

MARACATU



Photo by Jason Gardner

BY SCOTT KETTNER

Scott Kettner, a graduate of The New School University (NYC) and a 2006 Latin Jazz Ambassador, follows the path of such Brazilian luminaries as Lenine and Chico Science, offering yet another anomalous contemporary interpretation of the traditional 19th century Pernambuco-born rhythm.

In 2001, upon Scott Kettner's initial visit to Recife, he auspiciously met master Maracatu percussionist Jorge Martins. A 2004 Latin Grammy nominee (w/ his group Cascabulho), the founder of the downtown Recife percussion school *Corpos Percussivos*, and a member of one of the oldest existing traditional Maracatu groups *Estrela Brihante* (est. 1906), Jorge Martins unabashedly educated Kettner in Maracatu and other northeastern rhythms. After several years of extensive study, Martins invited him to join *Estrela Brihante*. Together, they observed the striking similarities between the music, rhythms and culture of the Pernambuco, New Orleans and the deep American south. It sparked an unruly enthusiasm to bring Maracatu to NYC classrooms and in return, to have stateside percussion students travel to Recife.

In 2003, Kettner launched *Maracatu New York* and *Nation Beat*. The Brooklyn Arts Council awarded him two grants for inaugurating these projects. The funding afforded Jorge Martins the opportunity to lead Maracatu classes in NYC, and directly benefited the kids studying at *Corpos Percussivos*. With over 40 students currently enrolled in *Maracatu New York*, the arts company celebrates its 5th-year anniversary in 2007.

Endorsements



MARACATU DE BAQUE VIRADO OR MARACATU NAÇÃO

For years, most Americans have associated Brazil with samba, overlooking the numerous regional rhythms and music styles which are tremendously popular throughout Brazil. A perfect example is Maracatu- a dynamic rhythm from the Northeast, propulsive and dramatic, steeped in African traditions with heavy religious overtones. In the last ten years, the biggest musical success story out of Brazil has been the explosion of music from the economically impoverished, culturally rich Northeast. World-famous musicians like Chico Science and the Mangue beat movement that sprung up around him used Maracatu as a springboard for contemporary fusions in the same way that Jorge Ben Jor and other MPB artists used samba a generation earlier.

Maracatu Nação or Maracatu de Baque Virado is a cultural performance that derives from a ritual of the African slaves in Recife (capital city of Pernambuco) approximately 400 years ago when they crowned their own king inspired by the Portuguese colonizers. To this day the crowning part of the ceremony still exists and a parade of Maracatu de Baque Virado still symbolizes the royal court accompanied by a percussion group representing slaves.

The origins of Maracatu can be traced back to the Reis do Congo (Kings of Congo) procession. The institution of the Kings of Congo (or Reis Negros i.e. Black Kings) existed in colonial Brazil from the second half of the 17th century until the abolition of slavery, in 1888. The King of Congo was a black African (slave or freeman) who acted as an intermediary between the government (Portuguese or, after independence, Brazilian) and the African slaves. He was expected to control and keep peace among his "pupils." From this institution, which existed throughout Brazil, different folk manifestations evolved in several regions of the country. It was in Pernambuco that the culture and music of Maracatu de Baque Virado evolved, and to this day still plays an important role in the community.

CROWNING CEREMONIES

The crowning ceremonies or "Coroações" are a very important aspect in the evolution of the Maracatu de Baque Virado. Crowning ceremonies of the King of Congo consisted of the gathering of the African slaves at "Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos" Catholic church in Recife, Brazil. Records show that the first crowning ceremony took place in 1674 at "Nossa Senhora".

All of the African Nations gathered in front of the Catholic Church "Nossa Senhora" to witness the crowning of the African King of Congo. During these crowning ceremonies the African Nations would celebrate the crowning of the King with singing, music and dance. According to Peirera da Costa, an important part of the crowning ceremony was the celebration known as the "Auto do Congo" that took place apart from the actual crowning ceremony. The "Auto do Congo" was an organized celebration of the African Nations, which included theatre, poems, music and dance. The Maracatu de Baque Virado was played at these celebration ceremonies.

CALUNGA DO RECIFE

In Recife, the Calunga, also known as Boneca (Doll) represents the African Nations and plays a very important role in the Maracatu Nações. Since the first half of the 19th century, sources say that in order to keep the secret link among the African groups the enslaved African chiefs had to show the source of their power. The Calunga represented this power and unity of the African nations.

To this day the Calunga doll takes part of the Maracatu ritual. The Calunga do Recife is considered a fetish: an object with magical powers believed to protect or aid its owner. The Calungas are believed to protect the Maracatu groups from the evil spirits during the Carnaval period in Recife. The Calunga is taken from the altar and carried by the “Dama-do-Paço”. The Dama-do-Paço is a woman who leads the Maracatu groups during a Carnaval parade while carrying the Calunga.

The Maracatu Nações give names to their Calungas. For example: Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante have two Calungas, “Joventina” and Erundina”.



Joventina & Erundina
Calungas for Estrela Brilhante

REI DO CONGO

In order to facilitate the administration of the enslaved Africans in Brazil, the Portuguese colonizers institutionalized the “Rei do Congo”, (Black Kings and Queens) under the protection of the “Irmandades de Nossa Senhora do Rosário” and “São Benedito” (Roman Catholic Church).

The Kings of Congo were very important to the administration of the province of Brazil. The hierarchy consisted of Governors, Colonels, Captains, Lieutenants, etc. Among the African Nations the Congo Nation was the most important.

The crowning ceremonies took place on the day of “Nossa Senhora do Rosário” (Catholic Saint). Only the enslaved Africans from the Congo Nation could elect the King. Among the Kings of the other African Nations, the elected “King of Congo” was the most important.

Source: Leonardo Dantas, Katarina Real, Guerra Peixe.

ORIGIN OF THE WORD “MARACATU”

Before the word Maracatu was used, the rhythm was known as Nação or Afoxé. The word Nação (Nation) related to the African Nations in which the enslaved Africans were from. Today, the Maracatu groups are no longer referred to as Afoxé. They are called Maracatu Nação _____ and the name of the group i.e. “Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante”.

There are three theories on the origin of the word “Maracatu”.

1) Guerra Peixe, author of the famous book, “Maracatus do Recife” believed that the word Maracatu came from the nature of the rhythm. His idea was that the word represents the sound or swing of the Maracatu rhythm.

2) Mário de Andrade believed that the word Maracatu came from 2 sources:
Maraca: an indigenous instrument
Catu: indigenous word for beautiful.

3) Roberto Benjamin’s opinion was that members of the African Nations would play their instruments to signal the Nation that the police were coming. The sound of the alfaías represented the word Maracatu.

The most popular theories are those from Guerra Peixe and Mário de Andrade.

Source: Leonardo Dantas, Guerra Peixe



Caboclo de Pena
Estrela Brilhante

THE MARACATU COURT

All of the traditional Maracatu Nações of Maracatu de Baque Virado had adapted elements of the Portuguese nobility into their culture. Within a Maracatu Nação exists an entire hierarchy. This consists of:

REIS (King)

RAINHA (Queen)

PRÍNCIPE (Prince)

PRINCESA (Princess)

DAMAS DO PAÇO (Maid of the Court, two females)- Carries the Calunga.

DAMAS DO BUQUÊ (Maid of Flowers) – Carries a bouquet of artificial flowers.

DAMAS DA CORTE (Maid of the Court)- Carries the Goblet.

EMBAIXADOR: (Ambassadors) In some Maracatus, he can be the man that carries the flag – in the Maracatu Estrela Brilhante the ambassador is a distinct character, he takes part of the royal court. He is dressed like the nobles of Luis XV court.

PORTA-ESTANDARTE - Carries of the Flag.

PAJENS – They hold the tail of the royal robes.

ESCRAVO – (Slave) He carries the “Umbela” (a very big umbrella that protects the King and the Queen).

LANCEIROS – (Lancer) They are a group of people who carries lances that surround that African Maracatu Nation in order to protect them.

BAIANAS – (Women from Bahia) They wear the traditional Bahiana clothes (ritual clothes of the women that belong to a Candomblé).

ORQUESTRA (Orchestra) - Composed of percussionists.

CABOCLO DE PENA – ‘The Indian’. Some nations have this character in order to guide and protect them.