

BLACK ROME

or

THE DRUMS OF SALVADOR

by

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At the dawn of civilization, when man started to think and when the spirit entered the world like the beat of a drum, chaos was transformed into the cosmos. Existence took on a meaning. With the irruption of the spirit, something new entered the world. All things changed in essence because they took on a meaning, a significance. The irruption of the spirit was the most monstrous of all natural catastrophes.

In the beginning, man felt this spirit, heard this interior voice come from outside of himself and attributed it to the Gods. The first relationship with the spirit, therefore, was obedience. This word derives from the Latin "audire" (to listen) man listened attentively. Later, man's existence split in half, man divided himself. From that moment on, however, he never stopped trying to reconstruct his former wholeness, to reunite thus finding inner peace and harmony. To this end, music was the most effective means.

The drum is one of the oldest instruments of mankind. In a certain sense, it symbolizes the unity of the male and female principles. Some say that the case is the female part which, in fact, receives, plays and delivers the sound. The male membrane, on the other hand, strikes and penetrates, creating sound. The female part gives birth to sound, gives it soul, color, while the male principle adds the fabric, the material, the impulse for sound. Together the membrane and case form a unity. In virtue of these principles, the drum has had a particular role in all primitive religions.

The documentary "Roma Negra" does not aim to present music as a well-packaged product through virtuosities to be consumed effortlessly. Instead, the film attempts to present music as the means that ancient man used to (re) find himself, actively living and experimenting music. Set against the colorful, lively background of the musical life of Salvador da Bahia in Brazil, the film intends to show how today man still tries, through music, to come to an agreement with his lost wholeness, to retake possession, re-unite himself, finding peace and harmony. Re-tie, religion from the Latin "re-ligare", the exact original meaning. This curative function demonstrates the religious origin of music.

La Cidade do Sao Salvador da Bahia de Todos os Santos - the complete name of Salvador - was the capital of Brazil from 1549 for a few centuries. Today it is still the cultural capital of Brazil. Salvador is also known as "Roma Negra" because its population is more than 80% black or mulattos. There are 365 Christian churches in Salvador which peacefully co-exist with 2000 places of worship of West Africa religions. In recent times, the treatment and development of primitive African rhythms - especially drum rhythms and rhythms of other percussion instruments - has become the basis and foundation of many musical movements. The best known are the Samba and the Bossanova.

The Afro-Brazilian religions are mistakenly taken as syncretical cults. This interpretation is due to the fact that Christian elements were seen fused with African ones. However, these religions have

never mixed. This phenomenon can be seen as a two-sided coin: on one side orixà (An African God/Saint) while on the other a Catholic Saint. The two saints have taken on the same identity. It is a coin which can be turned over at will, depending on the situation. Catholicism's contact with various forms of candomblé only provoked a superficial linguistic renaming, or parification, which had no influence on the contents.

The Afro-Brazilian candomblé is a cult handed down by word of mouth. Candomblé has strongly influenced the literature, traditional music, art and Mardi Gras of Brazil, but above all Salvador. Candomblé music should be interpreted on the basis of its ritual content. No drumbeat or movement is accidental. It is all a part of an elaborate choreography. For an inexperienced observer, the scenario is confusing and chaotic and, for this reason, there have been many incorrect interpretations, resulting in the refusal and alienation of African cultural values.

The documentary "Roma Negra" will reveal the complicated order of the cult, from a musical rhythmical point of view. A fundamental part is given to the three drums: Rum, Rumpi and Lé. The first drum wakes up the people, the second makes them completely clear-headed and the third invokes the Orixàs (the Gods, the "Santos"). As in the Catholic church, the saints are dead. They are called forth by the beat of the drums: the dead rise up from the earth. And so the drums re-tie the earth to the other world, the world of the Gods, of the forefathers. That world will bring relief and take care of the earthly problems. The magic of drums finds company in the profane ecstasy of Mardi Gras.

We Europeans feel rhythm through our sense of hearing whereas the Afro-Brazilians feel it through movement. A genuine "ecstasy".

The musical documentary "Roma-Negra" introduces a group of dancer-percussionists from Salvador who, through dance and drum rhythms, tells the story of Brazil. A story which today is interpreted differently. For example, it is a known fact that the Portuguese knew of Brazil's existence and geographical location before its official discovery. For political and power reasons, they were forced to keep this knowledge to themselves, almost a state secret. When the official discovery was announced - exactly 500 years later - the world took little notice of this important event.

The story of the colonization of Brazil which followed is a story of greed - an endless desire of wanting and possessing. Greed leads to quick ruin - greed - as the group of dancers/drummers shows us - swallows up everything and, in the end, even itself. For this reason, Portugal and Spain, who had accumulated huge fortunes thanks to the importation of gold, grew poorer and poorer at an amazing speed. The Portuguese and Spanish conquerors were adventurers, gamblers, reckless, fantastic, undisciplined, squanderers, irresponsible, and above all, insatiable. They did not think about what could happen in the future. They had no need for security, contrary to the inhabitants of North America where the first colonists were not thieves but pious men who wanted to create a kingdom of God on earth. Security (read: land, family, etc.) had always been the most important thing for them. The greed of the Portuguese and Spanish led to their extinction while in North America the will to destroy others in order to protect their own security grew stronger.

The group of Afro-Brazilian dancers/drummers, headed by Marcio Meirelles, includes musicians and dancers from various "schools" such as Olodum, Ilé Ayé and the Timbalada. The group members wish to represent their strong tie to the earth, a tie also deeply felt by native Brazilians. To live in harmony with the earth: this is the ideal of the Afro-Brazilians of the group. Their ancestors were slaves and were sold for almost three hundred years as "black ivory". They have brought their land and culture to Brazil. The Afro-Brazilian seeks to move in rhythm with the land and so progress, which would change this rhythm, is totally foreign to them.

The Afro-Brazilian has another perspective of reality: "the earth's point of view". From the earth, everything has a different aspect, as opposed to the spirit's "point of view". All birth comes from the earth. All creation is filthy and frightening. Evil is at the bottom of all good, almost at its roots. Moralistic reflections are not needed here. This paradox, the madness of the idea of purity, is explained in the Brazilian jungle. In the jungle it is hard to distinguish where death ends and where birth begins. Decomposition, putrefaction, and mismas are symptoms of procreation. The "North American preoccupation" of purifying the world once and for all is simply absurd. As long as there is birth and death, they cannot "purify" the world. Brazilians, on the other hand, feel all of this but live peacefully. The Brazilians are tuned in to another place in history's song which leads to a different melody and another rhythm. Good and evil do not automatically exclude each other in the mind of the Afro-Brazilian as it does in the mind of a Westerner. They form a single thing, a unit. It is for this reason that sadness and joy can be represented at the same time in Brazilian music.

The Olodum group performs an Afro-Brazilian funeral song. An evocative drum beat helps bring out the pain caused by the loss of a person. It is entirely different from North American funeral march which, due to its rigid metric, keeps the pain inside. We find this double rhythm both in the samba and in the march. The march emphasizes the first note of the measure whereas samba the second. In fact, the samba rhythm has a quality which seems to lean forward. The "pulse" of the march, on the other hand, becomes rather heavy.

With music, and especially with the help of the drum and other Afro-Brazilian percussion instruments, "Roma Negra" offers us a wider more complete picture of the city of Salvador da Bahia and its residents. There is no instrument closer to the Bahian than the drum (including the percussion instruments: cuica, pandeiro, surdo, tamborim, repinique, caixa, zabumba, l'agogo, the reco-reco, ganzà cabasa or maracas, the Shekere and the caxixi and naturally the berimbau as the instrument which accompanies the fight dance called capoeira).

This film does not overlook the fact that the most important and known Brazilian artists are from Bahia. From the writer Jorge Amado to the composer Dorival Caymmi, to the inventor of the Bossa Nova, Joao Gilberto, to the song writers Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil and singers Maria Bethania, Gal Costa and Nana Caymmi. Here Vinicius de Moraes wrote his most beautiful poems and together with Toquinho transformed them into music. Here Hector Villa-Lobos found inspiration for his famous "Bachianas". Other important Cariocas (inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro) such as Ary Barroso are strongly tied to the city of Salvador.

Thus, besides the music and the history of Brazil, "Roma Negra" will give us a colorful and acoustically exciting picture of Salvador, the most important musical center of South America and unique in the world. The filming will take place during the winter of 2000/2001. Post-production will take place in Rome during the spring of 2001. The director will be Georg Brintrup ("Strada Pia", "Poemi Asolani", "Symphonia Colonialis", "O Trem Caipira", Raggio di Sole, "Luna rossa"), director of photography Luigi Verga and the sound mixer Hubrecht Nijhuis.

Technical information:

length:	58 minutes
material:	Digital video
sound:	Mono
shooting days:	35 days
locations:	Salvador da Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, (Brazil), Rome (Italy)
shooting period:	From December 2000 - March 2001
production company:	Georg Brintrup Filmproduktion, Rome; WDR, Koln; BR, Munchen, Lichtspiel Filmproduktion GmbH, Munchen; Ravina Ltda., Rio de Janeiro