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Citation for published version (APA):

Botelho Correa, F. (2014). TREECE, DAVID. BRAZILIAN JIVE: FROM SAMBA TO BOSSA AND RAP. *Brasiliana – Journal for Brazilian Studies*, 3(1), 526-529.
<http://ojs.statsbiblioteket.dk/index.php/bras/article/view/17218/15532>

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Treece, David. *Brazilian Jive: From Samba to Bossa and Rap*. London: Reaktion Books, 2013.

Felipe Botelho Correa¹

Brazilian Jive offers a comprehensive introduction to those new to Brazilian popular music. Avoiding the formal and the semantic approaches frequently seen in musicological analysis, it attempts a different approach, focusing on the historical, anthropological, sociological, and political aspects of musical creation and reception in Brazil throughout the twentieth century.

Furthermore, it provides a select bibliography, chronology, glossary, references, discography, and filmography, making this a very good resource for those interested in start research on Brazilian popular music. In six concise chapters, David Treece reviews the numerous works that have been published since the late 1980s by experts in the field, describing and analysing distinctive aspects of the modern song-writing production in Rio de Janeiro, the cultural heart of the country.

Although catering for a reader with no prior specialist knowledge, the book also provides a fresh insight to those already familiar with this complex and vibrant subject. From the rise of samba in the 1910s, through the bossa nova revolution of the late 1950s, to the songs of protest of the 1960s, and the emergence of rap in the 1990s, Treece takes into account the enormous formative impact of African slavery on the country's economic, social and cultural evolution and the massive demographic presence of the Afro-descendant population.

Working with the notion of a distinctively black musical tradition – an Afro-Brazilian musicality – he argues against the widespread assumption that Brazil's strong

¹ Lecturer in Lusophone Studies, King's College London.

musical culture is a counterpart to the relative weakness of its linguistic culture. Following a contemporary line of enquiry, Treece challenges the idea that language is peripheral to the musical traditions of the African diaspora. By vigorously contesting this romantic idea and the fallacies of Eurocentric accounts that emphasize “orality” and “corporeality” in cultures of African derivation in contrast to the rational, cerebral character of European civilization, *Brazilian Jive* argues that Afro-Brazilian musicality and cultural life have always confounded these rigid dichotomies and the stereotypes that emerged from it.

The post-abolition popular culture at the turn-of-the century Rio de Janeiro is the starting point of the book. Focusing on the musical production of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood Cidade Nova in Rio, also known as the “Little Africa” for its great concentration of Afro-Brazilians, Treece gives a detailed account of the beginnings of what is now known as samba. Within this context, he points out the importance of the *malandragem* and the trickster figure of the *malandro* to this musical genre: a heroic popular icon expressing dissent from the modern state and economy with its ethos of playful, inventiveness language and social behaviour.

This concept is central to the book and is expressed in its own title, which is a creative attempt to translate this polysemic ethos. In the author’s own words: “At the heart of both jive and *malandragem* is the ludic instinct, as a strategy for survival as well as an existential alternative to the alienated world of capitalist labour” (2013: 41). Thus, the *malandragem* dramatizes a rebellion of those who do not (or cannot) reject the hierarchical order of Brazilian society -- for being in the lower part of it -- but use wit and inventiveness to play within this order. Treece successfully shows how music and language worked as complementary forms of mediation in the tradition of *malandragem* and how this ethos is evident in samba songs.

In the second and third chapters the focus shifts to the late 1950s and the

emergence of the bossa nova. There the author manages to summarize numerous debates around one of the musical traditions that has enjoyed the greatest consistent commercial popularity outside the country. The lyrics and music crafted by the three masters João Gilberto, Antonio Carlos Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes are analysed in depth, pointing out how this style goes beyond the presumption that its chromatic melodies and dissonant harmonies expressed mainly modernist traditions imported from Europe and the USA. Instead, Treece follows the line of enquiry that emphasises how bossa nova composers and performers created a subtle dialogue between this modernist drive and the African traditions of music-making. These two different musical traditions are brought together in bossa nova through what Treece defines as a suspended animation, that is, a dynamic equilibrium between the European traditions of tonal music and the African traditions of modal music.

Two other chapters deal with the emergence of political themes in songwriting expressing popular protests in the 1960s and 1990s. In the era of mass culture, popular music constituted a terrain of dispute between rival voices that expressed different stylistic traditions. Televised musical festivals staged these disputes between the traditions of samba, the bossa nova, and the emergence of rock and the fusion proposed by the tropicalistas. Later on, in the 1990s, the country was experiencing a different context. After the military dictatorship was over, music of popular protest changed and expressed different demands through different styles. The black youth of Brazil took rap as its main expression, recuperating the Afro-Brazilian aesthetic tradition of samba via another route. Brazilian rap of the 1990s was, Treeces argues, a re-reading of samba, rediscovering it through a parallel current within the black diaspora.

In summary, *Brazilian Jive* offers a new perspective on the significance of popular music through a wider cultural and historical understanding of Brazil in the twentieth century. By focusing on the relationship between songwriters, socio-political contexts

and the Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions, the book reveals the ways in which Brazilian popular music has dramatized the dissonances and contradictions of the history of the country throughout the twentieth century.