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Background Musicians and Their (In)Visibilities

Suzana Reck Miranda

Abstract: *This article focuses on the career of Brazilian tambourine player Russo do Pandeiro, who participated as a background musician in musical numbers of Brazilian and Hollywood films from the 1930s to the 1950s, yet his work remains mostly uncredited. Although these background musicians consistently appear throughout the films in which they starred, they still constitute a largely unexplored object of research. I aim to revive this Brazilian tambourine player from a marginalised setting and invest in an understanding of his contribution to cinema through an intermedial perspective rather than privilege films as exclusive objects of reflection. My hypothesis for this intermedial approach will argue that the trajectory of Brazilian supporting musicians, if observed closely, reveals significant and previously unexplored aspects of the Brazilian cinematographic universe in the first decades of sound cinema.*

In the mid-1920s, Hollywood cinema consolidated its hegemony in the exhibition market in Brazil. However, both the arrival of sound and the subsequent box office success of some local productions in the 1930s enhanced the dream of creating a Brazilian film industry. The reason behind this success was in part due to its musical film productions that featured Brazilian artists who were already consolidated stars in radio and the emerging record industry. In terms of narrative structure, these films were very similar to early Hollywood musicals such as *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beaumont, 1929), in which the story, most often focused on the backstage events of a theatrical production, functioned as a mere pretext for showcasing musical attractions.

Although very few 1930s Brazilian film prints have survived, a wide array of intersections between the most popular film productions, the radio and disc recordings have been continuously highlighted by recent scholarship on the topic, predominantly through historiographical analysis (Schvarzman; Freire). However, little attention has been paid to smaller music bands who played alongside film stars. In other words, these secondary musicians still constitute an underexplored research topic, not only regarding cinema from the 1930s but also if we consider Brazilian films produced in the decades that followed.

It is important to clarify that in the 1930s, both Brazilian radio and record companies prevented singers from being accompanied by big orchestras because of difficulties in achieving quality sound recordings and/or transmissions. As a result, a common practice was to employ small instrumental bands, called "regionais" ("regionals"). According to Hernani Heffner—researcher and chief of the Motion Picture Archive for the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM) who in 2001 coordinated the restoration of the film *Alô, alô Carnaval!* (*Hello, Hello, Carnival!*, Adhemar Gonzaga, 1936)—arrangement was preserved when musical numbers started to be recorded on film:

> In Brazil, if we try to figure out what the musical numbers in films such as *Coisas nossas* [*Our Things*, Wallace Downey, 1931], *Alô, alô Brasil!* [*Hello, Hello, Brazil!*,

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> Wallace Downey, 1935] and *Alô, alô Carnaval!* looked like, or if we watch the latter, which is the only one that survived, we may affirm that from *Coisas nossas* onwards [musical numbers] were presented on a theatrical stage with singers and small bands next to or behind them. (my trans.)

The tambourine player Antônio Cardoso Martins, known as "Russo do Pandeiro" was part of a small band that accompanied famous artists in *Alô, alô Carnaval*, but he proceeded to have an extraordinary career playing on North American stages and screens throughout the late 1940s and mid-1950s. At the same time, two other Brazilian tambourine players—Russinho and Gringo do Pandeiro—had similar careers in Brazil and the US. The three played alongside the same actors (Carmen Miranda, for example) and most often were not credited for their work. Although they never performed together, the Brazilian press were notorious for mixing up their names and so much of the archival information available regarding their involvement in films and shows remains inaccurate. So, while my text will focus on Russo do Pandeiro, it is crucial to include Russinho and Gringo do Pandeiro in my analysis.

My hypothesis is that the intermedial history and career trajectory of these invisible characters unearths peculiarities within the relationships established between radio, record industry and cinema in the first decades of talkies in Brazil. This focus parallels the purposes of the IntermIdia Project, a larger research venture which employs intermediality as a historiographic method to emphasise its significant role in Brazilian cinema.[1]

As its etymology may suggest, the concept of intermediality involves a wide range of relationships, interactions and border crossings between arts and media. According to Irina Rajewsky, the concept has been widely disseminated in the academic context since the 1990s, most notably in Germany and Canada, but it has not yet constituted a specific theoretical axis (43–4). Ágnes Pethő adds that while the notion of intermediality has been welcomed by media studies, it is still regarded with relative scepticism and ambiguity in film studies due to a series of epistemological issues (19). However, she claims that using the concept of intermediality is inarguably beneficial for a contemporary reflection on cinema, because it understands cinema as a medium in which changes and interchanges are continuous, which enables the researcher to approach film style, poetics and history in a more comprehensive way (2).

Ana M. López specifically refers to the use of intermediality in Latin American cinema studies and emphasises an argument which is central to my own research. Following Jürgen E. Müller, López argues that the use of intermediality as a "research axis" and/or "research concept" has proved a productive path for researchers interested in re-examining Latin American "classic" filmographies from the 1930s ("Calling" 137–9). This is because film studies during this historical era tends to focus on genres, on unique star systems, and issues linked to the national context and/or context of national cinemas. However, we must also consider this cinema's significant intermedial connection with other media that include radio, discs, music, theatre and press, among others.

Rather than approach intermediality as the interaction and/or interference between different media, or as a "theory per se" (López, "Calling" 17), I will employ it as a tool that defines my research object (in this case, something which is not exclusive of, nor central to the films) and how that research has developed. In this sense, I choose to examine Russo do Pandeiro's trajectory after his participation in 1930s Brazilian musicals, with the goal of exploring interrelationships between Brazilian and North American films, printed press, recordings and music performances from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s. My findings aim

to reveal that Russo do Pandeiro and other Brazilian musicians with similar careers constitute a "secondary" star system, a neglected area of Brazilian film star studies.

Tambourine Player on Stage: Radio, Records and Films

According to Eduardo M. Vidili, radio stations experienced technological and structural expansions in the 1930s, acquiring their own "regional" music group which were responsible for accompanying singers or playing instrumental pieces (sambas, *choros* and countless other genres). Band leaders named the groups and the typical formation of a solo instrument, guitars, *cavaquinhos* (small four-stringed guitars) and a tambourine became emblematic of Brazilian popular music in the period between the 1930s and 50s ("Perspectivas" 132). The tambourine gained notoriety in this context because it was often the only percussion instrument. Vidili explains that the tambourine player could synthesise rhythms that in samba, for example, would be distributed among many percussionists. As technical difficulties were the norm during this period, "concentrating" percussion on a single instrumentalist was crucial for radio and during large instrumental group recordings (133).

One of the first regional groups to exist in Rio de Janeiro was Gente do Morro, led by flutist Benedito Lacerda. In 1930, Antônio Cardoso Martins, called "Alemão" ("German") by his friends for being blond and blue-eyed, joined the band as a tambourine player. His bandmates jokingly referred to him as "Russo" (Russian) and the nickname (Russo do Pandeiro) stuck. Slowly, Gente do Morro gained prominence and, in addition to shows in circuses, cinemas and clubs, they began to secure contracts with radio stations and record companies. Then, in 1935, Benedito Lacerda's regional group debuted in a Brazilian film and were accompanied by the Simon Boutman's Orchestra and singer Almirante for the tune "Assim como o Rio" ("Like Rio"), in *Estudantes* (*Students*, Wallace Downey, 1935), a Waldow/Cinédia production. That same year, Gente do Morro also appeared in *Favela dos meus amores* (*Shantytown of My Loves*, Humberto Mauro, 1935), interpreting with Sílvio Caldas the samba "Arrependimento" ("Remorse", written by Sílvio Caldas and Cristóvão Alencar). A note in the *Jornal do Brasil* newspaper (on 17 August 1935) mentions Russo do Pandeiro's strong performance number ("Música" 13).

The following year, Gente do Morro appeared in *Alô, alô Carnaval!* for the samba number "Molha o pano" ("Wet the Cloth", written by Getulio Marinho and Vasconcelos and sung by Aurora Miranda) and in the *marchinha* "Querido Adão" ("Dear Adão", written by Benedito Lacerda and Oswaldo Santiago and sung by Carmen Miranda).[2] Russo do Pandeiro also played his tambourine in a third scene in this film, together with another regional group that accompanied Alzirinha Camargo singing the *marchinha* "Cinquenta por cento" ("Fifty Percent", written by Lamartine Babo). Despite the multitude of films in which Russo do Pandeiro participated, only one recorded performance exists today due to poor film preservation standards in Brazil.

Russo's next film appearance was in *Céu azul* (*Blue Sky*, Ruy Costa, 1940). By this point, he had become a star in the carioca musical scene through performances delivered in 1938 with the Simon Boutman Orchestra in the Copacabana Palace Casino in which he famously inserted juggling into the act. In June 1939, he had also been invited by dancer and singer Josephine Baker to prepare a number for the song "Boneca de pixe" ("Black Doll", written by Ary Barroso) to be performed during her season at Urca Casino. Soon after, Baker invited him to a series of performances in Paris. Russo not only accepted the invitation; he

intended to stay. Nevertheless, with the onset of the Second World War in 1939, he returned to Brazil. Despite the breakout of the war, which altered his career aspirations in Europe, Russo's new elevated status enabled him to be hired as a background performer and main attraction for the film *Céu azul*.[3]

After returning from Europe, he was invited by Carlos Machado to organise the Brazilian Serenaders, a musical group that experienced enormous success and at its peak became one of the official orchestras of the Urca Casino. In fact, this group was specifically created to play at casinos: the musicians were dynamic players, made costume changes during the show, and crooners sang and delivered physical performances at the piano while Russo do Pandeiro enchanted all by juggling his tambourine. By the end of 1945, this success led Russo do Pandeiro to an opportunity to perform at the Copacabana Night Club in New York. Russo's legacy was further legitimised when the Carlos Machado Orchestra at Urca replaced him with another tambourine player, who was also blond and was given a nickname that hinted at foreigners: Gringo do Pandeiro.[4] Furthermore, Gringo—whose actual name was Osvaldo de Oliveira—also had received a standout performance in a Brazilian film with his talent for juggling and varied rhythms. Alongside the Quitandinha Serenaders group, he accompanied Horacina Correia in "Os quindins de iaiá" ("Young Lady's Quindims", written by Ary Barroso), in the successful musical comedy *Este mundo é um pandeiro* (*This World Is a Tambourine*, 1947) by Watson Macedo.

While Russo's influence in Brazil was relevant to performers such as Gringo do Pandeiro, he made the decision to remain in the USA where he was enjoying a successful career. After his achievements in the Copacabana Night Club, he also played on Broadway and was invited to perform in Hollywood films.[5] His polemic debut was in *Copacabana* (Alfred E. Green, 1947), a film in which he and his tambourine should have been placed in the spotlight. Nevertheless, his performance was edited out of the film and the only moment in which a tambourine is visible on screen is one sequence in which Carmen Miranda interprets "Tico-tico no fubá" ("Sparrow in the Cornville", written by Zequinha de Abreu). However, both the tambourine player and instrument are firmly positioned in the background and offscreen. Despite Russo's visual omission in the final cut, it did not prevent the Brazilian press from highlighting his participation in a Hollywood film, which might have incited unknowing readers to imagine him in a number full of tambourine tricks, which paid homage to his golden years at Urca Casino.

It was not until 1947 that Russo would experience his first onscreen appearance in a Hollywood film for his participation in Norman Z. McLeod's *Road to Rio* (1947). In one scene, the two troubled protagonists, Hot Lips Barton (Bob Hope) and Scat Sweeney (Bing Crosby), arrive at a wedding party in Campinas and are "welcomed" by The Carioca Boys (a group including, among other musicians, Nestor Amaral and Zezinho), with Russo do Pandeiro well ahead of the band.[6] In a long shot, Bob Hope and Bing Crosby walk through a room full of people. A dance song is playing in triple time using a guitar solo, a counter melody on the flute and chords on string instruments. From the right side of the frame, they pass a set of stairs and Bob kneels down to pick up a *reco-reco* and an *afoxé*, a typical Afro-Brazilian music percussion instrument. Then, Bob hands the *afoxé* to Bing (Figure 1). At this moment, Russo and the other musicians of The Carioca Boys enter the frame and proceed to descend the staircase (Figure 2). Russo, ahead of the others, plays the tambourine. He salutes Bob and Bing and together they momentarily provide an instrumental ensemble, walking to the beat of the music. For thirty seconds, Russo is in the spotlight, positioned next to the film stars and ahead of the other musicians of the Brazilian group (Figure 3).







Figure 1 (above): Bing Crosby and Bob Hope (left to right) with Brazilian percussion instruments. Figure 2 (centre): Russo do Pandeiro going down the stairs. Figure 3 (below): Russo do Pandeiro playing and walking alongside the protagonists. *Road to Rio* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1947). Pearson Television (Bob Hope Film Collection), 2000. Screenshots.

Then, the Brazilian musicians positioned in the background interpret a samba by Russo do Pandeiro and Sá Roris—"Batuque no morro" ("Drumming Up the Hill")—in a well-known chase sequence in which the American actors Bing and Bob flee and perform a parody of one of Carmen Miranda's numbers while in disguise. This results in a massive dance party with the guests. The framing highlights dancers while the guests and musicians appear in the background (Figure 4). Even though Russo is one step ahead of the others and has performed with Hollywood stars, here he is positioned in the background alongside the film extras and musicians.



Figure 4: Russo do Pandeiro playing tambourine in the background while the protagonists dance in the foreground. *Road to Rio*. Pearson Television (Bob Hope Film Collection). Screenshot.

In 1948, Russo's role in *A Song is Born* (Howard Hawks, 1948) landed him with his name in the opening and closing credits (Figure 5). In addition to a certain emphasis on his tambourine playing—in a scene in which a group of musicians (Nestor Amaral, Zezinho, Laurindo de Almeida, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsy, Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton and Charlie Barnet, among others) record performances for a "musical encyclopaedia"—Russo do Pandeiro also appears with Nestor Amaral and Zezinho as an extra in a peculiar jam session at the end of the film, pretending to play a high saxophone (Figure 6).



Figure 5: Final credits in *A Song is Born* (Howard Hawks, 1948). Warner Archives (Danny Kaye: The Goldwyn Years), 2013. Screenshot.



Figure 6: Russo do Pandeiro in the background, wearing a grey suit, on the left side of the frame, during a jam session at the end of the film. He is the second, standing, from the left to the right.
A Song is Born. **Warner Archives (Danny Kaye: The Goldwyn Years). Screenshot.**

In fact, in sequences where multiple jazz players gather in the fictional Totten Foundation of Music, it is possible to see Russo together with the group of musicians (Figure 7). However, his tambourine performance lasts only thirteen seconds and occurs as Professor Hobart Frisbee (Danny Kaye), conducting the recording of "Volume 11, The History of Jazz", for the *Totten Musical Encyclopedia*, mentions the new rhythms that appeared in South America. The Brazilian musicians, then, briefly perform a basic samba beat (Figure 8).



Figure 7: Russo do Pandeiro among jazz musicians, behind Louis Armstrong. ***A Song is Born*****. Warner Archives (Danny Kaye: The Goldwyn Years). Screenshot.**



Figure 8: Russo do Pandeiro performs with Brazilian musicians in *A Song is Born*. Warner Archives (Danny Kaye: The Goldwyn Years). Screenshot.

The Brazilian press reacted with enthusiasm to the film and there are several mentions of Russo's performance within the Hollywood dream factory. For example, Orlando Portella's article "O pandeiro invade Hollywood!" ("The Tambourine Invades Hollywood!") published in *Revista Carioca* on 27 April 1948, presents a brief retrospective of the career of the "blue-eyed, Anglo-Saxon type [...] who can play the tambourine like no one else can", and highlights Russo's ability "to imprint the rhythm of samba on the spirit of the American people like Xavier Cugat did with rumba and related genres" (35; my trans.). Such a declaration might have been a consequence of his previous collaboration with the Catalan–Cuban conductor for the film *On an Island with You* (Richard Thorpe, 1948) in which the musical number "Wedding Samba" is actually an orchestral version of a Jewish popular song called "Der nayer sher*"* (written by Abraham Ellstein, 1940) with some touches of rumba (not samba).

After this brief success, however, Russo do Pandeiro practically vanishes from the Hollywood screens. He plays minor roles in three less significant films, including *Belle of Old Mexico* (R. G. Springsteen, 1950), a B musical comedy that was not released in Brazil but one in which he performs a musical number with Zezinho (Reid 24). In 1951, the tambourine player returns to Rio de Janeiro, but for some years newspapers and magazines highlight his former "success" in Hollywood, which had enabled him to purchase a mansion previously owned by Rudolph Valentino (see, for example, "Russo triunfou" 35). What was not revealed in these press reports was how little he earned from his few and minor film roles. In reality, Russo had acquired monetary success from his weekly shows in American nightclubs, theatres and

restaurants, in Los Angeles and several other American cities, not to mention his multiple collaborations with Carmen Miranda outside of Brazil.

By the time Russo returned to Brazil, Gringo do Pandeiro, the tambourine player who was his replacement at Urca Casino's Orchestra, had already relocated to the USA, where he played with many Brazilian and Latino musicians in popular night clubs in New York and Los Angeles, joining the Xavier Cugat Orchestra in the early 1950s and creating his own musical group in 1955 under the employment of Sand's Casino in Las Vegas. In addition to these accomplishments, he also toured with Carmen Miranda. In fact, his career abroad was longer than that of Russo do Pandeiro. However, unlike Russo, Gringo did not feature in Hollywood films and Broadway shows, and because of that he never attained the same amount of fame in the Brazilian press. For example, when he performed with Carmen Miranda at an event at London's Palladium Theatre, his photo with Carmen was published in some Brazilian magazines but his name was not cited, as shown in the special edition of *A Scena Muda* published in April 1955 and dedicated to Carmen Miranda ("Embaixatriz" 30).

Indeed, printed news frequently reported inaccuracies about Gringo that included confusing him with Russinho, also a tambourine player working in the USA. In one instance, the magazine *Revista do Rádio* (on 3 July 1954) briefly notes that "the artist Gringo do Pandeiro is sick in Hollywood. He is that tall, blond young man, and former member of Anjos do Inferno" ("Notas" 20; my trans.). Then, the magazine issue that follows on 21 August 1954 prints a correction about misattributing the sickness to Gringo ("Gringo", 27). However, *Revista do Rádio* was inaccurate on two accounts: Gringo had been sick and José Ferreira Soares (nicknamed "Russinho") was the blond, light-eyed and a former member of Anjos do Inferno. "Russinho", in Portuguese, is the diminutive of "Russian". Soares/Russinho had earned this nickname because he was also a blond tambourine player. Like Gringo and Russo, Russinho also toured outside of Brazil. At first, he performed in Brazilian venues as a member of the band Namorados de Lua, but the closure of casinos in 1946 by president Eurico Gaspar Dutra drastically reduced the number of shows where they could be hired.[7] As a result, Russinho decided to join Anjos do Inferno, which was set to tour Latin America.

After arriving in Mexico, and with increased job opportunities, Anjos do Inferno extended their stay for five years, participating in eleven Mexican films, eight of which starred actress Ninón Sevilla. Eventually the group dismantled with some of its members relocating to the USA to join Bando da Lua—the vocal and instrumental group known for accompanying Carmen Miranda—which was also undergoing changes. Russinho would take part in several tours and TV programmes with Carmen Miranda, along with acting/performing in the film *Nancy Goes to Rio* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1951).

After his career in Hollywood ended, Russo do Pandeiro returned to Brazil and continued to work in show business, though at a slower pace, with infrequent performances. He became the owner of a record company and an employee of the Ministry of Labour. He participated in one movie only during this period, Pierre Caron's *Eva no Brasil* (*Eva in Brazil*, 1956), a film that features stars from the Brazilian *teatro de revista*, and was produced in 1955 at the Vera Cruz studios, in São Paulo.[8] There was very little reported by the Brazilian press on his performance. In the *Fon-fon!* magazine (8 September 1956), for example, a small note criticises the poor filmmaking of a film that stars the "king of tambourine" ("Cinema" 39).

Although these works were virtually ignored by the Brazilian press, news features and long articles continued to highlight his former career in the USA, which further confirms the

strong appeal and image surrounding the Hollywood myth and its stars. This runs contrary to the relevance previously afforded to him by the Brazilian press in the 1930s, when despite receiving noteworthy success performing on Urca's stages and recording sambas with renowned singers Almirante, Carmen Miranda, Sílvio Caldas and Linda Batista, among others, the articles featuring him were usually brief and were rarely accompanied with a picture.

As previously remarked, Gringo do Pandeiro did not gain the same prominence. Neither did Russinho, although he participated in a Hollywood film (alongside Carmen Miranda) and in many Mexican films when he was a member of Anjos do Inferno. In fact, from 1947 to 1953—a period in which the group (led by Léo Vilar) resided in Mexico—the Brazilian printed press often reported on the "musical" success of Anjos do Inferno in Mexico (and other Latin American countries) while disregarding all film appearances.

A Paradoxical (In)visibility

The lack of film preservation in Brazil makes it difficult to discern Russo do Pandeiro's agency in films produced in his own country, including how much prominence was given to his performances in musical numbers. However, the information available about his career in Hollywood, including the films themselves and the level of response by the Brazilian press, is revealing, both in terms of the role musicians played in American films, and of some specificities regarding Brazilian film culture.

Firstly, a close analysis of Russo's interventions in films such as *Road to Rio* and *A Song is Born* makes clear that as a background musician he was relegated to an obvious invisibility, playing behind his instrument. Despite the opportunity to engage with the main stars from time to time, this did little to elevate him from relative anonymity in the USA. The same can be said of other Brazilian background musicians working in Hollywood at that time, such as Zezinho and Nestor Amaral.

Notwithstanding this invisibility, these musicians give visibility to the complex idea of Latinity built by Hollywood. After all, they are frequently ethnically interchangeable—from Cariocas to Mexicans to Cubans or any other Latino type required by the script—reinforcing what countless authors including López ("Geographical Imaginaries"), Darlene Sadlier, and Shari Roberts, among others, have already remarked about the obscure representation of Latino protagonists in films produced as part of the Good Neighbor Policy. Their bodies, instruments and exotic suits can be understood as a kind of visual translation of the ongoing sonorous changes in these films, with Latino melodies and rhythms. Rearrangements, hybridisations and alterations were common, so that "exotic" songs deriving from neighbouring countries would be made more palatable for an American audience. The standardisation was such that, according to Brian Eugênio Herrera, terms that include "latinoid" and "latunes" were used by scholars interested in the peculiar filmic musical performances of this period (20).

The obvious invisibility of these musicians wasn't a novelty of Hollywood nor was it an exclusive characteristic of musical numbers in films. When performing in night clubs and casinos in Brazil, most of the musicians were invisible as well, because only group leaders' names were publicised, while the identity of the other members was often ignored. Therefore, it was unlikely that a tambourine player would become famous in Brazil, even more so because, as Vidili highlights, the tambourine had been synonymous with "vagrancy" before becoming a symbol of "Brazilianness". Russo and other tambourine players, especially the black

musicians, had been subjected to police repression on countless occasions. In general, samba was associated with the idea of marginality, only gaining the status of "Brazilian musical genre par excellence" in the mid-1930s, during Getúlio Vargas' regime (1930–45), when the state learned that popular culture was a fundamental element to advertise its nationalist ideals (*Pandeiro* 88).[9] The cultural practices of Afro-Brazilians, harshly criminalised and repressed until then, became gradually "domesticated" and strategically employed as a brand of authentic Brazilianness. Samba, an essentially black rhythm played in neighbourhoods located on the periphery, was soon chosen as the "Brazilian quintessential" musical genre, mainly because it had already been assimilated by the white elite which, enchanted by its rhythmic complexity, had begun its commercial exploration in the 1920s.

Within this scenario, Russo do Pandeiro managed to circumvent the presumed anonymity that haunted regional musicians on two occasions during his career. First, as aforementioned, it was thanks to the way he played, juggling his instrument, that he became a well-known attraction in the Rio casinos at the end of the 1930s. However, his fame as a live performer was overshadowed by his appearances in Hollywood films, which enhanced his publication press appeal in Brazil. This situation created a paradox regarding the obvious "invisibility" mentioned before: while he remained a background musician in the films, the glamour surrounding the Hollywood label gave him prominence and visibility in the Brazilian press. For many readers of fan-oriented magazines, perhaps Russo was not necessarily a cult figure. The greatest delight was to know that a Brazilian tambourine player, that is, one of "ours", was at the "Olympus, among gods and goddesses", as the photographs of news reports and/or the films themselves proved. Compared to Gringo do Pandeiro and Russinho, Russo do Pandeiro was undoubtedly the tambourine player who became more famous, not only for appearing in Hollywood films, but also for being the only one to return to Brazil.[10]

This unique fame which Russo and other Brazilian musicians such as Nestor Amaral and Zezinho experienced contributes to a star system that I call a "secondary" star system. The main function of this system aims to partially ease Brazilian cinephiles' disappointment, at least in the decades from the 1930s to the 1950s, regarding the impossibility of Brazil competing with Hollywood and mitigating the frustration of those involved with film production in the country in relation to the dream of industrialising local film production.

But there is another relevant factor in this context that may have contributed to the public fame and success of these performers. Coincidence or not, Russo do Pandeiro and the two aforementioned tambourine players—Gringo do Pandeiro and Russinho—were Caucasian, blonde and had light-coloured eyes. For this reason, their nicknames identified them as foreigners, creating some misunderstandings in the Brazilian press, which mixed them up on multiple occasions. We cannot know for certain if this contributed to their "success" abroad, but they certainly were relevant in their home country, as they confirm racist and elitist practices within the Brazilian music industry at that time. Black tambourine players such as the talented João da Baiana, who was also a composer, did not enjoy the same visibility nor had an international career. In fact, when samba became popular in the early 1930s, the black and poor progenitors of the genre could hardly participate in the recordings of their own works. According to Humberto Franceschi, the vast majority delivered their work either in the form of a forced partnership (with some renowned white artists) or under a "very low sale price and the consequent omission of their authorship on the label of the commercialized record" (104).

Lisa Shaw and Tim Bergfelder believe that the notion of stardom cannot, in any way, be separated from issues involving racial relations. For the authors, "the evolution of dominant

discourses concerning the country's racial self-definition can be traced—literally—in the faces of its film stars" (3). João Luiz Vieira adds that the worship of stardom in Brazil, both for radio and cinema artists, was imported from the American model in which the white standard of beauty was exalted (349). Therefore, Russo do Pandeiro fits into this pre-established imaginary. Although he was a talent, he certainly brought together other qualities that he needed to be worshiped, if not in the first, at least in the second pantheon.

Concluding Remarks

As I mentioned in the beginning, this article does not aim to approach the concept of intermediality through a textual analysis of the interaction between specific films and music/songs, but to employ it as a historiographic method which motivates the choice of my research object, a background musician, and my investigation of his trajectory in cinema, radio and live theatrical shows. I have attempted to emphasise how Brazilian press articles oriented to movie and radio fans portrayed Russo do Pandeiro during and after his participation in Hollywood films. Even as a "secondary star", popular magazines such as *Revista Manchete* on 11 November 1954 ("Pandeiro") and *Revista do Rádio* on 3 April 1951 ("Russo artista") invested in the classic exploration of the "private life of the stars" about the tambourine player. After all, it offered a rare opportunity to publicise how a background musician acquired enough wealth and fame to purchase property that once belonged to Rudolph Valentino.

I understand that such a fact reinforces certain peculiarities of the Brazilian press at the time in relation to the star system culture. The studies I have presented contribute in part to research concerning relations between cinema and stardom in Brazil: Ismail Xavier; Maite Conde; Lisa Shaw and Tim Bergfelder, and João Luiz Vieira, among others. I believe that the rich and transnational trajectory of these Brazilian background musicians, with wide circulation in a variety of films, record industry, radio, casinos, and other stages, constitutes a powerful research theme, which provides a more intricate understanding of historical, ideological and aesthetic interactions not yet explored in Brazilian early sound cinema studies.

Notes

1 Coordinated by Professor Lúcia Nagib, the IntermIdia Project ("Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method") gathers researchers from the University of Reading and the Federal University of São Carlos.

2 *Marchinha* is music typical of Brazilian Carnival.

3 Ruy Costa, in a 1979 interview for the series *Depoimentos para a posteridade* (*Testimonies for Posterity*) by Museu da Imagem e do Som do Rio de Janeiro (MIS/RJ), confirmed that Russo do Pandeiro performed a very good musical number in the film, but did not specify the song.

4 "Gringo" is a colloquial term predominantly used in Latin America to label North Americans and Europeans who are not considered Hispanic or Latino.

5 In an interview that Russo do Pandeiro gave to Renato Vivacqua in 1982, the tambourine player said the Broadway number was called “Springs in Brazil”.

6 I have investigated Nestor Amaral and Zezinho in the ambit of the IntermIdia Project; partial results of this investigation can be seen in the video essay “Playing at the Margins”, by John Gibbs and I (2018).

7 In 1930, when Getúlio Vargas becomes the president of Brazil, casinos prosper as luxurious entertainment meccas that consist of bars, restaurants and a variety of stage shows. After his overthrow in October 1945, General Eurico Gaspar Dutra becomes the new president elect and signs a decree in April 1946 that suspends national casino operations, with justifications that gambling is harmful to morals, customs and religiosity of the Brazilian population. The new law caught many working artists by surprise and forced them to seek new alternatives.

8 The film was produced by Dordan Filmes and Francamerica Filmes S/A and was distributed in Brazil by Republic Pictures.

9 For more information on the intricate process of the “nationalisation” of samba in Brazil, see Vianna.

10 Russinho gave up his career as a musician and, in 1952, moved to Ensenada, Mexico, to run the Hotel Vila Carioca (Orsini 6). Gringo do Pandeiro continued to work in the US until 1961, the year he committed suicide (“Suícidou-se”13).

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