

HERMANO VIANNA: *The Mystery of Samba*, edited and translated by John Charles Chasteen. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

This translation of Hermano Vianna's study of the Brazilian *samba* is an important contribution not only to English-language scholarship on Latin American music, but also to today's lively multidisciplinary discussion about race, nation, and popular culture. An anthropologist, Vianna discusses the social history of the samba (he also touches on some of samba's precursors and descendants), but the book is primarily a response to existing samba discourse among Brazilians. Because samba is considered the Brazilian "national rhythm," this discourse is inextricable from discussion about national identity. The book thus constitutes Vianna's take on nation, race, and music in Brazil. Accessible to readers unfamiliar with Brazilian studies, it is a good introduction to this field. John Charles Chasteen's English rendering reads exceptionally well; free of excessive jargon, its nuanced turns of phrase nicely frame the author's probing and provocative thoughts.

Approaching samba's status as a national symbol from the perspective of Hobsbawm and Ranger's "invented traditions," Vianna takes a fresh look at standard samba historiography. He notes that the standard story of the samba contains a mystery in the form of a cleavage, a gap: "The first moment is the repression of samba, a time when it was sequestered in the [lower-class, largely black neighborhoods called] *favelas* of Rio...In the second moment, the *sambistas* triumph in carnival and on the radio, becoming symbols of Brazil as a whole" in the 1930s (p. 10). Vianna accounts for this gap by arguing that the music never had been a repository of lower-class Afro-Brazilian authenticity, that it developed as a hybrid. He shows that, instead of emerging fully-blown from Afro-Brazilian tradition, samba's stylistic characteristics took shape *alongside* the notion that this is a national music. Stressing interaction across lines of class and race, Vianna argues that while black favela-dwellers such as the innovative composer Pixinguinha were the most important architects of the samba, they did not create the genre in isolation: members of the mixed-race and white middle and upper classes played roles, and influences from other countries also came into play.

Without denying that Afro-Brazilian culture was repressed before (and after) the embrace of samba in the 1930s, Vianna shows that this repression coexisted with longstanding interracial intercourse: white and mixed-race Brazilians habitually and happily consumed Afro-Brazilian culture (especially music and food) in private spaces already in the nineteenth century, even while touting a virulent racism in public. Seen in this light, the rise of the samba seems less sudden.

Concomitant with samba's triumph arose an ideology that celebrated race-

mixing as valuable and quintessentially Brazilian, proposed by the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre and espoused by the dictator Getúlio Vargas. This usurped earlier openly racist views, but, because it failed to effect improvements in Afro-Brazilians' socio-economic status, it amounted to a cooptation of black culture that perpetuated the status quo. Unlike some of his compatriots who have hailed Brazil as a "racial democracy," Vianna affirms that the appropriation of black culture into national culture masks pervasive racism in Brazil. He claims, however, that this appropriation or cooptation of "low" culture by "high" culture played a negligible role in motivating the mainstream embrace of the samba. But, in my estimation, Vianna fails to provide ample evidence to support this claim. His seeming discomfort with notions of Brazilian racial hegemony is odd, since these notions are compatible with, and even reinforce, his argument that samba has been a meeting-ground of race and class.

In addition to challenging racial authenticity, Vianna refutes the pervasive idea that the samba is purely Brazilian, that outside influences on the national music constitute diluting elements. He shows that even samba's precursors participated in transnational trends: the nineteenth-century Brazilian *lundu* and *modinha*, for example, became popular in Europe, incorporated Italianite elements, and then returned to Brazil. Vianna also demonstrates that while successive waves of North American influence (such as jazz tinges in Pixinguinha's 1920s sambas and later in the *bossa nova* of the 1960s) were denounced as manifestations of cultural imperialism when they appeared, each was eventually accepted, even deemed supremely compatible with the national rhythm.

Near the end of the book, Vianna shows that, in contrast to the essentialism that pervades samba discourse, proponents of post-1960s musics such as Brazilian rock and MPB (*música popular brasileira*, Brazilian popular music) espouse an avowed *inauthenticism*, celebrating all manner of cosmopolitan influences. He concludes, however, that Rio-style samba, along with the discourse of authenticity that he delights in bashing, continues to serve as a vital agent of national unity in Brazil today.