by rum players to close most ternary toques in terreiros (see figure 4).



Figure 4: Use of crossrhythms by rum players in candomblé ceremonies as a closing cue and by Leite in A Grande Mãe.

Leite declared that he encourages Gabi Guedes, the percussionist in charge of rum in the orchestra, to use the variations he plays in the terreiro both for improvised passages and for the creation of fixed drumming parts for some grooves (p.c. April 27, 2012). It is remarkable that in the passages where Guedes has the freedom to improvise, he chooses to match or echo the basslines of the low brass section. His attention is particularly drawn to the tuba as he sees it as the melodic counterpart of rum (p.c. May 11, 2012). For fixed drumming parts Guedes draws on rhythms from candomblé. For instance in Alafia, a piece with a metric structure foreign to candomblé, Guedes

expanded a variation of the toque sató (for oxumarê¹⁷) to fit the new configuration (5/4). In fact, the pattern introduced by Guedes has triple subdivision (15/8), which adds to Alafia the characteristic simultaneity of duple and triple subdivision of candomblé music.

The diagram illustrates the adaptation of a variation of the candomblé toque sató to Alafia. It consists of three musical staves. The top staff, labeled 'clave', is in 3/4 time and shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The middle staff, labeled 'Rum variation in Sato', is also in 3/4 time and shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with syllables 'm o o s' underneath. Five boxes numbered 1 through 5 are placed above the notes in the middle staff, indicating specific rhythmic elements. The bottom staff, labeled 'Rum pattern in Alafia', is in 15/8 time and shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with syllables 'm o o o m o o o m' underneath. An arrow points from the boxed section of the middle staff to the Alafia pattern.

* My choice of 3/4 time signature for the transcription of *sató* is based on the way Guedes counted the beat while he demonstrated the rhythm to me. However, this *toque* may also be felt in 6/8. The pattern he derived from the original *sató* variation for Alafia reflects this.

Figure 5: Adaptation of a variation of the candomblé toque sató to Alafia by Gabi Guedes (p.c. May 11, 2012)

Reception

Rumpilezz celebrates local African derived culture by emphasizing the UPB spatially, visually, symbolically, and aesthetically. However, this is not the only reason for their positive reception in Salvador or in Brazil. Other groups like blocos afro, afoxés, capoeira groups, and candomblé houses also showcase the UPB, in even more explicit ways than Rumpilezz does. Many of these groups are politically involved in the struggles of African descendants, are very outspoken about issues of racism and

¹⁷Oxumarê is a Gegê deity represented by a rainbow serpent that controls the force that direct movement.

discrimination against black people and thus, are a source of pride for many. Rumpilezz is, in this regard, only one musical group among many celebrating Afro-Brazilian culture via the UPB in Salvador. What sets Rumpilezz apart from these groups is that its music combines elements of the UPB with jazz, an international prestigious music style sometimes locally perceived as foreign and "erudite" for its written character, and others as familiar for its improvisational nature. By pairing the UPB with jazz, and by focusing the attention in percussionists and their drums, the first one is felt to be dignified. But, once again, this alone does not explain the success of Rumpilezz firstly because the foreignness of jazz has been significantly diminished through a long process of appropriation, and second, because there are many other present and past instances where the UPB has been combined with foreign music styles seen as "erudite" to ennoble it. Big band-like jazz orchestras mixed with instruments from the UPB existed in Salvador at least since Abigail Moura founded the Orquestra Afro Brasileira in the 1940s and today Bira Marques' Orquestra Afro Sinfônica mixes elements of Western art music and jazz with the UPB.

What is really innovative about Rumpilezz' homage to the UPB is the technique developed by Leitieres Leite to combine the characteristic sounds, idioms, and rehearsal and performance practices of the UPB (especially of *candomblé*) and jazz. Each piece is based on a clave pattern

and a toque that identifies it both symbolically and aesthetically. Symbolically each clave is susceptible to association by local audiences to a specific orixá or a carnival rhythm. Aesthetically, each piece is designed in such a way that every musician in the orchestra plays "in a particular clave." The connection manifests because the rhythmic structure of the styles of the UPB is governed by the same types of claves. In the grooves designed by Leite, groups of horns play polyrhythms like the drums of the UPB, especially like candomblé atabaques and agogôs. Thus, the resultant musical product has potential symbolic and aesthetic evocation of the UPB, particularly of candomblé.

This leads audiences and musicians to new aesthetic and symbolic experiences that open up new possibilities of interaction with the music. Sandra Lima feels an overwhelming desire to dance at Rumpilezz shows.

In her words:

Their music pushed me to the stage. It touched me profoundly because of the candomblé toques. As I am not yet initiated (in candomblé), I am not allowed to dance inside the terreiros, but at a Rumpilezz's show I can, even if they modify some things of the toques. My body (still) responds to that (modified) rhythm... Here (in Salvador) we also have blocos afro with which I can easily dance for the orixás, but I have a better dancing trip with that mixture proposed by Rumpilezz. When I hear them my creativity emerges and flows better. (p.c. May 14, 2012)

Besides knowing intimately the dances of the orixás as danced inside the most traditional terreiros in Salvador, Sandra is trained in Afro-

contemporary dance, and is a candomblé devotee¹⁸. For her, Rumpilezz offers the ideal context to exploit her dancing knowledge because she perceives in the music both familiarity and a useful dose of foreignness. The familiarity she talks about is a logical emic response to the multiple references Rumpilezz makes to the UPB. On the other hand, the foreignness represented by the horns, the jazz big band idiom, and the modification of traditional candomblé toques, gives her the opportunity to reinterpret the traditional dances of the orixás she knows through exploration of new relationships of movements with those new rhythms and timbres. By dancing to Rumpilezz's music, Sandra can exploit her creativity and experience a kind of vindication related to the idea that local musicians can successfully combine local and foreign musics.

Musicians of the orchestra may also experience this. Gabi Guedes had long envisioned the possibility of bringing candomblé music to the world music scene in an original way. He stated that sometimes he gets tired of the popular music scene in Salvador where he makes his living. With Rumpilezz he sees his culture portrayed in a respectful and sophisticated way (p.c. May 1, 2012). Inspired by Leite, he created

18 When I met Sandra Lima on February 2012, she was at the verge of initiation at the terreiro Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká, perhaps the oldest and most prestigious terreiro of Brazil, best known Salvador as "Casa Branca." She also studied Afro-contemporary dance for years at FUNCEB with mestre King, one of the pioneers of dança afro in Bahia during the 1980s. Dança Afro is a combination of contemporary dance techniques with traditional orixá dances.

Pradarrum, an eleven-piece band (three atabaques, drum-set, electric guitar, bass guitar, keyboards, tenor sax, trumpet, trombone, and vocals) for which he and his nephew arranged candomblé toques and songs¹⁹.

Guedes mastered the traditional candomblé repertoire at terreiro Gantois under the guidance of Mãe Menininha. He is also a renowned percussionist in Salvador and has played with major popular musicians including Margareth Menezes, Lazzo Matumbi, Gerónimo, Ricardo Chaves, and Daniela Mercury. Between 1990 and 2000 he regularly toured with Jamaican reggae star Jimmy Cliff. In Rumpilezz Guedes gets the chance to display his mastery of the knowledge he acquired both inside and outside the terreiro. In pieces like Floresta Azul, based on the agueré toque and the song Okoke Odê, both for Oxossi, or A Grande Mãe, based on the toque vassi for Ogum, Guedes feels at ease using his candomblé knowledge more overtly. In other pieces like Alafia, Anunciação, or Feira de Sete Portas, respectively based on variations of toques sató, vassi, and ijexá, he is challenged to create new rhythms that fit new metric configurations.

The types of interactions with dancers, other drummers, and singers that Guedes is expected to get involved in during candomblé ceremonies, are replaced in a Rumpilezz show by interactions with other musicians, the

19 Examples of Gabi Guedes' Pradarrum may be found at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCIMS1Te_GI and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lv1qAmF09BE&feature=related>

conductor, and the public. While playing rum in candomblé, he must lead the candomblé quartet, accompany songs with appropriate toques, guide dancers into trance, and -once incorporated-, make the orixás dance and respond to their choreographies (Cardoso 2006). When he plays rum at a Rumpilezz show, he does not have the same responsibilities. Here Guedes interacts with the whole orchestra providing a rehearsed or improvised layer to a predesigned texture or soloing over a fixed groove, choosing from among many instrumental timbres to do so. As stated above, often he prefers to interact with the low horns, finding aesthetic pleasure in this and other new freedoms of choice (p.c. May 1, 2012).

Concluding Remarks

With Orkestra Rumpilezz, Leitieres Leite demonstrates that he understands the centrality of African derived culture in Salvador and the discourses linking percussion to that culture. He also knows that musicians and audiences in Salvador welcome eclectic musical choices, and that the creative mixture of local and foreign music idioms is considered a strength of local musicians that is justly celebrated, particularly in popular music. He benefits from the fact that jazz is locally perceived as a prestigious music form and that candomblé is seen as the core of the UPB.

Charged with sonorities and symbologies from the UPB, Rumpilezz offers local musicians and audiences the opportunity to experience African-

Bahian culture in a modern and sophisticated way that is perceived as dignifying, connected to the world, and free from the constraints of tradition. Dancers like Sandra and musicians like Gabi see these as liberating possibilities.

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