

Brazilian Music Expresses People's Struggles

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The country of Brazil has a distinctiveness all its own. Its citizens speak Portuguese, for one thing. And to an extent not seen in most other countries, popular music is an essential part of the identity of Brazil, says Christopher Dunn, associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Tulane.



Chico Science and Nação Zumbi perform with their band in Recife, Brazil, in 1995. They were the leading proponents of “mangue beat,” which combined psychedelic rock, electronica and hip-hop with regional rhythms such as maracatu, coco and ciranda. (Photo by Gil Vicente)

“Brazil might, in fact, be the most salient example of a country in which popular music has had an important role in society and politics and in the formation of cultural identity,” Dunn says.

It's an issue of degree, says [Dunn](#). In other countries, popular music plays in the background. But in Brazil, “Music is central to Brazilian notions of personal and national identity.”

With Idelber Avelar, professor of [Spanish and Portuguese](#) at Tulane, Dunn co-edited *Brazilian Popular Music and Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 2011). “We both have a deep interest in Brazilian music,” says Dunn, and both are affiliated with the [Stone Center for Latin American Studies](#) at Tulane.

Dunn and [Avelar](#) collaborated on collecting, editing and translating the essays in the book, many of them originally written in Portuguese by Brazilian scholars, including anthropologists, historians, literary scholars and ethnomusicologists. Among other contributors to the book are Daniel Sharp, Tulane assistant professor of music, and Aaron Lorenz, who earned a PhD in Latin American studies from Tulane in 2009.

The essays go beyond the formal study of Brazilian music per se, although there are discussions of samba, coco, maracatu and bossa nova as well as international genres that have been Brazilianized such as hip-hop, funk, rock and even the waltz. “What we really wanted to do is capture a range of debate and discussion around citizenship in Brazil,” says Dunn.

The citizenship that Dunn is talking about is not about how people literally become citizens. “It's about the long struggle for people gaining rights in the country ? civil rights, social rights, political rights, cultural rights.

“We're interested in how music has played a role in these struggles,” says Dunn.