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Livingston-Isenhour, Tamara Elena and Garcia, Thomas George, *Choro: A Social History of a Brazilian Popular Music*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005, 254 pp. Illustrations, photos, transcriptions excerpts, index, glossary, discography, internet resources, supplemental compact disc. ISBN 0-253-34541-3.

Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia's work is an historical account of the culture of the musical form, *Choro*, and its development, influences, and its function as a kind of "barometer" of Brazilian identity from its beginnings in the 1880's to its infusion today into other forms of music in Brazil and beyond. Choro was traditionally played by a *terno*, an instrumentation used by groups for playing dances, parties, and social occasions in the 1880's: a trio of guitar, *cavaquinho* (a smaller guitar with four strings and tuned an octave higher than the traditional Spanish guitar) and flute. Other instruments have been added, but these instruments remain core to the group as they each have a specific role. The musical form of Choro, similar in many respects to American jazz, is highly structured in its incorporation of traditional melodies, rhythmic motives, accompaniment figurations, and formal considerations, highly improvisational in its incorporation of the spirit of *malicia*, or, roughly, *a friendly competition between musicians* (borrowed from the Afro-Brazilian martial art/dance form *capoeira*, and earlier, from other forms of African music and dance), and, with its "lower class" cultural roots contrasted with its sophisticated harmonic and formal structures, bridged the gap between popular music audiences and the more elite European audiences in Brazil. The book traces Choro from its roots and origins in the 1880's to its heyday in the early 20th century, its popularization and commercialization in the 1920's-1950's spurred by political agendas, its decline in the later part of the 20th century in Brazilian popular opinion which favored the more modern music movements such as *samba*, *bossa nova*, and *Tropicalia*, its short-lived revival in the 1970's and early 1980's, and finally its indoctrination into the canon of "world musics" and its pedagogical institution in the current day.

Choro musicians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries played for many hours in *rodas*, which were a rough equivalent of "jam sessions" in American jazz music. These music sessions were as much social as they were musical, and certainly were intended less as a presentational form of performance than as an expression of a culture of reverence, entertainment, mentorship, and social connection. The musicians played more for themselves than for their listeners, and often, to some listeners' chagrin and to others' delight, played the same song many times in one evening each time with a different tempo and interpretation. The after-hours, sometimes irreverent and free-spirited culture of the *roda de choro* was so infectious for these young musicians and listeners

that many considered themselves *choraos* if they were only aficionados, rather than actual performers.

This book is successful in many respects. It maintains a steady, productive pace through over 100 years of a convoluted history which takes into account musical, ethnomusicological, sociological, political, economic, technological, philosophical, and racial considerations. The trends of the musical form, with its strong ties to Brazilian identity, are certainly not an easy one to describe or explain. The authors' level-headed and mild tone throughout the book allows the reader to garner their own meaning and import of the historical facts. This level tone, however, can also be seen as one of the work's downfalls. I felt simultaneously pulled into the reverence for the musical form, and also bored by its mild-mannered treatment. Throughout all of the historical perspectives that the book offers, the most interesting were the actual accounts by musicians and listeners of the day reprinted verbatim. These accounts helped give a true picture of the actual musicians making the music, rather than a popularized, "exoticization" or "dumbing down" of their culture or musical practices.

This dumbing down is something that often plagues Choro's American cousin, jazz, in its handling by historians and ethnomusicologists. And I wished that the authors were more aware of Choro's similarities to jazz in their treatment of the culture of Choro, especially considering that this book is published by an American press and is likely for an American audience. Their description of the rodas seemed to be for the first time reader of anything resembling improvised or popular music: there were so many redundancies and over-explanations of the music that it seemed that we were to know almost nothing. One example is the explanation that the flute plays the lead melody in Choro: there are at least 10 explanations of this in 9 chapters. It is not hard to understand this concept, and yet we are continually reminded of this. In addition, each chapter spent at least a page concluding itself at the end of the chapter. This might be a formal requisite for journal or scholarly writing, but for the reader of the entire work, especially considering the over-explanations of the musical form and constant reminders that the flute plays the lead, this seems somewhat off-putting.

Given the weaknesses in some of its execution, the book does maintain a looked-for reverence for the musical form. This plays an especially important role in the description of Choro's revival in the 1970's and 80's: If we are to follow the authors' enthusiasm for its revival, we must first be excited for its original form and feel a loss

at its decline. We do. However, despite our general propensity for revivals of anything (the very term invokes reverence for the restoration of something that, often unknown to us, defines us), I find the treatment of Choro as a single, pure, and "authentic" voice among the loud ugly yellers of political and economic changes, changing social trends, technological advances, and the dissolution of regional culture in favor of a homogenized "world culture," troubling. In fact, all music must change with the times. This is healthy and good, and most importantly, inevitable. Revivals are important from an historical standpoint: it is useful for future generations to put something behind glass so that we may learn where we have come from. However, it is misleading to believe that a revival "restores" that art form: this is a poor construction; they, in fact, and inadvertently, distil it. The swing jazz revival in the United States is a good example: young, middle-class, white musicians performing a lost popular art form created by impoverished, desperate and racially oppressed African Americans. How could modern audiences understand? Is the art form only for the culture that created it? Or is it just notes? This paradigm existed for the Choro revival as well: no one will ever recreate those infectious rodas from the 1800's: they are not about today, they are about our great-great grandparent's todays (that is, if our ethnos happens to include working class Brazilians who were lucky enough to learn an instrument and have enough time on their hands to play for many hours into the morning).

So what about today: What is current and exciting and new and created by young musicians right now is what has real "authentic" currency, just as Choro did in its day. Everything else is "museum music," a facsimile, which is valuable and absolutely worthy of preserving, but will never replace the original. The most interesting part of the history of Choro for the young composer or musician may be how it has been infused into current musical forms, and this is topic, regrettably, gets the least amount of coverage only in the last chapter. Nonetheless, with its swift yet steady pace, fascinating historical accounts, and healthy reverence for a rich and sophisticated musical form which is quintessentially Brazilian, this book offers a valuable and hitherto un-attempted historical document to the canon of Brazilian musicological scholarship.